THE UNCERTAINTY OF PEDAGOGY

A hermeneutic phenomenological study of ethical uncertainty in teachers' practice

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, the University of Auckland, 2022.

Abstract

In this study I ask, ‘How do teachers experience ethical uncertainty in their relationships with children?’. To answer this question, I used hermeneutic phenomenology as an empirical social science methodology. I created anecdotes using teachers’ lived experience descriptions of ethical uncertainty. These anecdotes became the basis of my philosophical reflections that I present in this thesis. I describe how the dominant perspective in educational research is that experiences of uncertainty are primitive states that we should overcome and move beyond. Conversely, I argue that such an approach can lead us to evade the contingency and ambiguity that conditions what is important in our lives with children. Educational research needs to remind us that good teaching requires caring about those things that are risky, unpredictable and unknowable. We should not attempt to structure our lives to protect ourselves from uncertainty. Instead, good teaching means making ourselves vulnerable to uncertainty. Regarding the ethical experience of teachers, I argue that proper ethical understanding is not a matter of being certain about the right course of action or being confident in how to resolve situations of moral conflict. Instead, uncertainty is an essential part of ethical experience because it can demonstrate our sensitivity to the complexity and challenges of our ethical entanglements with children.

Acknowledgements

My foremost thanks goes to the teachers who participated in this study. Thank you for gifting me your stories and sharing them with openness and honesty. As I have been writing my thesis, I have cherished what you have given me. My work would not be possible if you had not given me your time and shared parts of your lives with me.

Also, thank you to the principals who set aside time in their busy lives to let me share my research with their teachers.

I have had the privilege of being guided by two wonderful supervisors. Professor Alison Jones, thank you for believing in me enough to take me on as your student and giving me the space to find my own voice and direction for this research. With your guidance, I have become a better thinker and a better writer. You have provided for me a shining example of what it means to be a teacher and an academic.

Associate Professor Matheson Russell, I cherished our conversations and the insight you had for my work. Thank you for being open to supervising a thesis from outside your faculty. Thank you, also, to the philosophy doctoral students and faculty members who extended me invitations to share my work. I valued your engagement and encouragement. I always felt welcome and at home in the philosophy department.

Thank you to the postgraduate students of *Te Puna Wānanga* for giving me feedback on my writing through our writing workshops. Special thanks to Sandra Yellowhorse for showing enthusiasm about my work and making my doctoral journey not a completely solitary one.

I would like to offer my gratitude to Max van Manen. On page after page of this thesis, it is obvious that your work has had a significant and formative influence on my own thinking. The thoughtfulness and insightfulness that you display in your writing has been hugely inspirational to me. Furthermore, thank you for taking the time to give me thoughtful guidance when I emailed you about my initial ideas for this research project. Your advice gave me the confidence to embark on my doctoral adventure.

During my doctorate, I have had the privilege of working alongside many wonderful scholars in the *Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia.* My special thanks to Marek

Tesar, Michael A. Peters, Tina Besley, Nina Hood, Nesta Devine and Susanne Brighouse, for opening many opportunities for me to participate in academic life.

My doctoral journey was made easier and less stressful because of Irena Madjar. Thank you for feedback on my proposal and writing. But even more so, thank you for looking after Hugo and Hazel, cooking dinners, bringing over baking, and letting me take over your office when I had to get out of the house. You have saved me from more than a few grey hairs.

I know about pedagogy because of the care I have experienced from my mum and dad. Thank you for your encouragement, always believing in me, and all your support (emotional and financial) that you have provided from over the sea.

Thank you to Olivia, Hugo and Hazel for sharing your love with me.

Thank you to Nina Hood, editor of *ACCESS: Contemporary Issues in Education*, for granting permission to reuse in this thesis material from the following article:

Madjar, A. (2020). Pedagogy here on the ground: Using lived experience to research and understand our lives with children. *ACCESS: Contemporary Issues in Education, 40*(1), 72–83. https://doi.org/10.46786/ac20.8853

This thesis was made possible with funding provided by the *University of Auckland Doctoral Scholarship*.

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1. Introduction

In this study I ask, ‘How do teachers experience ethical uncertainty in their relationships with children?’. By asking this question, I am drawing attention to how our relationships with children are essential to pedagogy. As I will describe in this study, pedagogy is not a matter of prescribing teaching methods—as it is often understood in the English-speaking world—but designates the fundamental human relation between the older and younger generations. The pedagogical practice that happens in school is an institutional expression that derives its significance from pedagogy as a more fundamental human practice. Therefore, teacher practice needs to be understood as essentially personal, relational and ethical.

Often, educational practice positions teachers as instructional technicians. Teachers are understood in terms of what they should teach and the methods they should use. Similarly, we view children primarily as learners—they are appreciated by how they learn and what learning they have achieved. However, if we are to understand the relationship between teachers and children as pedagogical, then our understanding of teacher practice goes beyond issues of learning, encompassing the broader questions of what it means to live alongside children. Van Manen (2012) frames the pedagogical question this way:

> How are we to act and live with children,
> helping them to create their human capabilities,
> while realizing that we are apt to do damage? (p. 8)

By framing pedagogy this way, we can begin to consider how teaching needs to be seen as a human practice.

There is one part of van Manen’s question that stands out to me: ‘we are apt to do damage’. This could be read as a statement about how there are teachers who do not care about their students, put minimal effort and enthusiasm into their jobs, or act in ways that discourage and emotionally injure a child. Many of us can remember teachers that have caused damage in our lives or the lives of our peers. However, there is an even more unsettling suggestion in the idea that we are apt to do damage. It is not just the ‘bad’ teachers that cause damage. Even when we earnestly try to be a good teacher, we can find ourselves unwittingly causing harm. There are moments where our actions are insensitive, and we fail to anticipate the significance that our words and actions will have for a child. We can also miss moments where the child

was looking to us for providing some care and support, but we were too distracted to notice. It is not just bad teachers that cause harm in a child's life. The best of us are apt to do damage.

The seed of this study began as I reflected on moments in my own practice when I caused damage in a child's life, despite trying to be a good teacher. Here is an anecdote of one of these experiences from when I was the teacher of a class of 7-year-olds:

> It was the first day of a new term. There was an air of excitement as the children began to pile into the classroom. From the back of the classroom, I observed a group of girls chatting at the front. Smiling and giggling, they chattered about their holidays. Soon their attention was drawn to the printout of the new reading groups for the term where I had grouped the students (as per the school's practice) according to the test results from the previous term. The girls scanned the names, noticing which friends were in their group. Charlotte let out a "whoop" when she saw that she had moved up a group. I was proud of Charlotte. But I also felt uneasy. Even though I purposefully never told the children what the 'top' or 'bottom' groups were, they all knew.
>
> Luke was standing at the edge of the group of girls. I suddenly felt concerned. Luke's academic abilities were well below those of his peers. When I started the year with him, he seemed to resent school. But over the year, he had begun to show enthusiasm. From the eager look on his face, I could tell that he was hoping to see that he was no longer in the 'bottom' group. But he still was—his name had not moved. I tensed as I anticipated his disappointment.
>
> The girls were still gathered around the printout. Luke's slight stature prevented him from seeing the names, so he had to wait for the girls to disperse. As soon as the girls had moved away, Luke eagerly scanned the list. Then he realised. His shoulders and head dropped. For a few moments he stood still and then withdrew to his desk. He sat down stiffly—his fists clenched towards the ground and his eyes staring at a hole somewhere in the classroom floor. I walked to his desk and crouched next to him, trying to offer some encouragement. But whatever words I used lacked any power. I felt in that moment that I had lost him.

In this situation, my fault was not disinterest or malice towards Luke. I was going about my work as a teacher and following the school guidelines about what good teachers do. For Charlotte, my actions made a positive difference. She felt affirmed in the progress that she had made. But Luke was not Charlotte. For him, ability grouping became a tool that taught him he belongs at the bottom and there's no point trying to change that. My practice was insensitive to the ways that the reading groups would be meaningful and significant for Luke. I did not realize the I was apt to do damage in Luke's life. Consequently, I was unable to provide a sufficient answer to the question of how to act and live alongside Luke.

I provide this as an example of the phenomenon of ethical uncertainty that is the focus of my study. This uncertainty refers to experiences where teachers feel uneasy in how they have responded to a child. This situation may involve teachers acting in ways that failed to be

authentic, personal and appropriate. It may also involve moments where teachers feel uneasy from failing to do something.

By specifying a focus on teachers' experience, I am interested in a *phenomenological* understanding of ethical uncertainty. I am interested in ethical uncertainty as a part of our immediate and pre-reflective lived experience of acting with children. Understood this way, ethical uncertainty is not foremostly something that we can reflect on in a way that is abstracted from our everyday involvements. Ethical uncertainty is firstly something that we live through. It is the lived-throughness of this phenomenon that I am interested in.

Since I am interested in the lived experience of ethical uncertainty, it should not be confused as merely a rational uncertainty. I am not describing how teachers deliberate to resolve moral dilemmas and decide what they ought to do. While rationality is a part of our experience of pedagogical situations, these situations are also lived in corporeal, personal, and relational ways. When we experience ethical uncertainty, we find ourselves in a particular space, as a particular person leading a life that is entangled in various relationships and involvements.

My focus on lived meaning opposed to rational meaning mirrors the particular way that I use the terms *ethical* and *moral*. While in regular parlance, the terms are interchangeable, in my study, I use them in distinct ways. [This distinction between ethics/morality is influenced by Bernard Williams (2011)]. By morality, I refer to the way that we understand our actions in relation to rational systems and theories that help us determine what our obligations are to others and what we ought to do. But ethics, in the way I use it, is more fundamental than morality. We construct moral systems because we have ethical concerns that inspire us to want to create these systems. Even if morality exists out there somewhere for us to discover, we need to have some reason to go looking for it. This motivation is ethics.

My understanding of this motivation is both *phenomenological* and *hermeneutical*. In the case of the former, I am inspired by the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (*inter alia*: 1991b) who sees subjectivity as fundamentally structured by our responsibility for the life of the Other. We are not obligated to the Other by a rational principle, but by seeing the face of the Other whose very existence demands that we take responsibility.

I also understand ethics as hermeneutical. As Charles Taylor (1989) posits, ethics is connected the Socratic question of, 'What is it good to be?'. Consequently, ethics cannot be separated from our understanding of what we value and how we make evaluations about parts

of our lives. Ethics is intimately connected with our personal concerns and involvements in the world. Consequently, it cannot be abstracted form our everyday acting and living because this would disconnect it from the very source of its vitality and significance.

On the basis of phenomenology and hermeneutics, I understand ethical uncertainty, not as a matter of being uncertain about our relationship to abstract rational principles—rather, ethical uncertainty is about being unsure in how we see ourselves in relationship with particular, concrete and unique persons who share with us a rich, meaningful but contestable world.

To answer the question of how teachers experience ethical uncertainty, I used *hermeneutic phenomenology* as an empirical social science methodology (see van Manen, 1990, 2014). As an empirical human social science methodology, hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with trying to understand lived experience through collecting descriptions of a phenomenon. This understanding cannot happen by only describing how the phenomenon appears in consciousness. Instead, it is important to interpret the experience by seeking to understand how the experience is meaningful. Hermeneutic phenomenology does so by identifying the thematic content of experiences and developing understanding through the creation of a phenomenological text.

For this study, my main source of data was teachers' lived experience descriptions of ethical uncertainty—like the anecdote I shared about Luke. I obtained these descriptions by asking teachers to either write about their experiences or participate in a digitally recorded interview. These lived experience descriptions became the basis of my philosophical reflections that I explore in this study. I will now provide a chapter overview of the arguments that I present.

In Part 1, 'The pedagogical significance of ethical uncertainty', I engage with the literature in order to explore the significance that uncertainty has for pedagogy (Chapters 2 and 3), ethics (Chapter 4) and phenomenology (Chapter 5). But before directly considering uncertainty, I begin in Chapter 2, 'Losing certainty', by reflecting on the significance of certainty for practice and research. I describe how we are anxious for certainty and are consequently allured by the prospect of being able to acquire educational knowledge that is securely grounded on a solid and reliable foundation. Our intentions are often noble. We want to make a positive difference in the lives of students; so, we desire to make classroom life controllable and predictable to avoid failing our students. However, the danger of educational

knowledge that promises certainty is that it does not necessarily give us certainty about what is important. Rather, it makes important only what can be made certain. Our anxiousness for certainty can then narrowly define how we understand children and what it means to live alongside them. I will contend that educational research needs to also consider what is uncertain in our lives with children.

In Chapter 3, 'Understanding pedagogy without certainty', I offer possible ways to broaden our reflections on pedagogy. I consider what it means to understand pedagogy as a human social science. From this perspective, we can appreciate the hermeneutical dimension of pedagogy—essential to our pedagogical acting is an understanding of who we are and how we find ourselves in the world. Studying pedagogy requires interpreting meaning. One example of this approach can be found in the field of *phenomenological pedagogy* that seeks to understand pedagogy as lived experience. I will describe how reflecting on lived experience can help elucidate and inform our pedagogical practice in a way that does not rely on any promise of certainty.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the significance uncertainty has for pedagogy. In Chapter 4, 'The uncertainty of ethical action', I explore uncertainty in relation to ethical action and the claims of moral philosophy. I argue that by seeking certainty in the praiseworthiness or blameworthiness of our actions, we end up reducing and deforming our ethical concerns. Our ethical concerns can become disconnected from how ethics has a force in our lives. To remedy this issue, our ethical understanding needs to draw from sources that admit how uncertainty and ambiguity are a significant part of our lives.

In Chapters 2-4, I argue that we need to appreciate those parts of our pedagogical and ethical lives that are uncertain, uncontrollable and unpredictable. In Chapter 5, 'The phenomenological significance of uncertainty', I make a further step by arguing that uncertainty is not only something that we should recognise in the world, but should more fundamentally inform the disposition and mood for our thinking. This is because there is a creativity in uncertainty. When meaning breaks down, we have the opportunity to reflect on how meaning structures our lives. As a result, we realise that this meaning is our own responsibility. Uncertainty can disclose our own possibilities, including our possibilities for how we relate to others.

In Part 2 of my thesis, 'Researching ethical uncertainty', I take the threads of my argument in Part 1 and apply them to the methodological concerns of my study. In Chapter 6,

I describe hermeneutic phenomenology as an empirical social science. In Chapter 7, I describe the empirical data-gathering methods that I used in my study. And in Chapter 8, I reflect on the significance that uncertainty has on engaging in the task of writing my study.

The outcomes of my empirical methods and writing are presented in Part 3, 'The lived experience of ethical uncertainty'. In Chapter 9, 'The risk of speaking', I consider how uncertainty is conditioned by the trust and risk that defines our pedagogical relationships. For a child to open themselves up to the teacher requires them to feel safe. We cannot be open with another person without also making ourselves vulnerable in some way. Speaking involves trust. The child needs to trust a teacher to share something of themselves. Similarly, the teacher needs to trust the child to receive and respond to what the child shares. This trust is premised on the possibility that trust can be broken. Using abseiling as an illustration—I trust the rope to hold me because I understand that the rope snapping is within the realm of possibility. Likewise, when we put our trust in someone there is the risk that they could injure us. Consequently, essential to trust is risk. If I make myself vulnerable to the Other, I risk them abusing my trust. As I argue, we can never know for certain whether we can trust each other. Furthermore, we cannot even be certain of our own trustworthiness. This creates uncertainty in the pedagogical relationship.

In the pedagogical relationship, it is important that the child can trust the adult. A pedagogical response also requires the adult to have some trust in the child. However, children are not always trustworthy. In Chapter 10, 'Hospitality and hostility', I consider pedagogical situations where our trust in the child is abused. I argue that an uncritical and naïve trust in a child can deteriorate into an ethical masochism that undermines our ethical identity and pedagogical agency. Therefore, pedagogical responsibility requires both a being-for-the-Other as well as a self-affirmation. Maintaining these two elements requires a hermeneutical recognition and reception of the child.

There is an ambiguity in our relationship with the child. This ambiguity extends into the context of the relationship. Pedagogical action takes place in a shared world where our response to a child is caught up in our various involvements and entanglements with others. In Chapter 11, 'Others as the possibility of conflict', I describe how pedagogy is complicated by situations of conflict. While the child makes a pedagogical claim on us, we are also subject to other claims. These claims do not necessarily harmonise with one another. Claims can compete with one another. I argue that these situations are not moral dilemmas that can be resolved by finding a univocal solution. Rather, when we live through these situations we experience an

ethical loss, no matter what we do. Consequently, there can be no certainty that we are blameless. I describe how this uncertainty is not an ethical deficiency; rather, it demonstrates our hermeneutical sensitivity to the complexity and importance of our ethical entanglements.

If we are to accept that hermeneutics has an important place in ethical experience, then a significant issue arises: there is no guarantee that we will all share the same interpretations. Furthermore, since interpretation is an open process, there cannot be any final authoritative interpretation that can conclusively define a situation. I explore this issue in Chapter 12, 'Different interpretations'. I argue that when we find our ethical agency in opposition with others, the issue is not necessarily that one person is in the right and one person is in the wrong. This opposition can also arise from how we interpret a situation differently. While pedagogy demands that we do what is good for the child, the pedagogical good is not a grounding principle but a contestable site of meaning. Since interpretation cannot be definitive, appreciating the hermeneutical nature of the pedagogical good results in uncertainty, especially when we act with others who differ in their interpretations.

In Chapter 13, I explore the significance of interpretation and acting with others in relation to the experience of 'Being-seen'. Using this type of experience, I describe how ethical uncertainty is not only an issue of being unsure about the rightness of our action, but an uncertainty about what we owe those people we share the world with. Next, I argue that exploring the uncertainty involved in being-seen is ethically significant because it provides a hermeneutical provocation. By reflecting on what it means to be-seen, we are given the possibility to articulate and re-evaluate how we interpret what it means to live alongside children.

In my concluding chapter, I restate some of the important threads that run through my study. I describe how the experience of ethical uncertainty is structured in three important ways. First, ethical uncertainty is an uncertainty about how we understand ourselves and our practice. Second, this uncertainty is closely connected to the encounter with the Other due to the hermeneutical dimensions of this encounter. Third, ethical uncertainty arises from the difficulty of understanding the meaning of our actions when they take place in a world that is beyond our control. In the final section of my study, I describe how ethical uncertainty points to the way that pedagogical responsibility is a hermeneutical responsibility. We are not only responsible for what we do, but also how we interpret and understand what it means for us to live alongside children. This has important implications for how we understand both teacher practice and educational research.

PART 1

The pedagogical significance of ethical uncertainty

2. Losing certainty

Introduction

We tend to think of certainty as preferred to uncertainty, knowing as better than not-knowing. What sets humans apart from other creatures is our intelligence and ingenuity. We might not be the strongest, fastest, or fiercest of the animals—but we have found ways of mastering nature through science and technology. Our knowledge protects us by providing security and stability. Not having knowledge exposes us to the fate of luck and chance. We want to remove risk from our lives. So, we try to overcome uncertainty and unknowing.

In education, we want certainty in our knowledge of what practices should be used in schools. We want to take the uncertainty out of teaching. This has led us to attempt translating the success of science and technology into the field of education. Research has endeavoured to establish educational knowledge that can make classroom life predictable, controllable and reliable.

However, in this chapter I describe how this certainty comes at a cost. By pursuing educational knowledge on the basis of scientific and technocratic understanding, we are limiting the field of education within the narrow boundaries of certain methods and perspectives. Consequently, we evade the parts of our life that are vulnerable to luck and contingency but are nevertheless an important part of what it means to lead a human life. I will argue that educational research needs to reflect on not only what is certain, controllable and predictable in our lives with children, but also what is uncertain, fallible and unforeseeable. To begin, I will frame this argument in relation to my personal experience as a classroom teacher engaging with educational research.

Certainty interrupted: Worms, ladders and rocketships

Working in New Zealand schools, I have always been impressed at the effort so many teachers put into creating classroom environments that are fun, colourful and vibrant. There is one particular kind of display that always grabs my attention. It takes different forms in different classrooms—sometimes a giant worm, other times a ladder, or maybe a rocketship. These displays are brightly coloured, friendly and inviting, drawing you in. When you come in close, you realise that they are displays of student assessment data. You can see that Jeremy is reading

at Level 14, so he is up high on the ladder. But Caleb is reading at Level 2, so he is all the way down at the bottom of the ladder, underneath the rest of his class.

Working as a teacher, there has always been an expectation put on me to have these types of displays in my own classroom. But they made me feel uncomfortable and uneasy. One day, I was attending a lecture by a leading professor and they brought up these displays as examples of good teacher practice. I thought, this was my opportunity to raise my issues with the person who literally wrote the book about the practice. So I did. And the professor gave a very erudite response to justify the practice.

Looking back, what I now find interesting is the way that I framed my concern. I argued that educational psychology shows that students are more motivated when they understand their abilities in relation to the learning content, not when they compare how they are achieving in relation to the other students in the class. So, I asked, do worms, ladders and rocketships promote peer-based comparisons that decrease student motivation and adversely impact student outcomes? In my argument, there are a few significant assumptions. First, that the issue needs to be understood scientifically—namely, through the language of psychology. Second, that teachers are 'instructional technicians'—they are meant to use this technique because of its impact on student achievement. So third, if I wanted to critique this practice, I needed to present my thinking in terms of its effectiveness.

At face value, there is nothing particularly surprising about my argument. In education we have tended to give primacy to studies that model their approach on psychology (Lagemann, 1989, 2000). Additionally, educational issues are commonly discussed by appealing to evidence-based practice (Biesta, 2014; Wiseman, 2010). Therefore, the argument I presented to the lecturer is not unusual. I was merely adopting a type of reasoning that was conventional for the academic context I was in. If I wanted to critique this practice, then obviously I would need to do so on the grounds of educational psychology and effectiveness.

However, looking back, I find my argument elided my real concern. By adopting the language of psychology and evidence-based practice, I was not presenting my real objection. It was not the issue of psychological motivation or technical efficacy that was creating a disquiet inside me. It was about the relationships that I had with the children in my class. My discomfort emerged when being faced with the child who hated being in the bottom reading group, who tried so hard to get better, and who would look at me with disappointment when

their name remained stuck below the other children. However, I did not feel that I could express my concern in these terms.

Why did I feel this insecurity? There are two closely related reasons I would like to offer. First, I felt that I needed to present my concern using an academically valid language. And second, I thought such a language needed to be rooted in empirical measurement. If I was to express myself by talking about my experiences and feelings, then I would not be on secure ground; I would just be offering a mere personal opinion and preference. What I needed to do was bolster my position with scientific authority.

This was not just a matter of trying to make a worthwhile contribution in the university classroom. As a school teacher, I wanted to feel a certainty that I was doing the right thing for the children in my class. I did not want to base my decision making on my own personal whims. Rather, I wanted to pin my knowledge upon some immutable and stable foundation. I did not want to merely *feel* I was making the right decisions—I wanted to *know* that I was making the right decision.

However, neither the argument of the lecturer nor my own reasoning was able to relieve my unease. Even though I engaged with the lectures and the course readings, I never felt I got any answers. I could not shake my sense that there was still much left unsaid and unarticulated about worms, ladders and rocketships.

Our anxiousness for certainty

I share the above experience because it provides an illustration of a more general feature of educational research. A pressing issue for education is how to bridge the gap between research and practice (Biesta, 2007a; Korthagen, 2007). Research should inform teacher's actions. To do so, research needs to offer advice that has epistemic authority—otherwise, the opinion of the researcher is no more worthwhile than the opinion of a layperson.

If decision making is only determined by tradition and intuition, we have no justification for believing that our actions make a significant difference for students. Alternatively, if researchers conduct large-scale studies that measure the effects of certain actions, we can create an evidentiary basis that provides authoritative guidance on what teachers should do in the classroom. In this regard, the methods of the natural sciences have been particularly alluring (Lagemann, 1989, 2000). Measurement, data and experimentation have come to be seen as the panacea for our uncertainty in teacher practice (Biesta, 2010).

Consequently, educational research, policy and practice strives to be evidence-based (Biesta, 2014; Wiseman, 2010). The use of data and evidence can give our knowledge a stable foundation.

Evidence-based practice prioritises effectiveness. If research is going to help teachers know what to do in the classroom, then research needs to provide evidence about 'what works' (Davies, 1999; Hargreaves, 1997). As Ramaekers (2014) discusses, scientific and evidence-based research is attractive because it claims to provide an objective basis for practice: "Education, so it is often heard in one or another version, 'is too important to allow it to be determined by unfounded opinion, whether of politicians, teachers, researchers or anyone else'" (p. 52). We can't leave decision making up to the fancies of fallible humans. Rather, we need to find some certainty that can guide our decision making. Measuring effectiveness gives us this certainty. Science establishes the 'truth' of educational reality from which we can derive authoritative rules of action.

Educational research demonstrates what Richard Bernstein (1983, p. 16ff.) calls *Cartesian Anxiety*. This anxiety arises from our conviction that we need to find a stable foundation for our knowledge. Once we have established this foundation, then we can build our knowledge with strength and permanency. As Bernstein (1983) says, this search for a foundation "is the quest for some fixed point, some stable rock upon which we can secure our lives against the vicissitudes that constantly threaten us" (p. 18). This pursuit seduces us into believing in an either/or—*either* we can find security on solid ground, *or* we are at the mercy of contingency, chaos and confusion. The threat of the latter is what gives us anxiety.

Similarly in education, scientific and evidence-based research wants to be able to establish a stable ground so that we have a point on which we can fix our knowledge. By establishing sure footing, it can give security in teacher's decision making and how they structure life in the classroom. Science can be the source of educational research's authority. What is the alternative for the educational scientist? If we are unable to secure a foundation, then we lose our basis for improving educational outcomes. Our hopes rest on being able to secure a solid foundation for research.

So Cartesian Anxiety did not end with Descartes. We see this anxiety demonstrated in the types of thinking that try to provide a stable point to affix our thinking. But neither does Cartesian Anxiety begin with Descartes and the Enlightenment. This anxiety can be recognised in the philosophy practiced by Plato. Underpinning Plato, and the style of philosophy that

flourished in his wake, is the hope that humans can seize essential insight through the powers of rationality.

The importance of achieving this insight is raised in Plato's (2005) *Protagoras*. Here we see a retelling of the creation myth (p. 19-22, lines 320c-322d). Prometheus and Epimetheus are charged with bestowing different gifts on all creatures. Epimetheus, eager for this task, asks Prometheus to leave it to him to distribute abilities amongst the creatures. To some he gives strength; and to those without strength, he gives speed so that they can readily flee from danger. To some creatures he gifts weaponry such as teeth and claws; and to others he gives them the ability to defend themselves. The animals were clothed with fur to keep warm, hooves to walk along rough ground, and wings to travel through the air. Epimetheus made sure that the creatures were well-equipped to deal with the hazards they faced. They had all they needed to make themselves at home in the world. However, when it was the human's turn to receive their abilities, Epimetheus had run out of gifts. So, "while the other animals were all very carefully provided for, humankind was naked, shoeless, without bedding and defenceless" (Plato, 2005, p. 21, line 321c). Humans were left helpless and vulnerable in an unsafe and threatening world. When Prometheus returns, he discovers the plight that Epimetheus has left humans in. Unable to leave humans in peril, Prometheus steals technical ingenuity from the gods and gifts it to humans. So now, even though humans have no natural abilities to protect themselves in a hostile environment, they have the ingenuity to make their own clothes, shoes and shelter. Through agriculture and farming, they can feed themselves and lessen their reliance on nature. Technology is used by humans to make the world a safer, reliable and hospitable place. Instead of humans being left vulnerable, technology enables them to have control over the world and create stability in their lives.

In Plato's use of this creation myth, we see an antagonism established between practical reasoning and the forces of luck. Our ability to apply reason and technical know-how to our situations is key to our survival. Practical reasoning is how we can gain control over our lives and overcome our vulnerability. If we succumb to the forces of luck, this is either because we have failed to adequately apply what we know, or we still need to make progress in our knowledge and technological abilities (see Nussbaum, 2001, Ch. 4).

Little has changed in this outlook over the last couple of millennia. Humans have made incredible technological progress, gained considerable control over the natural world, and still put our hope in our technical ingenuity to overcome the vulnerabilities we face. This is all too clear in the current historical moment that I write, where humans have globally had to confront

the ravages of the Covid-19 pandemic. We have found ourselves vulnerable to an invisible killer virus that we do not have the natural capacity to defend ourselves from. We have also found a promethean saviour in science and technology. Doctors and nurses have been able to use technology such as ventilators to save lives, biologists and chemists have developed vaccines, and epidemiologists have been able to advise governments and populations about how to control the spread of the virus. In the war with the virus, our best weapon has been our intelligence.

These kinds of successes give the natural sciences a particular allure. Science has proven to be a powerful tool to both understand and harness the natural world. Science has protected us and helped us to live more comfortable lives. Therefore, it is not surprising that the methods of the natural sciences would be appealing to education. We don't want to leave the teaching of children susceptible to luck. If we want to equip schools and teachers, then we need to do so on an empirically validated basis. Either we apply the methods of science, or we let education be overrun by chance; either we control how teachers instruct and children learn, or we acquiesce to chaos. This is the anxiety educational research suffers from. We need to establish some certainty in teacher practice and overcome the vulnerabilities of being human. We can gain stability and control of children's education through our technical and scientific ingenuity.

Due to this anxiety, education in the last half a century has seen a desire for certainty in its knowledge of how teachers should teach. We want student success to be controllable and predictable (Blake et al., 2000; Dunne, 1997; Smith, 2005). As prominent educational researcher David Hargreaves (1997) asserts, "research should provide decisive and conclusive evidence that if teachers do X rather than Y in their professional practice, there will be a significant and enduring improvement in outcome" (p. 413). There are three important assumptions in Hargreaves' statement. First, an action must be understood as generalisable. It is not enough for action X to have worked in one situation. Rather, action X must be widely applicable to have validity. There needs to be a strong link between an intervention and an outcome. This desire for generalisability can be seen in the prestige given to meta-analysis (e.g., Hattie, 2009). Such studies endeavour to establish the effectiveness of practices by comparing the results of a large number of international studies. By doing so, they flatten out the diversity and contingency of teaching situations to determine practices that are universal and generalisable (Snook et al., 2009). If teaching practices are to be applied in all times and places, then our understanding of them needs to be stripped of their sense of time and place.

Second, we need precision in our knowledge of an action. If research gives evidence that teachers should do X, then it needs to be clear exactly what X is. This clarity is needed for the researcher to reliably establish a link between X and its effect. It is also needed for the teacher so that they know what they should do and that their leaders can readily observe these behaviours. We want to remove any ambiguity and vagueness in our understanding.

Third, we also need precision in our knowledge of outcomes. If we want to know that action X is effective, then we need to be clear what it is effective for. If we are vague about the ends of our actions, then we will be vague as to the validity of an action. We want to be able to observe that a particular action brings about a particular outcome. To determine that an outcome has been achieved, we need to be clear about exactly what we are looking for. Additionally, singular ends will be preferable to a plurality of ends. If we think of an action as having a variety of ends, then we will find ourselves in a position of having to weigh and adjudicate between these different ends. This can lead to undue complications for our decision making. When trying to give advice to teachers, researchers need to be decisive and unambiguous about what the important objectives are for their practice.

Our knowledge of teacher practice needs to be generalisable and precise if we are to make classroom life controllable and predictable. Consequently, knowledge and research that exhibits higher levels of generalisability and precision is going to be seen as having higher value. Thus, it is not surprising that measurement and quantitative data (especially student assessment data) have become prominent in educational research. Just like a carpenter can be more precise by measuring a length of wood using a ruler, likewise, educational research can be more precise by using fixed scales of measurement. For this reason, research becomes concerned with measurable outcomes and the measurable effectiveness of our actions.

If measurement can give us the precision necessary for combating the forces of luck, then what is measurable will become more significant. As a result, we concern ourselves with outcomes and actions that can be measured. In this way, our anxiety for certainty in educational research informs the types of questions we ask and the methods we employ. Research not only gives us knowledge about teacher practice, but also shapes our understanding about what is important in practice. In describing Plato's perspective, Nussbaum (2001) says: "We must go further, be more thoroughly scientific, if we are to 'save our lives'—even if science makes those saved lives different" (p. 99). This can also be said of educational research in the current situation. To improve education, we believe that we need to be more scientific and more evidence-based in our knowledge. So, we pursue this knowledge and encourage teachers to

apply this knowledge. In turn, we change the life of the classroom and shape the lives of children. We assume that this change is for the better because it is rooted in a sense of epistemic certainty and the human power of rationality.

Letting certainty define us

Shaping classroom life according to scientific and evidence-based knowledge is attractive because they seem to be objective and thereby transcend human fallibility. But despite purporting to be objective, evidence-based practice is not neutral. It assumes a causal and technocratic model of education (Biesta, 2007b). The presupposition of evidence-based practice is that teaching is an intervention designed to produce certain outcomes. Questions of effectiveness and 'what works' are brought to the fore. These questions then become understood as central in the work of teachers and researchers.

When technocratic models dominate our thinking, we can fail to consider how a teacher's actions have more significance than their instrumental function. A teacher demonstrates for a child possibilities for what it means to be human. As Mollenhaur (2014) describes, when adults live alongside children, they are presenting a way of life. This is both unavoidable and usually unintentional. At school, a child not only learns the intended academic outcomes; they are also developing an *understanding of being* by seeing *how* teachers act (van Manen, 2015). When teachers operate according to a technocratic model of education, they are not merely focused on transmitting knowledge and skills—they are also presenting to students technocratic thinking as a way of life.

This argument is also developed by Thomson (2001, 2005) who explores Heidegger's discussions of metaphysics in relation to both technology (Heidegger, 2013b) and the philosophy of Nietzsche (Heidegger, 1991). For Heidegger, metaphysics is how we ground our intelligibility of being—of what is. Metaphysics informs our understanding of what something is and what it means to be. While 'metaphysics' may sound like an esoteric concern, it is an issue for everyone. All of us operate according to an underlying metaphysics that makes the world intelligible for us. Likewise, our understanding of being shapes our thinking about education. Our metaphysics is what makes children intelligible to us. How we see children is shaped by our underlying understanding of what it means to be.

According to Heidegger (1991, 2013b), in the current time we understand being as the self's capacity for discharging its strength for growth and advancement. As Thomson (2005)

describes, the self is "an unending disaggregation and reaggregation of forces without any purpose or goal beyond the self-perpetuating augmentation of these forces through their continual self-over-coming" (pp. 55f.). Being becomes the insatiable desire for more. We are only instances of forces that will our own meaningless self-optimization and self-augmentation.

For Heidegger, the consequence of this understanding of being is that humans become meaningless resources and raw materials that exist for the sole purpose of maximising their potential. This optimization has no goal beyond itself. We are merely forces that exercise our power in the universe, only to return to the dust and disappear. All of human existence is punctuated, like the life of Sisyphus, by this meaningless rise and fall. Our lives become dedicated only to the extensive and efficient discharge of our strength.

Just as the natural world has become a resource that we manage and manipulate for the purpose of our technological development, so too, the human world has become an object for control. We think of ourselves and others through a technological and calculative thinking. What is valued in ourselves is what can be measured and enhanced. We measure our self-optimization, reducing all qualitative relations to quantifiable terms. This is the essence of technology. To speak of a technological understanding of being refers to our preoccupation with understanding ourselves using instrumental and calculative rationalities.

We see a technological understanding of being determining many aspects of our social lives. In business, we use terms like 'management' and 'human resources'. People are valued according to what they can produce. Effective management becomes interested in optimizing inputs and outputs so that human resources can be efficiently maximised. The result is that people become merely the objects and agents of technical action.

This tendency is also readily apparent in education. Educational research is reduced to the task of establishing an evidence base for policy and practice (e.g., Alton-Lee, 2003) so that we can maximise educational outputs. We scour the research landscape to establish effective practices for school leaders (e.g., Robinson et al., 2009), teacher learning (e.g., Timperley et al., 2007), mathematics teaching (e.g., Anthony & Walshaw, 2007), and so on. With this proliferation of evidence-based practice, teachers' actions are judged according to their instrumental capacity to procure certain goals. To determine the efficacy of a teacher's actions, these goals are measurable. The 'value' that is added to a child's education is delimited in terms of quantifiable data. Within this framework, students are valued according to their measurable self-optimization. This manifests itself through an emphasis on assessment results.

Additionally, many students come to see their education in terms of getting a job and making money as an adult.

The problem with giving a technological understanding of being pride of place in our educational understanding is that it can take over our thinking. We can end up being unable to imagine the significance of our relationships with children outside of a technocratic rationality. As Thomson (2005) contends:

> The danger...is that we could become so satiated by the endless possibilities for flexible self-optimization opened up by treating our worlds and ourselves as resources to be optimized that we could lose the very sense that anything is lost with such a self-understanding. (p. 57)

Enamoured by the certainty that a technological understanding of education might give us, we can end up thinking about education exclusively in these terms, without reflecting on what we might have lost by doing so. For this reason, it is important that educational research not only produces knowledge, but considers the nature of the knowledge it produces. The claimed 'objectivity' of evidence-based research is particularly dangerous because it can lull us into believing that we have escaped the crutches of ideology and fallible human beliefs. But a technological understanding of being is no more neutral than other ideologies.

This would not be an issue if evidence-based practice was only an adjunct part of educational decision making. However, evidence-based practice is being presented to teachers as the source of 'truth' for teaching. What is worthwhile for teachers to know is determined by a technocratic rationality. This in turn pressures educational research to ask questions and provide evidence that meets the teacher's need for technical and instrumental understandings. Consequently, evidence-based practice promotes and validates its own agenda while simultaneously marginalising, excluding and delegitimating other perspectives. Evidence-based practice circumscribes the field of education within its own borders (cf. Holmes et al., 2006). This pernicious monopoly then limits possibilities to reflect on broader meanings of education. We are led to ask:

> Where is the life we have lost in living?
> Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
> Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
> (T. S. Eliot, 1934, p. 7)

Knowing is not knowing

There is no shortage of knowledge in education. A plenitude of experts, consultants and researchers are readily available to offer teachers the tools to be highly reliable practitioners that can eradicate failure in our school system. One of the requirements of being a teacher is to engage in professional learning development that advances our understanding of learning theories and develop our expertise in applying them to the students in our classroom. We have the knowledge we need. If there is a problem with our knowledge, it rests in the issues faced with making sure that knowledge is applied inside the 'black box' of the classroom (Black & William, 1998). In other words, we know what makes a difference; we just need to work hard at bringing research and practice closer together so that teachers apply this knowledge in the classroom. To face the challenges experienced in classrooms, we need 'knowing teachers' who have the tools and techniques to be effective practitioners. As Smith (2006) describes: "A kind of knowingness has indeed come to take over education" (p. 23).

This knowingness becomes the basis for our optimism in our teaching practice. At the level of policy and leadership, our knowledge about what makes a difference encourages us to set up structures and systems that close the gap between research and practice, resulting in institutions that propagate evidence-based practice. Furthermore, at the teacher level, having knowledge can give us peace of mind that we are doing a good job. Research gives us tangible indicators that we can use to assess and improve our practice. Additionally, we can look at the measurement of student progress to see the impact of our teaching. By aligning ourselves with research and verifying our effectiveness with data, we can be secure in our identity as good teachers.

The vast amount of knowledge that we have in education usually operates within an understanding of teaching as a technical practice. Teaching is a technology, typically conceived as a system of inputs, processes and outputs. When we consider what we mean by technology, a common definition is 'applied science'. Using this definition, a technological understanding of teaching would involve drawing upon a scientific understanding of human development and applying it to teacher practice. From this perspective, our 'knowing' in education is one that is grounded in the natural sciences. But according to Blake et al. (2000), this is not the actual issue when we consider the relationship between technology and teaching. Instead of viewing technology as an applied science, we can reverse the priority so that technology is understood as what makes our scientific thinking possible. To understand education as a scientific knowing, we need to first consider the technologies that form our knowing. As Blake et al.

(2000) argue: “Modern teaching as technology then may perhaps be understood not as the application of science, but rather as the utilisation of various instruments or quasi-instruments” (p. 6). So, when researchers and teachers utilise instruments of measurement, such as testing and assessment, it is not so much science that is constituting educational knowledge; rather, it is the instruments that are being used that determine the shape of our knowing.

The tools that teachers use for practice not only help them to think about their teaching, but fundamentally change how they see and understand their practice. To illustrate this, Blake et al. (2000) give the parallel examples of the dentist's probe and the microscope. Both of these technologies amplify certain aspects of our normal perception. The dentist probe amplifies the sense of touch and the microscope amplifies vision. Through using these tools, practitioners can hone their perception with greater refinement and precision, supporting them to do their job more effectively. But in amplifying their senses, they are also concealing how something appears in normal perception. The dentist, via her probe, does not perceive other features of the tooth such as its wetness; and the scientist only sees that flat, two-dimensional, picture that is disclosed through the barrel of the microscope. Similarly, the tools that we use in education amplify certain features of our practice, while also concealing other features.

This concealing nature of technology is an advantage for the dentist and the scientist. The instruments help them focus on features directly relevant to their task. We can say the same about teaching. The instruments (such as tests and techniques) that we use in education focus on certain aspects of our practice that have been deemed particularly relevant. We appreciate our practice by establishing a limited range of specific outcomes, measure them on a singular scale, and then determine how an intervention has a measurable effect on progress. However, by determining what is included within the bounds of our vision, our instruments also determine what is excluded. That is, the educational technologies we use are not neutral. They make normative evaluations about what we value in our lives with children. Certain features of our lives are prioritised and brought into focus at the expense of other features. In this manner, the instruments that we use bring with them certain assumptions. First, that the outcomes we measure are to be taken as both valuable and given. Second, that the outcomes we value are the ones we can measure. Third, what is important about these outcomes is the progress we measure using a singular scale. And finally, the important function of practice is to make an intervention that effectively impacts the measured progress. Therefore, the instruments we use, on the one hand, determine a particular perspective that teachers use to

understand their practice, while on the other hand, distracting us from reflecting on broader questions about the task of education and the significance of living alongside children.

Teaching as technology both amplifies our vision and blinds us. We forgo a consideration of what outcomes we value, and we end up valuing what we can readily measure. This has several implications. First, while our tools give us evidence for how we have made an impact on certain outcomes, they do not give us information about the outcomes that we have not measured. Second, our practice has an influence on children's lives in ways that cannot be measured. But just because it cannot be mapped on a singular scale does not mean it is not significant. Thus, our tools are blind to significant influences that we have on a child's life. Finally, our tools might help us ascertain the efficacy of our actions, yet they do not comment on the appropriateness of our actions. As a teacher, I might be employing practices that can be justified using student progress data; but, I am still left with the issue of whether it is good and appropriate for me to act towards a particular child in this way. In these ways, the tools that researchers and teachers use can produce a way of knowing that becomes myopic—we focus on certain aspects of teaching without bringing into view its larger lived significance. Educational thinking then runs on set railway tracks (Blake et al., 2000) without exploring the broader terrain of lived experience.

Our thinking about education devolves from an exploration of fundamental pedagogical questions about what it means to live with children, to a reduced and simplified vision that aligns with a technical style of thinking. Our usage of tools relies on taking as granted certain assumptions about the nature and process of teaching. If we open up the question of what we value in pedagogy to accommodate what is beyond the scope of our tools, then we bring into question the terms that our tools rely on to operate. It serves the interest of technological understandings of teaching to evade broader pedagogical reflection. Teaching as technology both produces a myopic vision and relies on this blindness to sustain itself.

In much research, the exemplary model of a reflective teacher is one who enquires into their own practice to determine whether what they do works (e.g., Timperley et al., 2014). A good teacher has the knowledge about what works, and reflects in order to further develop this knowledge. In this way, a technical knowledge of teaching can give us a sense of security in our identity as good teachers. But if knowledge becomes caught up in this closed circuit of reflection, it is blind to the broader meaning and significance of our lives with children that cannot be captured within a technical rationality. This is not to disparage this knowledge—but to admit its limits. If we fail to recognise these limits, we lose opportunities to recognise and

reflect on the broader meanings of our lives with students. Our knowing is at the same time an unknowing.

The beautiful uncertainty of our lives

The problem with understanding pedagogy in exclusively scientific terms is that it loses touch with the lived reality of pedagogy. The task of scientific pedagogy is to measure pedagogical phenomena. But to be measured, phenomena need to be described using exact terms. Exact descriptions are a necessity for any scientific understanding, yet such descriptions, by their nature, will always be idealized and abstracted forms of the real. The pedagogical lifeworld is not made up of idealized entities. Therefore, whenever pedagogical phenomena are described in exact and measurable terms, these descriptions are distanced from lived reality. Replacing lived experience with a reconstructed and theoretical account of practice risks alienating theorising from the very reality that it wishes to describe (van Manen, 1982).

I am not claiming that there is no value in a scientific understanding of teaching. Science can, and should, be used as a tool to inform the methods that teachers use. But it needs to be done with an awareness of its limitations: Science deals with the general; teaching occurs in contingent and concrete situations. Science describes the world in clearly delineated terms; classroom life is complex and messy. Science sees 'the child' as an abstraction; a teacher encounters the child as a unique and irreplaceable person (Joldersma, 2008). If science is to have utility for our pedagogical practice, it needs be applied in a way that serves rather than masters our everyday living with children. Pedagogy needs to be grounded in the lifeworld—the place of our everyday acting, relating and existing (cf. Husserl, 1970).

However, by using scientific and technological languages to understand education, we are forgetting this ground. As Galvin and Todres (2007) argue, the current problem facing scholarship is the increasing specialisation of knowledge. They describe how science, morality and art became differentiated in the modern era. Each sphere was given the autonomy to pursue knowledge according to its own terms. While this ushered in a period of monumental technological progress, the negative consequence of this specialisation was, firstly, a fragmentation of knowledge—the different spheres of knowledge became increasingly dissociated and insulated from one another. And secondly, the lifeworld became increasingly regulated by scientific discourses.

Our understanding of education has become increasingly specialised through the rational and technical language of learning. Consequently, these scientific discourses have become insulated from ethical spheres, and further removed theorising from the lived meanings of teaching. For Galvin and Todres (2007), the solution for this situation is found in the 'creativity of unspecialization'. This is made possible by clearing away a technological understanding of the world and ourselves to reveal our "unspecialized capacity of being" (p. 38). Through this orientation to the world, our understanding is not the result of method, but about an openness to lived and felt meanings.

Education needs to guard against the *forgetfulness* that results from unchecked specialisation. Educational practice and theorising require *reminders* about the basic sense of finding ourselves in the world living with children. According to the philosopher, Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. lxxii):

> I am not the result or the intertwining of multiple casualties that determine my body or my "psyche"; I cannot think of myself as a part of the world, like the simple object of biology, psychology, and sociology; I cannot enclose myself within the universe of science. Everything that I know about the world, even through science, I know from a perspective that is my own or from an experience of the world without which scientific symbols would be meaningless. The entire universe of science is constructed upon the lived world, and if we wish to think science rigorously, to appreciate precisely its sense and its scope, we must first awaken that experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression.

When educational research talks about practice in terms of the science of learning, and about the effectiveness of teaching, this will always be a second-order expression of teaching. By substituting the ideal for the real, educational theorising is at risk of passing over the 'first-order' human, relational, personal and ethical features that make pedagogy meaningful. What is important in our lives is not limited to what can be measured and abstracted. Rather, our lives involve a variety of goods and commitments that have a qualitative significance (Taylor, 1989).

To appreciate these 'first-order' meanings requires breaking free from certainty in our knowledge. If we ground our knowledge in the unspecialised understanding of how we find ourselves in the world, we are faced with the messiness, contingency and unpredictability of our lives. This messiness arises simply because, at the ground level, education takes place in a relationship between fallible human beings who each find themselves trying to deal with unique situations.

Here, education will always be a risky project. In theory, we might want to imagine education without risk. However, such an endeavour is self-deceptive (Papastephanou, 2006;

Smeyers, 2010, Smith, 2005). To take the risk out of education would require taking out the human element that makes education possible in the first place. Thus, as Biesta (2016a) argues, to remove risk from schools is to also remove education from schools.

What gives life to classrooms are the human moments that are unpredictable, spontaneous and qualitatively unique. If we only try to talk about classroom life in technical and abstract terms, then we will suffer, what Smith (2006) describes as, "a kind of amnesia with respect to contingency and finitude" (p. 25). We need to find and develop ways of thinking about education that speak about the rich and lived significance of classroom situations. Our knowledge can be deepened by a sense of the uncertainty of being human (Wolbert, 2018).

For Martha Nussbaum (2001), the peculiar beauty of being human is not the beauty of a hardened gem, but the beauty of a plant. A plant is tender—vulnerable to exposure of the world and dependent on the nourishment of the soil. Similarly, I would argue, education is conditioned by fragility. In our lives with children, we might want to protect ourselves by trying to remove what is fragile, unreliable and risky. But in doing so, we are evading the very contingency and uncertainty that conditions what is important in our lives with children.

Educational research needs to remind us that good teaching requires caring about those things that are risky, unpredictable and unknowable. We should not attempt to structure our lives to protect ourselves from uncertainty. Instead, good teaching means making ourselves vulnerable to uncertainty. By reopening the question about what it means as adults to live with children through a reflection on uncertainty, we might find that what is beautiful and human about education is not what is precise, controllable and reliable, but what is messy, vulnerable and fragile.

3. Understanding pedagogy without certainty

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed how a lot of our thinking in education is dominated by scientific and technocratic rationalities. We pursue these styles of thinking due to an underlying anxiety for certainty in our knowledge. This anxiety gives us a wager: *either* we find a point upon which we can ground our knowledge objectively, *or* we will find ourselves ultimately aimless and directionless in our thinking. The undesirability of the latter prospect is what makes fixed, grounded and objective thinking so appealing. However, in the last chapter, I attempted to describe why certainty is not as appealing as we initially hope.

In this chapter, I will look at the ways that we can understand pedagogy without certainty. By doing so, I am not submitting to the either-or of the wager. Rejecting certainty does not necessitate acquiescing to intellectual and moral chaos. Rather, in rejecting certainty I am attempting to escape the climate of the wager, and instead develop understandings of pedagogy that neither, on the one hand, boast certainty and final authority, nor on the other hand, succumb to relativism and nihilism. There is a third way where understanding is imagined as tentative, ever-open, and accepting of human finitude.

One possible path we can take to escape our anxiety for certainty is to understand pedagogy as a human social science. This requires, first, extricating pedagogy from technocratic understandings of education. I will do so by rooting my understanding of pedagogy in the Continental tradition that sees pedagogy as the fundamental human relationship between the older and younger generations. I will illustrate this conception of pedagogy using an anecdote from one of my research participants.

Second, pedagogy needs to be understood as a human social science. I will describe how the study of pedagogy is a hermeneutical task. Pedagogical research requires interpreting meaning through understanding the meaningful ways that adults and children find themselves in the world living alongside each other.

A fertile ground for this kind of research can be found in the field of phenomenological pedagogy. This approach focuses on lived experience. I will contend that a focus on lived

experience can provide us with meaningful ways to understand life in the classroom that are relevant and beneficial to the field of education and to teacher practice.

Pedagogy as a human social science

What does it mean to understanding pedagogy as a human social science? To answer this, first, I need to discuss how I understand pedagogy. In Chapter 2, I described how educational research is dominated by a technocratic model that is focused on explaining how students learn and makes generalisations about what techniques teachers should use. In the English-speaking world, the term pedagogy has become caught up in this discourse. This is readily apparent in my own context of New Zealand. When pedagogy appears in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), it is presented in every instance as 'effective pedagogy'. Here, pedagogy is a matter of identifying practices that can reliably bring about measurable student outcomes.

This technological understanding of education is precisely what I critiqued in Chapter 2. So, it might seem strange that the term pedagogy is a prominent feature of my work when pedagogy is so deeply wedded to the educational approaches that my work attempts to move away from. However, I want to reclaim a meaning of pedagogy that is not focused on instrumental effectiveness, but more fundamentally concerned with what children mean in our lives and what we mean in the lives of children.

Reclaiming this meaning is not without warrant. Even though pedagogy has a long and rich history in Western and European traditions, the term only became prominent in the English-speaking world from around the 1980s (Hamilton, 1999; van Manen, 1999). But the way that the English-speaking world uses pedagogy is very different to how the word is used in Continental Europe. In the English-speaking tradition, it is commonplace to see pedagogy as being about method (Ponte & Ax, 2009)—about how to teach. But in the Continental tradition, pedagogy has a much broader concern than method. Pedagogy is about the fundamental human relation between the older generation and the younger generation. The basic questions of pedagogy are: Why do we have children? What assistance do we give them? How do we bring children into our common world? (Mollenhauer, 2014). As Langeveld (1983) says, pedagogy is concerned with "bring[ing] into being for the sake of this child and with the help of this child, all that is essential to its being human" (p. 5). So, as a practice, pedagogy concerns all who are involved in a child's upbringing: parents, families, friends, communities, social agencies, as well as schools.

When I speak of pedagogy in relation to teachers and the classroom, I am not grounding pedagogy in the institutional agendas of schools. Instead, I am connecting the pedagogy of teaching with the more general social phenomenon of bringing up children (Friesen, 2020; Mollnehauer, 2014; Ponte & Rönnerman, 2009; Saevi & Foran, 2012; van Manen, 1991b). In this regard, pedagogy is not a specialised task that only concerns professional teachers and academics. Pedagogy is a concern for all of us. We know about pedagogy by the care that we have received from adults who have had a formative influence on our lives; and we know about pedagogy by how we take responsibility for the children in our care (van Manen, 2015). Thus, the pedagogical practice of teachers needs to be understood as the institutional incarnation of pedagogy as a more fundamental human practice.

What distinguishes pedagogy from other areas of social science is its concern with our relationship to the younger generation. We do not relate to children the same way that we relate to adults. There is a particular pedagogical responsibility that we have as adults. The existence of children in our lives requires us to take some form of practical action and to do what is good and appropriate for a child's upbringing. As Martinus Langeveld says: "Pedagogy is a science of experience; it is a human science, indeed it is an ethical human science that is conducted or studied with practical intent" (cited in van Manen, 2012, p. 13). Children are not just a part of our lives—they require us to act pedagogically for them.

Langeveld's definition pinpoints four key aspects of pedagogy: it is experiential, human, ethical and practical. To explore these four aspects, I will discuss them in relation to an anecdote that one of my research participants shared with me:

> My student, Nathan, had his ninth birthday coming up. I asked whether he had any plans. He told me he never had a birthday party. He hadn't even ever had a birthday cake. That really bothered me. A birthday cake is one of those things that every kid should have. But Nathan never had one.
>
> I thought, *I could give him a birthday cake*. So, I did. On Nathan's birthday I organised a cake for the end of the school day. When I brought the cake in, he just lit up with gratitude.
>
> "Miss, let's cut it up now," Nathan said.
>
> I said, "you take the cake home. Share it with your brothers and sisters."
>
> Without pause, Nathan said, "Nah. We're going to have it at school. This is my family here."

This is a pedagogical moment. As I described above, we tend to think of pedagogical moments as being about teaching and learning. However, many of the moments that teachers share with children are not about teaching and learning. But this does not make them any less pedagogical.

Following Langeveld's definition of pedagogy, we can see why this situation with Nathan is pedagogical. First, this situation is about *experience*. It is concerned with a relationship between an adult and a child located in the midst of life. The teacher finds herself faced by a unique child, in a unique situation that demands a unique response. This moment is experienced by the teacher and Nathan in lived and meaningful ways.

Second, this is a *human* encounter. For the teacher, this situation is not about fulfilling professional or institutional agendas. Instead, it is about being sensitive to how Nathan is experiencing the world. The significance of this moment is personal and relational.

Third, this moment is *ethical*. Nathan's situation provokes the teacher to reflect on what is good and appropriate for Nathan. The teacher does not feel that it is good that Nathan is growing up without people recognising and celebrating his birthday.

Finally, this moment is *practical*. In this situation, the teacher finds herself responsible and able to act. The pedagogical relationship assumes that the teacher is committed to act in Nathan's interest. She needs to make a practical difference in his life. So, she buys a cake and gives it to Nathan.

When we understand pedagogy in this way, it becomes clear why I have decided to make it a dominant feature in my study. My research is interested in how teachers experience ethical uncertainty in their relationships with children. If we apply Langeveld's definition to my topic, we see that: I am interested in how ethical uncertainty is *experienced* by the teacher; the context of this experience is the *human* relationship between the teacher and child; the experience involves an uncertainty about what is good or bad, making the experience *ethical*; and finally, ethical uncertainty involves being unsure what to do, so it is a *practical* concern. Therefore, pedagogy is a natural and essential term to use for my research.

I have described pedagogy. Now, to understand 'pedagogy as a human social science', I need to unpack the second half of this phrase.

To develop a science of the human and social world, one possibility is to look at the natural sciences. They have demonstrated a power to explain and control the natural world. If we want to translate this success, it might be thought that all we need to do is transpose the methods and aims of the natural sciences onto the social sciences. However, this assumes that the methods and aims we apply to the objects of our study in the natural sciences will also suit the object of our study in the social sciences. If we are going to model the social sciences on

the natural sciences, then the objects that we study in both these sciences need to be similar (Winch, 2007).

Our desire to replicate the success of the natural sciences can lead us to shape how we see the entities we study in a way that fits with scientific methods. In the case of pedagogy, we let certain methods dictate our pedagogical understanding. Our approach to pedagogy then becomes dictated by disciplines foreign to education without us asking how pedagogy might pursue its own agenda driven by its own, distinctive concerns (cf. Biesta, 2011). Instead, we need to stop to consider the nature of pedagogy to help direct us to ask worthwhile questions.

Therefore, I would like to start with a simple question: In pedagogy, what are the entities that we study? A geologist studies rocks. A botanist studies plants. So, what does pedagogy study? To reaffirm Dilthey: "the study of pedagogy…can only begin with the description of the educator in his relationship to the educand" (cited in Friesen, 2017, p. 743). Pedagogy studies adults and children, and the relationship between them. As such, the entities that make up our study are not things like rocks and plants, but people. The objects of our studies are not whats but whos. While pedagogical situations in schools will involve learning about things through the use of things, fundamentally pedagogy concerns a person who learns, and a person who teaches. When we study pedagogy, the entities that we study are ourselves.

To ask what pedagogy studies may seem pedantic. However, it has important implications for how we understand pedagogy as a social science. Geologists and botanists launch their inquiries based on an understanding of the being, or is-ness, of those objects. Rocks and plants are taken as self-sufficient entities with certain properties that can be described and analysed. When we consider ourselves, what does it mean to be? Asking what it means for a rock 'to be' is fundamentally different to asking what it means for me 'to be'. When I think about myself, I am not foremostly an entity with properties. I am a person who is *be-ing* (Heidegger, 1962). Our essence lies in our lived existence. The adults and children involved in pedagogy are people who have a past and a future, who find themselves in a world that is meaningful and significant. Pedagogy takes place in lived situations. We are not detached observers; we are engaged actors. Our being is an issue for us. A rock doesn't care about being a rock; a plant doesn't care about being a plant; but we care about our lives, both as children and adults. My being is mine.

Another important difference between a rock and ourselves is that we are self-interpreting beings. Thus, Charles Taylor (1971) argues that what distinguishes the natural

sciences from the social sciences is the latter's *hermeneutical* dimension. Meaning and interpretation are an essential part of what it means to study humans. For Taylor, human action cannot be reduced to a matter of stimuli and response—nor can it be adequately explained through causal laws. Instead, we act in meaningful ways in situations that are meaningful to us. When we engage in activity, we do so with a self-understanding and an understanding of our involvement in the world. Therefore, an essential task of the social sciences is interpreting meaning.

Human action cannot be understood as a discrete event independent of a meaningful context. Human action is always the action of a subject that understands themselves in a particular way, who has a sense of history, projected future, and who is engaged in a variety of meaningful projects. Any abstract understanding of an action will always presuppose a more fundamental understanding where action happens in the midst of life. As MacIntyre (1985) puts it, "an intelligible action is a more fundamental concept than that of an action as such" (p. 209). Any attempt to analyse human action in objective terms will be secondary to a conception of action as performed in meaningful ways by a self-interpreting being.

Writing in the 19th century, Wilhelm Dilthey made an important distinction between the natural and human sciences. For Dilthey, natural science aims to provide explanations and generalisations. On the other hand, human science is interested in how our personal and social lives are experienced in meaningful ways. As such, human science aims to understand human phenomena through description, interpretation and meaning. In short: "We explain nature, but human life we must understand" (Dilthey, cited in van Manen, 1990, p. 4). Thus, in the social sciences, interpretation is more significant than explanation. In the natural sciences, validity is given to knowledge if it is able to demonstrate an ability to make predictions. In educational research, we also tend to give validity to knowledge that can predict that certain teacher actions will bring about certain outcomes in students. However, if we understand educational research as a hermeneutical task, then predictability should not be used as a criterion for judging the validity of knowledge. Instead, priority should be given to knowledge that demonstrates an interpretative power.

In my study, I want to reclaim an understanding of pedagogy that is grounded in both the phenomenon of bringing up children, as well as a recognition that adults and children live meaningful lives that require interpretation. My specific interest is in an area of human social science pedagogy called *phenomenological pedagogy*. As the name suggests, this field has its antecedents in *phenomenology*—an approach to philosophising that takes as its starting point

how we experience things (Husserl, 2012; Moran, 2000). In the mid-20th century, many European educational scholars were inspired to apply some of the insights of phenomenology to their work in human science pedagogy (Brinkmann, 2016; Levering & van Manen, 2002; Saevi, 2017; van Manen, 1996; van Manen & Adams, 2014). Towards the end of the 20th century, Max van Manen introduced this field to the English-speaking world (Friesen, 2017). In short, phenomenological pedagogy is interested in how pedagogy is lived. It studies concrete, real-world pedagogical situations and draws meaning from within these experiences (van Manen & Adams, 2014). This approach gives priority to lived experience over theoretical understanding. In the remainder of this chapter, I will further explore a phenomenological understanding of pedagogy.

The lived experience of pedagogy

The central focus of phenomenology is lived experience (see van Manen, 1990, 2014). Lived experience is the moment of the now. Right now you are seeing these words, either on a screen or on a piece of paper, and are engaging with the meaning of the writing. The now is not something that we can escape from. If we exist, then we find ourselves living in the now. But despite being so essential and basic to our lives, the now also proves to be elusive. If we try and capture the now we find that it has gone. We have already moved on to another moment. What phenomenology tries to do is retrieve this experience of the now by finding ways of describing our lived experiences (Left Coast Press, 2014).

Phenomenology is specifically interested in the lived dimensions of our experience. It is more than describing what happened to us and what we have observed. Phenomenology is about grasping what it is like to live through an experience. Phenomenology tries to capture pedagogical practice in this lived-throughness—it sees teachers and children as living alongside one another in schools. The basic phenomenological question is: "what is this experience like?" (van Manen, 2017, p. 811). Phenomenology looks at pedagogical situations and asks: 'What is this experience like for the teacher?' and 'What is this experience like for the child?'

Furthermore, our lived experience is meaningful. We inhabit a world of meaning. Meaning is everywhere on the surface of things. When we hear the sound of a car speeding down the road, we do not experience it as pure auditory data. Rather it has meaning—we

experience it as a car. Likewise, when we see a child laughing or crying, the experience contains emotional and relational meaning.

These meanings do not merely superficially decorate our experience. They are fundamental to what it means to find ourselves existing. If we were to reduce experience to raw visual and auditory information, this would require removing the situated qualities of these phenomena. Yet in so doing, we are not recovering a more primal sense of experience, but are distancing ourselves from experience as it is lived. We cannot understand lived experience without looking at how it is meaningful. We also cannot understand meaning without grounding it in experience.

Since this meaning is right under our noses, we often do not stop to notice it. Consequently, we are prone to a forgetfulness. The role of phenomenology is about reminding ourselves of lived meaning by making the implicit explicit. Phenomenology is about pointing out the meaning in the world—letting things show themselves, as themselves (Heidegger, 1962, p. 58/H. 34).

For phenomenology, understanding the human world is about seeing the meaning that arises in the midst of life. It requires an insider's perspective. In contrast, natural science positions us as outsiders, observing the world from a distance. But detaching ourselves from the world puts us out of touch. Only when things are appreciated in the thick of our existence can we understand what they mean. Our first access to the world is through experience. In the case of pedagogy, it is first encountered by us as the lived relationships that we have with children. Before life in the classroom becomes an object of our scientific investigation, it is the world that we find ourselves in. Pedagogy begins in lived experience.

Phenomenology in the classroom

The everyday moments and situations that take place in classrooms are rich with lived meaning. Phenomenological pedagogy posits that learning does not merely involve the transmission of knowledge through the instrumental and technical actions of a teacher; rather, it involves learning from someone, somewhere and in some way. Pedagogy happens in the context of life, between the meeting of two people. It is a thoroughly human encounter in which the lives of teachers and students intersect. These intersections are formative in the life of the child—they create opportunities for teachers to have a positive influence on a child's life, as well as the potential for harm. Pedagogy is given its form and colour through its personal, relational,

emotional and corporeal details. These qualities manifest themselves in the ordinary everyday encounters between teachers and students. Yet despite being so prominent in the experience of pedagogy, these qualities are difficult to fully capture using theoretical knowledge. Like all human moments, they are meaningful to us—yet when we try to describe how they are meaningful, we feel that we are lost for words.

Phenomenology can give us the tools to think about the pre-theoretical meaning of lived experience. As an example, let us look at an anecdote taken from the research of Saevi (2005). Here, a young learning-disabled student, Oda, describes a learning moment she has in the classroom:

> When my answer is wrong, I know it immediately because Per [the teacher] looks at me with this particular humorous glance and says, after just a little pause: "Yes …?" Then I understand that he wants me to give the question a second thought. He just leans back comfortably and waits. That's why I like him so much. I feel relaxed and smart with him. (p. 168)

Imagine we were in the classroom observing this situation. On the surface, it's a mundane and trivial moment—a student gives an answer, there is a pause, the student gives another answer. However, Oda recalls this moment as one that stands out for her. She remembers it and chooses to share it because it is significant and meaningful for her. Why?

To answer that, we need to see the moment that Oda describes as lived experience. We need to ask, 'What was this experience like for Oda?'. As Saevi (2005) describes, in this moment it is the gentle gesture of a teacher that opens up a space in which Oda can have another attempt. Through the teacher's humorous glance, Oda has the trust to enter that space and give another answer. The teacher's look affirms her uniqueness. It is a look that is meant only for her. The glance is also significant in how it does not bring attention to her disability or her mistake. The teacher practices a caring blindness, a caring forgetfulness. It recognises her potential. Oda is seen in the way that she wants and needs to be seen.

Education happens in moments like these. Teaching is a personal and relational practice that involves us encountering unique students in concrete situations. When a child learns, they learn from someone while finding themselves in the world in a particular way. However, much of the research that we use to inform teacher practice is unable to capture how teaching and learning is grounded in the lived reality of the classroom.

With Oda's anecdote, we could reflect on it 'objectively'. We could describe it as an example of 'wait time' (Rowe, 1986)—a measure of the time between a teacher's question and a student's response. A researcher might analyse this time objectively by measuring the

seconds that Oda needed to process the problem, and how the teacher engaged in effective practice by giving Oda sufficient wait time. However, such an analysis does not uncover the lived meaning that this moment has for Oda. Rather than experiencing time as the objective passing of seconds, this moment involves a lived time. This lived time opens up a space that invites Oda to reconsider and revise her thinking. What makes this opening inviting is not just the seconds that pass, but the personal, relational and emotional qualities that this time possesses. These are sustained through the lived body of the teacher—a humorous glance and a relaxed leaning back. In simple terms, Oda experiences this situation through a warm and personal relationship. Now, imagine if another teacher observed this moment and went back to their classroom and attempted to recreate it. It would not be surprising if these efforts failed. The teacher may try to 'wait' for a certain number of seconds, recreating the objective conditions of the lesson. Yet they would be unable to easily create the comfortable and uplifting atmosphere that Oda experienced.

We see in Oda's situation that what animates teaching and learning are those ineffable qualities that lie beyond the horizon of technical thought. It is the pre-theoretical and lived meanings that create the conditions for Oda's learning. These conditions cannot be manufactured and reproduced through technique because they fundamentally involve our whole being. Pedagogy is not a technical practice—it is a human practice.

As I described in Chapter 2, we often claim that we need knowledgeable teachers. When we make such claims, we assume a form of knowledge that is intellectual and cognitive. However, there is another type of knowing that relates to understanding the qualities of the lifeworld that are felt rather than thought (van Manen, 2014; van Manen & Li, 2002). A classroom might have felt meanings that are relaxed and cheerful. Conversely, a classroom could feel tense and unnerving. Good teaching requires being sensitive to these different felt meanings. Recognising the felt qualities of experience is important to understand how school is meaningful for children. As we saw in the case of Oda, she found herself in the classroom attuned to the felt meanings of the moment. The relaxed atmosphere and the warm relationship with Per made this moment significant and enabled Oda to engage in the learning.

If we, as teachers, are to open up the possibilities of our students, then we need to reflect on the felt and lived ways that children find themselves in the classroom. We need to ask: How do my students experience the lived space of the school? What are the felt meanings of my students' experience? Do they feel a sense of belonging or loneliness? Do students feel recognised or glanced over in their relationships with me? Such questions orient us to the

meanings that fundamentally condition daily life in the classroom. Good teachers intuitively know the importance these meanings have for children. They are sensitive and attuned to the way that the moments we share with children are felt.

For the teacher, being attuned in this way involves distinguishing between felt meanings that are desirable and undesirable for the child. Desirable meanings are necessary for raising and educating children because they create an atmosphere that is good for the child. But the value of a positive environment is not instrumental—that is, the teachers should not foster positive conditions merely to create an effective learning environment. While this is important, the primary inspiration for teachers to create a safe and nurturing atmosphere resides in the ethical significance of how the child experiences the world. Bollnow (1989a, 1989b, 1989c) describes how a pedagogical atmosphere is experienced by the child as trust and security. According to Bollnow, the pedagogue has a responsibility to create an 'island of security' that protects the child from a world that is chaotic and frightening. As the child gets older, this island of security will expand—it begins in a trust for the parent, to a trust in the school, and eventually to a trust in the world and in life. In contrast, if the child is not given this security, they will grow up to experience the world as chaotic and frightening.

Felt meanings have the power to either open or close off the world for children. Through a joyful mood, a child sees the world as open to possibilities—as a "joyful unfolding of lived time...the feeling of morning-ness" (Bollnow, 1989b, p. 22). But if a child's life is clouded by a gloomy mood, then the world becomes cheerless and the child retreats—"these are children who are born at dusk" (Henriksson, 2008, p. 65). Felt meanings do not colour our world like an Instagram filter that casts a superficial hue over reality. Instead, they are like the colour on a painter's brush that give constituent shape and form to our lives. The mood by which a child experiences life has a significant formative influence over how they come into the world.

In the pedagogical relation, it is not the responsibility of children to cultivate positive felt meanings. This responsibility lies with adults. Here, adults are called to be pedagogically sensitive to the ways that children find themselves in the world, protect them from chaotic and frightening modes of existence, and cultivate an atmosphere of trust, security and joy. A fundamental task of pedagogy is to create a sense of 'morning' for students—to create a world that is full of hope and promise.

Pedagogical action

Good teaching involves a felt knowing that is orientated to the child's experience and takes responsibility for how the child finds themselves. This presupposes the teacher's practical ability to involve themselves in a child's life. It is not sufficient for a teacher to only empathise with how a child experiences the world—they also need to respond.

For us to know what action is appropriate, we cannot rely on rules. Rules deal in generalities. But teaching involves finding ourselves in singular and dynamic situations with children who act unpredictably. Thus, teachers need to respond to the unexpected and the surprising (Westfall-Greiter & Schwarz, 2012). To do so, teachers need to be sensitive to the unique lived meanings of these situations so that they can act in thoughtful ways. Van Manen calls this ability *pedagogical tact* (van Manen, 1991a, 1991b, 1995, 2008). To act with pedagogical tact means that a teacher is orientated to the ways that a child is experiencing the moment. It is a kind of improvisational acting that involves the teacher discerning the significance that the situation has for a student, and then acting in a way that responds to the specific contingent qualities of the situation. Acting with tact goes beyond knowing the right thing to say and do. Good teachers know *how* to speak and act. Every teaching moment involves small discernments about the right gesture, the right body language, and the right tone of voice (van Manen, 2008).

But to call them 'small' does not mean that they are insignificant. They all contribute to what is appropriate and inappropriate for a child. From the perspective of a child, the small qualities of a situation can be the most salient features of their lived experience. As Oda described, a leaning back, a pause and a smile can be the features that make the difference. Good practice cannot be adequately captured through method or procedure. Instead, appropriate action requires a sensitivity to lived meaning and an ability to respond to situations with our personal and embodied presence.

Pedagogical tact has a normative significance—it involves acting in ways that are good and appropriate for the child. When we interact with children, every action, gesture, glance and word contributes to the mood of our classroom in ways that ethically implicate us (van Manen, 1994, 2012). Hence, pedagogical tact involves discernment, judgement and discretion. So, it would seem natural to assume that pedagogical tact is a type of reflective action: we interpret the situation we are in, consider possible courses of action, deliberate on the best option, and then put our plan into action.

While this kind of reflection is important, van Manen (1991a, 1995, 2008) argues that it does not match how teachers actually make choices when they are in the classroom in front of students. If we look at the phenomenological structure of teacher's acting, we notice that there is no time to reflect in this way. In pedagogical situations, we do not have time to think about the right thing to say and do—we need to act on the spur of the moment. If we hesitate and take a moment to reflect, then the moment for our timely response will have passed. Teaching involves a continual flux of moments that each require immediate action. Deliberate reflection takes us *out* of the moment to analyse the situation; but tact requires us to be fully present *in* the situation. If tact is to meet the demands of a moment, then it requires an immediate responsiveness.

Tact does not call for deliberate reflection. Yet we do not want to say that tactful acting is unthoughtful or unreflective. Pedagogy is the search for meaning, including the ethical significance of our living with children (van Manen, 1991a); so, a reflection upon the normative significance of our actions is embedded in pedagogy. Yet the way that this manifests itself in practice is not through rational deliberation, rather, through a 'practical knowing-in-action' (van Manen, 2008). Pedagogy is a reflective practice. This is demonstrated not so much by a discernment in thought, but by a discernment in action.

Van Manen (1991a, 1995, 2008) emphasises the immediacy of teachers' actions in their practical knowing-in-action. Alternatively, Molander (2008) elucidates an understanding of practical action where the agent is both immediately responsive and their understanding of a moment unravels over time. Molander describes how we have a 'conversation' with a situation. When we act, the situation 'tells us' something. Sometimes a situation will tell us what we already know—this situation is familiar and we already possess the knowledge about how to act. Other times a situation will tell us something that we do not know and we find ourselves in uncharted territory. The life of pedagogy is replete with unique moments that we have not encountered before. The human and relational nature of pedagogy means that teachers constantly deal with instability, unpredictability and uncertainty. When faced with the unexpected, skilled practitioners are able to test one's way forward by having a conversation with the situation. Rather than just an immediate response, knowing-in-action requires remaining attentive to how the situation unfolds. The meaning of our action only becomes apparent when the situation responds. The situation shows us what we have done. Thus, as we test our way forward, we gain understanding through our actions.

The way teachers think about their actions cannot be reduced to a rational and technical process. Pedagogical reflection requires a felt and embodied understanding. Such an understanding is difficult to articulate, and difficult to communicate to others. But it is an essential part of practice. Tactful action cannot be adequately captured in conceptual terms because, as van Manen (2015) says, "[p]ractical instant acting is driven by inner ontology rather than a deliberative epistemology" (p. 82). To understand tact requires a vocabulary that expresses the felt and embodied ways that we test our way forward in our concrete everyday encounters with children.

Phenomenological research and practice

Good practice cannot be adequately captured through method. Instead, appropriate action requires a sensitivity to lived meaning. If we accept this, then it does provide a challenge to the relationship between educational research and teacher practice. One of the common demands placed on educational scholarship is to close the gap between research and practice. Research is deemed valuable if it can provide evidence-based strategies and methods that can be used by teachers in the classroom. But such research can only provide guidance based on generalisations that are abstracted from the day to day lives of teachers. Rules and methods will always be of limited use since they are unable to capture the messy, unpredictable and contingent qualities of life in the classroom. Does this limit the possibility of closing the gap between research and practice?

Phenomenological pedagogy provides an alternative way that we can understand the closing of this gap. Phenomenological research is a way to reflect on teacher practice. However, its value lies not in being able to tell us what to do, but rather in its power to do something *with us* (van Manen, 2007). By reflecting on the lived experiences of teachers and children, we can orientate ourselves to the meaningful ways that teachers and children find themselves in the classroom. By reflecting on lived experience descriptions, we can develop our ability to notice meaning that might otherwise be obscured from us. Furthermore, we can foster our imagination about the lived significance that situations might have for children.

There have been various phenomenological studies that deal with various features of school life, such as: the impact of technology and the internet on our relationships with students (Adams, 2006, 2012; Friesen, 2011); education outside of the classroom (Foran, 2005); students' experiences of movement (Smith, 2007); and school failure (Henriksson, 2008). The

findings of these studies are valuable for teachers—but not because they provide a conceptual explanation of the processes involved in the phenomena, nor because they provide rules for good practice. Instead, these studies help elucidate lived meaning. By engaging with these studies, teachers are directed towards the lived meanings that constitute their own experience and the experiences of their students. The expertise of the researcher involves demonstrating their sensitivity to lived meaning and their ability to interpret the significance of this meaning. What the researcher offers teachers is not conceptual, but perceptual. Through engaging with phenomenological research, the teacher cultivates their ability to see what an experience is like.

By engaging with this research, we can become more attuned to both the positive and the harmful ways that our own lives intersect with those of children. This ability to notice lived meaning is not important for its own sake. Rather, we need to be sensitive to meaning because it helps us to act with tact. Interpreting the meaning of pedagogical experiences includes recognising how these moments are practical (Langeveld, 1983). In our encounters with children, we find that we are responsible to do what is good and right for the child (Saevi & Eilifsen, 2008). We need to know when to act and when to hold back, to sense what should be said and what should be left unsaid. In this sense, phenomenological pedagogy is concerned with our actions. But whereas technical approaches to educational research encourage us to apply actions from research to practice, a phenomenological approach is more about transposing a sensitivity for lived meaning from the text into the lived moments that we share with children. In this way, phenomenology can help close the gap between research and practice, not by giving us rules for action, but by encouraging us to be more thoughtful and sensitive in how we navigate the life of teaching.

This does not mean that techniques and methods are not important for teaching practice. They can help us think about new and different ways of doing things and can provide alternatives to our regular practices that we mistakenly consider to be effective. However, a technical understanding of teaching will never be able to capture its significance as a human practice. The photographer Elliot Erwitt is quoted as saying, “All the technique in the world doesn’t compensate for the inability to notice”. Similarly in teaching, we might be well versed in all the latest techniques and have rehearsed all the lines that effective teachers say. Yet if we do not embody pedagogical tact in our interactions with children, then our technical proficiency will not make us a good teacher.

If educational research only provides a toolbox of methods and techniques, then it will have little relevance to the complex and dynamic experiences of teaching. Similarly, if research

understands pedagogy in exclusively scientific terms, then it loses touch with the lived reality of pedagogy. If research is to be relevant to practice, then it needs to find ways to reflect on how pedagogical phenomena first appear in the lived experience of teaching. The languages of science and psychology, while useful, are unable to do this. Consequently, they should not be relied on to provide a ground and foundation for our pedagogical reflection. Educational research also needs to have a role in awakening us to the more fundamental experience of teaching.

To this purpose, I believe that phenomenological pedagogy should play an essential role in informing teacher practice. It gives researchers and teachers a way of reflecting on teacher practice in a way that is grounded in the lived meanings that make education possible as a human activity. Furthermore, for phenomenology, the importance of lived experience is not just that it provides a different way of looking at things. Rather, lived experience is seen as our first and most fundamental access to the world. According to van Manen (1990), phenomenological pedagogy "bids to recover reflectively the grounds which, in a deep sense, provide for the possibility of our pedagogic concerns with children" (p. 173). Phenomenological pedagogy is not just an alternative way to think about our practice as teachers, nor just one possible methodology among others. Instead, phenomenological pedagogy is about reminding ourselves how children are already a concern in our lives, prior to adopting any theoretical or methodological perspective.

4. The uncertainty of ethical action

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have described the anxiety for certainty in our pedagogical knowledge. In this chapter, I explore this desire for certainty in relation to ethical action. The anxiety for certainty is particularly acute in ethics. Most of us readily feel the weight of ethical claims in our lives. What is good, right and moral is self-evidently considered to be desirable. On the other hand, evil, wrongdoing and immorality are abhorrent and need to be expunged from our lives and societies.

From the obvious importance of ethics in our lives, we often assume that there is a clear and unambiguous way that we can categorise our actions as either good or bad. When making moral judgments, we believe that there is some unitary and coherent structure behind the world that can evaluate our actions. We don't want a matter as important as morality to be left to personal preference. So, we are anxious to establish some certainty in determining what is praiseworthy and blameworthy.

However, in this chapter I argue that our ethical thinking should not submit to the either-or wager between certainty and nihilism. My argument follows the same path of what I argued in relation to pedagogy: by seeking certainty, we end up flattening, reducing and simplifying our ethical concerns to the point that they bear very little relation to the way ethical claims are meaningful in our lives

When we think about ethics in terms of how we find ourselves in the world, we need to face issues of our finitude, partial agency, fragility, and vulnerability. These are essential dimensions of our ethical experience. Yet, the rational thought utilised in moral philosophy often attempts to evade these issues. We need to look to other sources. One possible source is Greek Tragedy. I describe how the style of thinking found in these ancient plays gives important insight into what it means to try and live a good life and what it means to be pedagogically involved in the lives of children.

The ‘good news’ of moral philosophy

One of the defining moments of Western thought occurred when the world was understood as a unitary whole. As Geuss (2014) puts it: “when some Greek probably in the sixth or very early fifth century BC, whoever he was, first looked out at everything and called it a unitary, attractive structure, something changed” (p. 203). This idea would spread and be decisive for the development of fields such as biology, physics and astronomy. Furthermore, a unitary conception of the world was applied to the realm of human action. From this vantage point, we could make sense of how we should act in relation to a unitary whole that could provide a coherent order and structure to our lives. This belief, that our actions can become intelligible in relation to a unitary whole, is what Geuss (2014, Ch. 11) calls ‘the idea of a moral cosmos’.

Once the idea of a moral cosmos became entrenched in Western thought, a prevailing concern arose to discover and describe this order. To pursue this concern, we need to assume that the world does exhibit some moral structure. Furthermore, we need to assume that this structure is accessible and intelligible to us, and can be used by us to make sense of our own lives. On this view, there is a natural way of doing things—all we need to do is discover it. Once we do, we can then make sense of our involvements in the world and bring our own beliefs in line with the given order. Thus, the idea of a moral cosmos includes the promise that we can structure our lives to be in harmony with the order of things. We can hang our beliefs and actions on a stable, coherent and unitary system. The existence of an order gives us hope that we can put our lives in order.

A belief in the world as a unitary whole is also the source of optimism that has characterised the vast majority of philosophy. The promise of the good life depends on discovering and describing the moral order. We go about this task through the exercise of reason. The history of philosophy, beginning with Plato, is a style of thinking that holds up the non-contradictory psychic life as the ideal that we should strive for (Critchley, 2019). In Plato’s (1992) *Republic*, Socrates sets out a parallel vision for both the self and for politics—both are to be characterised by order and harmony. What Plato excludes in his vision is those parts of us that are contradictory.

From this perspective, it is the philosopher who is best equipped to help us pursue the good life. As Nietzsche (1967) describes: “Socrates is the prototype of the theoretical optimist who, with his faith that the nature of things can be fathomed, ascribes to knowledge and insight the power of a panacea” (p. 97). In exercising reason, we can become attuned to the goods of human life. By establishing and pursuing these goods, reason will enable us to structure our

personal and social lives in a way that promotes individual and social flourishing. Philosophy can create for us a stable ecosystem where the world, ethics, and human flourishing support one another. In other words: what is natural, what is good, and what makes us happy, all exist in harmony. Hence, throughout western history, the vocation of the philosopher has been attached to the self-image of one who brings good news (Williams, 1996, 2006).

The more modern incantation of this good news is in moral philosophy's various claims to have found a fixed principle that we can use to evaluate moral claims. Despite there being disagreement in exactly what this principle is, moral philosophy has been largely in agreement that moral considerations require an objective and rational foundation. What is good, right and moral should have power in our lives because it is bigger than our own individual preferences and selfish desires. It is our responsibility to bring our actions in line with some basic moral principle.

In the history of moral philosophy, there are two main basic principles that have been offered. First, is the idea of obligation or duty—named 'deontological ethics'. Here, the belief is that through rational processes, we can ascertain universally binding rules. Our moral obligation is to live according to these rules. The second alternate basic principle is that we should act to bring about the best possible state of affairs—named 'teleological ethics' or 'utilitarianism'. From this perspective, moral reasoning requires making a calculation about the consequences of our action. Whatever course of action brings about the best state of affairs is the action that we are obliged to take.

These two schools of thought are incompatible with one another. For the deontologist, an agent must act according to duty irrespective of the consequences of their action, and for the utilitarian, a moral duty has no relevance to our reasoning if it is to bring about an undesirable state of affairs. There have been many words exchanged between these two schools arguing for the strengths and weaknesses of their respective positions. I do not want to relitigate those issues here. Instead, I want to raise two problems common to both approaches.

First, both approaches desire to reduce ethical considerations to a single principle. They do so because it creates an unequivocal measure for moral claims. If we operate according to a plurality of principles, then they will either conflict or be incommensurable with one another. In this situation, we would need some higher principle to adjudicate this disagreement. Thus, we return to the need for a single principle. However, is the nature of ethics something that can

be reduced to a single concern? In our ethical experience, often we are faced with a complex set of concerns and responsibilities. As Bernard Williams (2011) proffers:

> If there is such a thing as the truth about the subject matter of ethics—the truth, we might say, about the ethical—why is there any expectation that it should be simple? In particular, why should it be conceptually simple, using only one or two ethical concepts, such as *duty* or *good state of affairs*, rather than many. Perhaps we need as many concepts to describe it as we find we need, and no fewer. (p. 19)

We might want to reduce the number of our concerns in order to have certainty in our moral reasoning and action. However, to achieve this certainty we would need to jettison moral considerations that have a significance and power in our ethical lives.

A second problem with both deontological and utilitarian approaches is that they reduce moral concerns to a rational concern. The moral agent is an abstracted 'I' (Williams, 2011). Both approaches accede to either an abstract duty or impersonal calculation, independent of an agent's personal commitments and relationships. This was illustrated to me when I took an undergraduate ethics class and I was given the following moral dilemma: I am taken hostage during a bank robbery. The robber tells me that I have to shoot my loved one (a parent, child, friend, etc.). If I refuse, he will murder everyone. If I obey, he will let everyone else go. For the deontologist, I have the duty to not murder so I must refuse; and for the utilitarian, I must obey because it will bring about the best outcome. For the philosophy student, this is a simple task. However, outside of the ethics lesson, ethical experience is not so cut and dried. Our actions have a meaning and significance apart from a sense of abstract duty or calculation. I cannot live as a pure deontologist because an important part of my ethical experience is that my actions do have consequences. I cannot separate these consequences from my actions without doing violence to my sense of being an agent in the world living alongside other people. Similarly, I cannot live as a pure utilitarian. What is ethically significant for me is not a brute calculation but involves various relationships and concerns that have a qualitative significance in my life. The philosopher might object and say that I need to forgo these base concerns and instead seek the loftier issues of what is rational and objective. However, worldly concerns are essential to my sense of what it means to live a meaningful human life. This is not to say that ethical considerations are not important for how we find ourselves in the world. Quite the opposite. Ethical considerations are important to us prior to seeking out any basic moral principle. Philosophers did not invent ethics (Williams, 2011). All of us, to varying degrees, value doing what is good and right. All philosophy invented was ways to formalise and theorise what was already a concern for us. Therefore, when we ask the question of, 'What shall I do?', it makes sense to ask this question from the position of an agent who finds themselves in the

world, living a human life, rather than an abstracted 'I' who has no worldly concerns (Schmidt, 2008, 2016).

However, the disadvantage of grounding ethical issues in how we find ourselves in the world is that our ethical concerns and involvements do not add up into a coherent and harmonious whole. What it means for us to live a good life involves diverse and complex goods (Taylor, 1985b, Ch. 9; 1989, Chs. 1-4). This means that we are susceptible to situations where these goods come into conflict with one another (Nussbaum, 2001). We find ourselves having to make a choice between goods. Sometimes, it might be clear which good is more important; other times, this decision will be more difficult and painful. But in both cases we find that we have to sacrifice something that holds significance (Nussbaum, 2002). We cannot avoid feeling regret that we have neglected something that is important. Furthermore, sometimes we cannot avoid a sense of guilt—in situations of conflict we are forced to make a decision where wrong exists on both sides. Our lived realities do not display the stability and coherence promised by the idea of a moral cosmos.

In human life, a conflict between goods cannot be cleanly resolved because it is difficult to compare different goods. We value something because it has a particular qualitative significance to us. Likewise, another good will also be significant to us but in a qualitatively different way. As I described in Chapter 2, technical rationalities overcome this problem by finding ways of comparing using a singular scale. However, many goods in our life cannot be reduced to one dimension or have their value conform to any fixed scale of measurement. What makes them important is also what makes them immeasurable and incomparable. As Taylor (1988) describes:

> To love humanly is to love particular people, and hence to be terribly vulnerable to fortune; it is to be open and receptive, and is incompatible with the drive to dominate; and it places us squarely in the realm of the incommensurable: someone really loved is precisely *not* replaceable by another with the same universal properties. (p. 807)

What is true of people in this case is also true of many other goods. One good cannot be simply replaced with another good without us experiencing loss. When we find ourselves having to choose between two different goods, we are faced with having to sacrifice something that has a particular and irreplaceable importance in our lives.

Furthermore, leading a good life involves pursuing goods that are mutable and fragile. As Taylor described above, by loving certain people we are vulnerable to fortune—others might disappoint us, betray us, or we might lose them in unfortunate circumstances. Goods do

not become important to us because they display resilience and immutability. What is important to us can also be perishable (Nussbaum, 2001). We might attempt to structure our lives by only pursuing what is controllable and stable by giving priority to parts of our lives that can endure chance and necessity. However, in the process we might end up forgoing the other parts of our lives that have value and urgency. As Nussbaum (2001) argues, what is beautiful about a human life is its vulnerability and fragility. Consequently, leading a good life is not a matter of evading luck and instability, but about finding ourselves trying to carry on while exposed to chance and necessity.

Since so much of our ethical lives is conditioned by vulnerability, it would be fair to suppose that our reflection on moral action would want to consider the role of chance and necessity has in our projects and involvements in the world. Yet, for Williams (1996, 2006), much of moral philosophy evades these issues. To maintain the possibility of 'good news', our thinking detaches us from how we are historically embedded and involved in the world, and instead lifts us into a realm where all that matters is our relationship to principles and moral orders. If, however, we conceive our actions in terms of the complex situations and relations we share with others, then we interrupt moral philosophy's proclamation of good news and the promises it holds for our future.

Thinking with the tragic poets

To honestly apprehend ethical experience requires taking into account the forces of chance. In this regard, styles of thinking that rely on a belief in a stable and ordered moral cosmos cannot aid us. As an alternative, we can turn to artworks such as the ancient Greek Tragedies (Nietzsche, 1967). In these plays, we see people who find themselves in difficult situations, forced to make impossible decisions where right and wrong exist on both sides. We are not ultimately taught by the playwrights how to think or what to do. The tragedies are not moral dilemmas that we can solve like puzzles—they are not learning exercises that we use as practice in moral philosophy classes. Instead, they present questions that do not have a satisfying answer. They bring us face-to-face with what is inconvenient and insecure in our lives. The Tragedies do not pretend to bear good news.

The picture of the world that we see represented in the work of the tragic poets contrasts with the optimism of the philosopher. In Tragedy, when we look behind the curtain of human

affairs we do not discover order and stability. Instead, we find flawed and warring divinities who look at us with a cruel indifference. As Sophocles (2011) describes in *Women of Trakhis*:

> But look at the cruelty of what
> the ruthless Gods have done
> To us—the gods whom we call
> our fathers, whose children we are—
> And yet how coolly they watch us suffer.
> No one foresees the future,
> but our present is awash with grief
> that shames even the gods, and pain
> beyond anything we can know
> strikes this man who now meets his doom.
> Women, don't cower in the house.
> Come with us. You've just seen death
> and devastating calamity, but
> you've seen nothing that is not Zeus.
> (pg. 179; Gk 1266-1278)

In the tragic plays people suffer for no reason. Misfortune is not the result of divine retribution or karma, and suffering has no higher meaning or significance. Our heroes' stature in life and action does not always befit the outcome of their lives. When we turn to the gods seeking some justification for what has happened, they do not offer any explanation. They look at our plight with a remote indifference.

The perspective of Tragedy is sceptical about the good news of the theoretical optimist. In the vision of Tragedy, to be human involves having to deal with complexity and chance. Our ability to deal with these issues is less about being able to resolve them so that they disappear, and more about finding ways to live with them as permanent fixtures in our existence. According to Tragedy, if we do enjoy a share of success, this is due in no small part to sheer luck and forces largely outside of our control (Nussbaum, 2001, 2009; Williams, 1981).

As Aristotle (2013) describes in *Poetics*, Tragedy is the imitation of action. It is not concerned with the life of the gods or the realm of forms—it is not concerned with rationality or theoretical knowledge. Rather, the actions that are imitated belong to the human world. In this way, Tragedy avoids enacting some idealised version of what it means to lead a life. The plays do not tell stories where we can easily tell the difference between the heroes and the villains. Neither do we find our protagonists in circumstances where it is clear what is good and right. All paths seem to lead them towards destruction, pity or shame. As the plots unfold, we do not see a portrayal of the examined life—the good life promised to us by the philosophers. Nor does our protagonist provide a moral example for us to follow. There is no greater meaning or explanation given to the story. Rather, Tragedy shines a light on the

ambiguity of the human condition. Our characters are faced with the difficulty of acting in the face of uncertainty. In this situation, how am I to know the right thing to do? Is there a right thing to do? Am I damned if I do, damned if I don't?

The theoretical optimist tries to separate us from this ambiguity. Instead of admitting the uncertainties that constitute the human condition, they try to describe moral life as exhibiting a structure and clear categories in which good and bad, right and wrong, can be clearly told apart. But these are demands that our thinking is placing on the world rather than an appreciation of the way the world discloses itself to us. As Geuss (2014, p. 205) puts it: "the main line of traditional philosophy [is not] a kind of principled and realistic attempt to come to terms with our world [but is] a form of addiction to the production and propagation of fantasies of a certain kind" (p. 205). As such, the good news of philosophy becomes an escape from reality rather than an honest engagement with it.

When we reflect on our experience of being human, we must be open to the possibility that the world may not be set up in a way that makes sense to us. In turn, this means that we do not have available to us any final authority by which we can make sense of our lives and our actions. Moral philosophy is more interested in regulating those parts of us that suffer, rather than give a voice to them. In this regard, Tragedy does not belong to moral philosophy but is excluded from it. However, the purging of the contradictory is not philosophy's gain—it is philosophy's loss (Critchley, 2019). Tragedy articulates a style of thinking that can help compensate for this deficit. As Critchley (2019) puts forward:

> My general question could be stated in the following way: What if we took seriously the form of thinking that we find in tragedy, and the experience of partial agency, limited autonomy, deep traumatic affect, agonistic conflict, gender confusion, political complexity and moral ambiguity that it presents? How might that change the way we think and the way we think about thinking? (p. 11)

Tragedy encourages us to reflect on human action by not merely *thinking past*, but *thinking with* uncertainty and ambiguity.

Western thinking has historically been characterized by a certain optimism (Geuss, 2005, 2014; Williams, 1996, 2006). We have held the belief that the world can be known as a stable, coherent and unitary whole, and that we can order our lives accordingly. From this perspective, our experiences of confusion and ambiguity are primitive states that we can overcome and move beyond. Our thinking can move from uncertainty to certainty. But in Tragedy, this thinking is reversed. In the world of Tragedy, we see our heroes coming up against a world that does not make any ultimate sense. Right seems to exist on both sides. And

even when our heroes make virtuous choices, it is impossible for them to act without remainder. As Williams (1993, pp. 163f.) says:

> Sophocles...represents human beings as dealing sensibly, foolishly, sometimes catastrophically, sometimes nobly, with a world that is only partially intelligible to human agency and in itself is not necessarily well adjusted to ethical aspirations.

In the modern world, our energies go into constructing ways of living that attempt to mitigate our experiences of risk. We hope that by ordering our lives in certain ways we will achieve success and minimise failure. In Tragedy we see how the world is not always amenable to our efforts.

Oedipus

To explore how Tragedy understands human action in terms of ambiguity and uncertainty, I want to consider the example of Sophocles' (1977) play, *Oedipus Rex*. At the beginning of the play we find the citizens of Thebes coming before their King, Oedipus, imploring him for help. The city is suffering a plague because of a defilement—dwelling among them is the murderer of the previous King, Laius. Oedipus hears the cries of his people. He will be their saviour. Oedipus believes he is a great and wise king who will discover the identity of the murderer. Oedipus is the 'knowing one'. But, what he does not know is that he is the defilement. He thinks he stands before his city as a great and blameless King; but in fact he is an incestuous parricide.

A bit of backstory. Oedipus did not grow up in Thebes but as a Prince in the city of Corinth. There he received a prophecy that he would murder his father and have sex with his mother. The very thought of this repulsed Oedipus so much that he fled Corinth, distancing himself from his family so that the prophecy could never come true. While fleeing Corinth, he was the victim of an ancient incident of road-rage. In self-defence, he killed all the attackers. Continuing down the road, he came to the city of Thebes that was being terrorised by a Sphynx. Oedipus confronted and defeated the monster by solving its riddle. As his reward, he became King of Thebes alongside Queen Jacosta who had been recently widowed. Oedipus sees himself as master of his fate. But there are parts of Oedipus' history that he does not know. As the play progresses, this unknown past comes to light, and Oedipus learns that he is the opposite of what he thinks he is.

Since Oedipus is wise, he puts it upon himself to find the murderer of King Laius. It turns out that Laius was murdered while travelling on the road. A witness comes forward and

reluctantly discloses that the murderer was Oedipus. Furthermore, Oedipus learns that the King and Queen of Corinth were not his true parents. Rather, they adopted him from a shepherd. The shepherd had been ordered to murder Oedipus by his true parents because a prophecy was spoken about the child—he would murder his father and have sex with his mother. This shepherd was a servant of the kingdom of Thebes. Oedipus' real parents were King Laius and Queen Jacosta. Oedipus discovers that he is guilty of parricide and has been living in incest. Upon learning all of this, Jacosta kills herself and Oedipus gouges his eyes out. He cannot bear seeing how people look at him.

The play of Oedipus Rex is concerned with the conditions of our seeing and hearing. In the experience of this Tragedy we bring into question how we see ourselves and we are confronted by the possibility that we are blind to who we really are (Critchley, 2019). Oedipus sees himself as the saviour of the city, but is blind to the truth that he is also its defilement. He is both detective and criminal; the cure and the disease; the King and the scapegoat. In this way, Oedipus is double (Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1988), but he only sees himself on one side. He is blind to the other side of what he is.

This blindness is not simply due to a lack of knowledge or wisdom. Oedipus is neither a fool nor a madman. He is the great and knowledgeable king of Thebes. His name itself recalls the Greek word *oida* that means 'to know'. Oedipus' knowledge is demonstrated by the manner he became King. The Kingdom of Thebes was being terrorised by a Sphynx, and Oedipus confronted and defeated the monster by solving its riddle. For this reason, the citizens of Thebes come to him for help. They give their prayers to him, because he is a mortal one who is closest to the Gods. Oedipus is the wisest among them and the surest in his actions. So, their hope is placed in Oedipus to find a remedy for their plight and give them safety. Hearing the cries of his people, Oedipus makes it his task to solve the problem. Oedipus concurs with the esteem that the people of Thebes place on him.

As the play progresses, it is Oedipus' hubris that blinds him from the truth. While Oedipus sees himself as oida, the one who knows, there is another meaning to his name. Oedipus literally means 'swollen foot'. When the baby Oedipus was sent away to be killed, he had his feet pierced and pinned together, leaving a permanent scar. Oedipus' feet testify to his past. But the loftiness of his self-conception means that he does not look down at what his feet might say about his origins. For him, to be Oedipus only means to be the knowing one. His hubris prevents him from thinking any differently. The one who solved the Sphinx's riddle cannot solve the riddle of himself.

Time and time again, Oedipus is given opportunities to confront his past. Back in Corinth during a feast, a drunk man babbled to Oedipus that he was adopted. But Oedipus dismisses the words as the foolish maunderings of a drunkard. Similarly, when Oedipus consults an Oracle about whether his adopted parents are his birth parents, the Oracle gives only an enigmatic answer that he will murder his father and have sex with his mother. But Oedipus does not press the issue. He thinks he is given an answer, only hearing what he wants to hear. Again, when Jacosta realises the truth, she tells Oedipus to stop trying to learn who he is. But Oedipus thinks that the only reason Jacosta would say this is because she doesn't want him to discover that he might come from lowly origins. Oedipus is ready to think that he is the child of a slave, yet he is unable to admit the more horrific truth of the royal blood coursing through his veins. Even when Oedipus is directly accused, he sees the fault in the messenger not himself. If someone dares to bring charges against Oedipus, it is because they are liars who are jealous of his greatness and power. Oedipus only hears what affirms his self-image as the one who knows. This hubris is his downfall. His knowing becomes the cause of his unknowing.

The play also brings into question the relationship that we have with our own actions. To see the significance of Oedipus' fate, we first need to understand that Oedipus is a good man. At every significant point in his life, he is driven by the noblest of intentions. When he is given the prophecy that he will murder his father and have sex with his mother, he abhors this possibility. He cannot risk this ever coming true—so he cedes his royal claim and leaves his family whom he loves dearly. To keep his loved ones safe, he sacrifices privilege and happiness. It is important to note that this picture of Oedipus is in stark contrast with how his fate was appropriated by Freud to describe psychosexual development (Nussbaum, 1994). The Oedipus we see in Sophocles' drama did not harbour any dark desires towards his father or mother. There is no hint of aggression towards either of his fathers: he has only goodwill towards his adopted father and he only kills his birth father because King Laius is a stranger who provokes Oedipus to act in self-defence. Similarly, his sexual urges do not play a role in the relationships he has with either mother: he has a pure affinity for his adopted mother, and he only (unknowingly) takes his birth mother as his wife because the city of Thebes rewards him by making him King. There is no hint of any dark ulterior motive in his actions. Oedipus did not have an Oedipus complex. What Oedipus represents is not what is twisted and perverted in us, but what is good and noble in us (Critchley, 2019).

Oedipus' fate was not the result of a flaw in his character. The tale of Oedipus is not about how bad people do bad things and suffer the consequences, but about how good people

try to do good things yet find that their actions turn against them. In the world of Tragedy, we see that our actions don't have a clear causality. In our thinking, we might want to assume that our actions make a simple straight path from the self to the world and back again. We do x with the expectation that it will result in y. But in Tragedy, our actions take a detour. They go out into the world and make their way along a winding path through complex and unpredictable circumstances. When our actions finally make their way back to us, we find that they have been twisted into a form that we never intended. In the case of Oedipus, he acts in a morally consistent and intelligent way. Yet he suffers a reversal and his actions end up being their opposite (Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1988). He flees his mother and father to be master of his future, without realising that this course of action is steering him head on towards the very fate he is trying to escape from. Oedipus has good intentions, but his actions end up coiling back against him.

Good intentions do not provide Oedipus any comfort. He is so distraught over what he has done that he gouges his eyes out. People see him for what he has done. Oedipus cannot bear seeing this recognition in their faces. He would rather be blind than constantly reminded of who he is. In this way, the play reminds us that what is significant in our ethical lives is not limited to our intentions and what is in our control. We are ethically implicated by situations that are larger than us. Our action takes place in a world that is beyond our ability to control, define and understand. As Dennis Schmidt (2001) says, "In tragedies we are reminded that we live in a world larger than that of our own making or control, and yet a world to which we are answerable" (pp. 7f.). We suffer from reversals that arise from forces outside of us. However, this does not mean that we can limit our self-understanding to only what is under our control. Our ethical identity is tied to not only what we knowingly do, but also what we unknowingly do and what our actions become. When the people of Thebes see Oedipus, they see him as the one who has brought about his own terrible fate. We are unavoidably tied to our actions. We cannot disown our actions just because they have unintended and unforeseeable consequences. When our actions morph into strange, alien, abhorrent shapes, they are still a part of us. Our actions will always be *our* actions (Williams, 1981, Ch. 2) whether or not we can admit seeing ourselves in them.

Seeing pedagogy through Tragedy

The style of thinking we see in Tragedy provides an important way to understand pedagogy. In saying this, it is important to emphasise that when I talk about Tragedy, I am not talking

about the bad and sad things that happen to us. I am talking about a particular genre of theatre that emerged in Athens in the 5th century BC. Tragedy, for the Athenians, was the mode by which their city was put on stage. The city was grappling with issues of politics, democracy, and law. The theatre was established as the place where the city could wrestle with questions of how it was to understand itself. For the Greeks, the philosophers, politicians or scientists didn't have a monopoly over practical wisdom. If you wanted to reflect on issues of practice, you went to the theatre (Cartledge, 1997; Goldhill, 1997; Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1988).

But in order to translate this literary genre so that it is relevant to our pedagogical lives, there is an important way that we need to differentiate ourselves from Tragedy. As Felski (2008) describes, the Greek Tragedies were concerned with great national heroes and figures—the characters in the plays were nobility. This is not particular to Tragedy. Ancient forms of literature were concerned with those in raised positions of power, authority and privilege. In contrast, with the invention of the modern novel we saw a democratization of literature. Stories were no longer only about the high and mighty, but also the common and the ordinary. For some literary critics, the elevated status of the protagonists is essential to the genre of Tragedy. This would disqualify ordinary life from being considered by Tragedy. However, others see the democratization of literature as an opening where anyone can be the protagonist in Tragedy. As Eagleton (2003) argues, the broader political ideals of democracy make it possible for the tragic to be a feature of all human life. With the promise of self-actualization and autonomy comes the opportunity to have our actualization and autonomy thwarted by forces outside of us. By having more control over our lives, we realise how little control we do have. So, as Felski (2008) argues, even though applying ordinary life to Tragedy does not match the structures of the original genre, we can nevertheless make connections between the features of Greek Tragedy with the features of ordinary life—including pedagogy. As Williams (1993) says:

> When the ancients speak, they do not merely tell us about themselves. They tell us about us... They can tell us not just who we are, but who we are not: they can denounce the falsity or the partiality or the limitations of our images of ourselves. (pp. 19f.)

The necessities expressed in Tragedy do not only belong to the world of the ancient Greeks. They are also a part of our world. Thus, the plays demand that we find analogies between our lives and the lives that were enacted on the stage of the ancients. My work in this study includes a recognition that the necessities expressed in Tragedy are part of our experiences of living with children.

But again, to see how the features of Tragedy also structure pedagogy is not about being pessimistic. In our everyday usage of the word, 'tragedy' just refers to the sad parts of our lives. But this is not what Tragedy, as a literary genre, is concerned with. What is essential to Tragedy is the ways that human action takes place in a world that is larger than us and refuses our attempts to control, comprehend and define it (Schmidt, 2001). To reflect on pedagogy through Tragedy, I am not simply suggesting that we become mired in the bad things that happen as part of school life. Rather, I am trying to take seriously the experience of impotence, ambiguity and uncertainty that structure pedagogical action. Our lives with children demonstrate our capacity to act for what is good and appropriate for a child, but they also reveal the limits of our autonomy and self-sufficiency. According to Tragedy, to act always involves making a wager with the unknown. Even when we carefully reflect and deliberate about what to do, our actions will always involve a risk. We never know if we are preparing for success or disaster (Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1988). The meaning and significance of our actions are largely hidden from us.

Reflecting on pedagogy through Tragedy reveals the partial agency involved in our daily living with children. Even in our earnestness to do what is best for the child, we also find ourselves apt to do harm. The cause of our harm can be due to acting in ways that are insensitive and indifferent towards the child. But we can also fail children even when we endeavour to care, love and take responsibility for them. Furthermore, our loving intentions make us more sensitive to seeing how we miss the mark. It is those that are indifferent and dispassionate who fail to see the harm they do in children's lives. Just like Oedipus, sometimes our care does not provide a remedy, but instead reveals the damage that we have done.

We might see ourselves as good teachers who are having a positive influence in children's lives. But do we really know who we are for our students? If we think back to when we were children, on the one hand we experienced teachers who touched our lives in positive and formative ways. But on the other hand, there are also those teachers that in some ways damaged us. While as teachers we may aspire to be the former for our students, it is unavoidable that at times our actions will miss the mark. We experience moments of regret when we don't have the right words to say, or when what we want to say comes out wrong and we cringe at our echo.

Teaching is full of these moments of regret. Furthermore, it is filled with missed moments—times when I needed to recognise what the meaning and significance of a situation is for a child, but I was either too preoccupied to notice or just unable to see. How many times

in my life as a teacher did I fail to notice those moments and missed opportunities to respond to children the way that those situations demanded? In the following anecdote, one of my research participants describes a missed moment:

> At my school, I take the choir. Every year I would get the children to have a little audition. There was this tiny, sweet girl who tried to audition but never got into the choir. But I got her to come to practices to turn the pages in my music while I played the piano. This happened each year for three years. The fourth year, she came again to audition.
>
> After the audition, she looked at me and with this little sad voice said, "Do I have to turn the pages again Miss Baldwin?"
>
> I felt so guilty. I thought, *What am I doing?* I realised how a tiny little incident like that could impact on that child's whole life and about how she feels about herself as a singer. What if later on she said, "I tried out for choir but I didn't get in so I never sang again." That thought just killed me.

Every week that little girl would have come to the choir practices, stood by the piano and quietly turned the pages while the other children sang. All that time, the teacher would have been happily playing along, failing to notice the meaning of the situation for the child. For three years, the child was kept on the side-line, probably often wishing that she could sing well enough to be involved. It was only when the child spoke up that the teacher realised what she had done. In a moment, those years of getting the girl to turn the pages were seen in a completely different light by the teacher. She had been blind to their meaning all along.

We share with this teacher similar moments when we realise that we failed to notice how something might be significant for a child. But this raises the further more horrifying possibility. How often have I acted insensitively, but never realised? Just as Oedipus is double, I can be double in how I live with children. I can be both an effective teacher and fail my students. I can have professional expertise and knowledge but still not notice what is significant. I can be a highly reflective practitioner yet have no self-understanding. Like Oedipus, I may see myself as innocent, blameless and good. But is there something that I do not know about myself? How am I blind to the way that children see me? The tragedy of our situation is that the meaning and significance of our actions are largely hidden from us. As Critchley (2019) puts it, "tragedy permits us to come face-to-face with what we do not know about ourselves but what makes those selves the things they are" (p. 3). Tragedy is an invitation for us to call ourselves into question.

5. The phenomenological significance of uncertainty

Introduction

So far, I have been arguing that an appreciation of our pedagogical and ethical lives requires an openness to the uncertainty that is an unavoidable feature of our lives. In this chapter, I will deepen the significance of uncertainty by arguing that it is not only something that we need to appreciate in our lives, but is also important as a disposition and mood for our thinking. Through experiencing uncertainty, we can become more sensitive and attuned to lived meaning.

To begin, I will describe the way that we feel at home in the world. Homeliness is a fundamental part of our existence. We feel at home in the world because it is understandable in a way that allows us to be absorbed in activity. But while this understanding purports to be grounded, ultimately it is baseless. We can become aware of this baselessness by experiencing interruptions and disruptions in our activities. In this experience, meaning breaks down and we are able to critically reflect on the understandings and interpretations that structure our lives. If our uncertainty goes deep enough, our sense of homeliness dissolves and we are confronted by the strangeness of our existence. In this experience, we realise that there are other possibilities open to us. How we understand and interpret our lives is not pre-determined. It is a matter of our own responsibility. However, this hermeneutical responsibility should not be conceived as our freedom to pursue our own possibilities. Rather, we need to find our way forward by taking seriously the fundamental ethical responsibility that we have for others.

Being at home in the world

In our lived experience, finding ourselves in a world is more than just designating our physical location. We are at home in the world—not only in the sense that the world houses our existence, but furthermore in the sense that the world is familiar to us. We never find ourselves as indifferent and neutral, but already invested in the situation. Our place in the world is shot through with our cares, worries and projects. The world is where we reside, dwell and are formed.

The self who is at home in the world needs to be placed in stark contrast with the Cartesian understanding of the self. Descartes cogito, 'I think therefore I am', attempts to establish the thinking self as a foundation for any understanding. The argument follows a method of doubt—by bringing more and more of the world into question, we end up reaching the point where the only thing we cannot doubt is doubting itself. For Descartes, I cannot doubt that there is an I who is doubting. In this formulation, the self is reduced to a detached subject that observes the world. It is a being that directs itself to the world through thought. The world is discovered by the subject.

But who is this subject that is thinking? If there is a thinking subject, then we are assuming that the subject exists. So, before we can understand what it means for the 'I' to think, we need to consider the being of the cogito—namely, what it means for the 'I' to exist. Ontology precedes epistemology. Therefore, we need to turn Descartes on his head and say, 'I am and therefore I think' (cf. Nietzsche, 1989). If we begin by raising the question of being, we find that the thinking 'I am' is not worldless but is in fact a person who finds themselves enmeshed in the cares and concerns of their existence. My existence is entangled with things and people. I am engaged in activities. I do not hide away in what Heidegger (1962) terms, a "cabinet of consciousness" (p. 89/H. 62). I exist out in the open, moving about the world engaged in activity and absorbed in my concerns.

The world is the space where we try to get things done. As part of our engagements, we attend to things in the world in terms of their usefulness and handiness. The pen is the thing to be written with; the whiteboard is the thing to be written on. We do not attend to these things as objective and self-sufficient entities with properties. Rather we appreciate them in terms of how they help us go about our lives. We are familiar with the pen for writing. We do not pick up the pen, analyse its shape, weight, colour and the material that it is made out of. Rather we pick it up and use it. We are familiar with it because we know what it is for. As Dreyfus (1991) points out, our intentionality towards the things in the world is best described as an absorbed intentionality not a representational intentionally. In other words, objects appear to us firstly in terms of how they function in our activities. Following the example given by Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. 153/188), when the blind man is walking down the street, he does not experience the cane as the feeling of the object making contact with the skin on his hand, but in terms of how the tip of the cane makes contact with the pavement. We could perhaps take this even further and imagine that the cane and the pavement fall from view altogether, and the blind man is occupied with the route to the bakery where he is heading to buy a loaf of bread.

Likewise, teachers are familiar with the things in a school foremostly in the context of their day-to-day activities. The things that constitute the school environment exist as part of a web of references. All things are understood in terms of how they point to other things which are in turn involved with other things. When we encounter things in the school, they are given meaning according to their references. We do not understand a pen by scrupulously gazing at it, but by seeing it as available for us to pick it up and write with it. The pen is revealed through our understanding of how to use it in our environment. This disclosure is not possible if the pen is only understood in isolation. We only grasp the pen when we see it as pointing to something that is to be written upon, in order to write something, within the context of a lesson, where we want to the children to learn. In this way, the pen finds its place within a web of purposes and meanings.

We should not limit this web to the referential nature of physical tools such as the pen. More broadly, we can consider our theoretical and practical understandings as being part of this web. These also have a referential quality. The theories and practices adopted by a teacher do not have a self-sufficient meaning, but rather are significant in relation to the teachers' projects. A teacher uses theoretical and practical understanding because they are trying to find their way.

How a teacher finds their way constitutes a self-interpretation. This self-interpretation helps govern and order a teacher's existence as a teacher. Part of what contributes to this self-interpretation is how we define the role of a teacher. In a teacher's institutional role, there are explicit norms, responsibilities and expectations which are to be followed. While these definitions are important to being a teacher, they do not exhaust one's understanding. Self-interpretation largely involves an understanding of the self that is implicit and unarticulated. How we find our way through school life involves a tacit understanding. In our practice, we see certain possibilities open to us. We take the openings for granted. In our everyday acting, we are just trying to find our way by following paths that are familiar to us.

Since we find ourselves being in a world, we cannot understand ourselves as having a self-sufficient inner life that is self-given. Who I am is not an isolated subjectivity, but a being that is disposed, comported, fascinated and absorbed in the world. As Heidegger (1988) argues: "Each one of us is what he pursues and cares for. In everyday terms, we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of" (p. 159). Thus, I am never only myself. Who I am is also a matter of where I am and what I am doing. The world is an essential part of what it means to be me.

Being in the world involves not only an engagement with things but being with others. We are not alone. The world is a shared space where our projects and involvements take place in the sight of others and, more significantly, in relation with others. We cannot understand who we are without understanding ourselves as being with others (Heidegger, 1962, §§ 25-27). Our everyday activities and practices cannot be considered as being our own. Since the world is shared, our understandings and interpretations are shared. When someone becomes a teacher, they become involved in a situation that is already structured around certain publicly available social norms and practices. A teacher's self-interpretation does not derive from a self-sufficient and autonomous rational agent. Rather, they interpret themselves through publicly available meanings.

Self-interpretation always happens in relation to these public meanings. They are seen as the normal ways to think and act. Consequently, they have a normative strength to them. We can never be indifferent to these meanings. They possess a gravity. Even if we try to deviate from these public meanings, our self-interpretation will be understood in terms of our distance from these meanings. As an analogy, we can think about the experience of travelling to a foreign country. When we encounter different cultures, what stands out for us are the ways that this new place is different to where we come from. Our home provides the reference point for our experience of a new place. We see something as unfamiliar in relation to what we find familiar. Likewise, it is the interpretations that belong to our shared world that create for us a sense of home. We feel that we belong by navigating our world according to the normal patterns of existence that we share.

The way of life presented by these interpretations usually feels right to us. We feel at home with these interpretations, and they create a sense of homeliness for us. Interpretations give us a sense of grounding and certainty. Yet, to create this sense they do not need to provide any justifications. They have an air of obviousness, so it feels unnecessary to question them. The certainty that interpretations give us is not due to them being secured to an immutable foundation, but because they have the authority of social agreement and acceptance. This authority is ultimately baseless. Yet, by presenting a way of life that is acceptable on mass, these interpretations hide their baselessness. They present a way of life as *the* way of life. By living according to these interpretations, we feel secure in our way of life and feel no desire to look elsewhere for how we should configure our existence. We do not need to question or doubt, because things are just how things should be. Consequently, we do not direct ourselves to our world with a phenomenological openness. As Heidegger (1962) writes: “By publicness

everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone" (p. 165/H. 127). Thus, publicly available interpretations direct our pursuits and give us the terms by which the world should matter to us. In doing so, they also hide other possibilities.

It might be tempting to consider this obscurement and lack of openness negatively. However, we need to keep in mind that public interpretations are a prerequisite for our involvement in the world. Without the guidance of publicly accessible meanings, we would not be able to find our way. Even though they restrict our possibilities, they also give us a form of freedom. Interpretation makes things in the world discoverable (Heidegger, 1962, p. 167/H. 129). We are able to see a pen as a pen, which enables us to pick it up and use it for writing. We can only pick the pen up and use it when we see it as equipment that belongs in a web of references. The interpretations free things in the world to be used by us. Without interpretation, there would be no world available. Thus, we cannot speak of our existence without reference to the interpretations available to us in the world. They are an essential part of how we find ourselves, giving us the possibility to say, "I am here".

Nevertheless, there is a problem in letting these interpretations have the power of certainty and obviousness in our lives. When our movements around the world become easy and second nature, this is precisely because we are becoming disburdened of responsibility for our actions (Heidegger, 1962, p. 165f./H. 127f.). We no longer actively determine our own possibilities to pursue. Instead, we opt to take the routes that have already been made for us and are easy to follow. By living, we are no longer answerable for how we think, talk and act. Our choices are justified on the basis that this is what anyone does. But since this anyone is indefinite, no one is answerable, and no one is responsible. Our own existence is no longer our own responsibility.

The breakdown of meaning

Publicly available interpretations help us feel at home in the world. But in recognising the fundamental homeliness of lived experience, we are faced with a problem. If consciousness is fundamentally directed outwards through our being in the world, how is it possible for us to reflect on the self, and particularly, reflect on how interpretation constitutes the self? In our everydayness, we are directed towards things in the world—not ourselves. We are absorbed in our activities and projects. In the case of pedagogy, the experience of teaching involves being

immersed in the task at hand. As I discussed in Chapter 3, pedagogy requires a tact that is sensitively directed towards the lifeworld of the child and the contingency of the moment. Tact is only possible if the teacher is engrossed and in tune with the pedagogical situation. In such a situation, where is the self? It remains tacit, in the background. By directing our attention to the child and their situation, the self does not rise to the forefront of consciousness. Our everyday absorption conceals our own being from us.

This is the main critique levelled at educational research that focuses on the pedagogical relation—the position I argued for in Chapter 3. The problem with focusing on the pedagogical relation is that we are unable to consider the powers and forces that impose on our experience. In the pedagogical relation each person is not a socially isolated individual but rather exists in a cultural and political context. So, when pedagogy requires adults to act in appropriate ways with children, our understanding of appropriateness represents the values of our culture and society. The pedagogical relation then becomes a site where social realties are reproduced (Friesen, 2017). This raises doubt as to whether the pedagogical relation can be used to initiate a critical understanding of education.

Phenomenology faces the same criticism. By viewing lived experience as the source of meaning, critics argue that experience becomes an unquestioned given in phenomenology. Consequently, phenomenology does not ask if there is something even more original than experience, and so does not take into account conditions that might influence the nature of a particular experience. On this basis, critics conclude that studying experience cannot bring anything new from outside of our socially determined horizons of meaning. Experiences are only reproductions of social orders. Therefore, phenomenology is incapable of contesting these orders and imagining change (Stoller, 2009).

In my study, I take a phenomenological approach. Thus, there is a danger that my focus on teachers' experience could make my research blind to the existing social orders of schools and merely reinforce the interpretations that teachers use to define themselves. If this was the case, my study would be limited in how it could critically assess how social orders and interpretations shape teachers' experience.

These are important concerns. I contend that they can be addressed while still affirming the importance of both the pedagogical relation and phenomenological experience. Regarding the pedagogical relation, Biesta (2012) and Friesen (2017) argue that our understanding of the relation needs to take into account the interruptions and disconnections that are experienced in

the lifeworld of the adult. Traditionally, the focus of human social science pedagogy has been on the lifeworld of the child. But if we make this the exclusive concern of pedagogy, then we run the risk of not taking into account what the adult brings to the pedagogical encounter. The solution cannot be to try and relate more, and hence further pass over ourselves; rather, we need to recognise that in the pedagogical encounter, not only does the child need addressing, but they address us. By feeling addressed by the child, the adult experiences a moment of 'hesitation' (Biesta, 2012) where they are confronted by their own experience and see themselves in a particular light (Friesen, 2017). As Friesen (2017) proposes: "In being confronted by disruptions and interruptions, one could also say that the educator is also confronted in terms of her membership in the flawed and contested adult world" (p. 753). In such a confrontation, it becomes possible to locate ourselves within certain structures of meaning and within existing power relations. This creates the possibility for a critique, but one that remains grounded in the pedagogical relationship.

These disruptions and interruptions are also relevant more generally to phenomenological experience. Heidegger describes how the nature of our involvements in the world rise to our awareness with the phenomenon of tool breakdown. In this type of experience, our absorption in an activity is interrupted. The equipment previously available to us comes to obtrude in its unavailableness. Our tools go from facilitating our concerns to standing in the way. As a consequence of the tool's obstinacy, we are no longer absorbed in the task at hand but become aware of the tool and its involvement in our activity.

To demonstrate this, consider the experience of a computer crashing. I am sitting at my computer, writing this chapter. I am going about work, absorbed in the task at hand. I am not reflecting on how the writing is possible or the space I am in. I do not notice the light being cast by my desk lamp, the chair I lean forward in, the desk that supports my arms, or the keyboard that my fingers tap on. Instead, my attention is on my writing. Then the computer freezes up. All of a sudden, the tools that were making my writing possible light up in my consciousness. The computer, the keyboard and mouse become salient in their unresponsiveness. I think about when I last saved my work and worry about what I have lost. This interruption reminds me that I need to finish writing this chapter and my deadline becomes more pressing. I notice the tools and how they are involved in my concerns. The breakdown of my tools lights up my world and lets me appreciate it from a new perspective. What was taken for granted and unnoticed in my everyday acting now becomes conspicuous.

How might tool breakdown help us disclose the world of pedagogical practice? The breakdown of our physical tools is a common phenomenon in classroom life—a whiteboard marker runs dry, the projector won't turn on, the internet cuts out. However, I am not particularly interested in this kind of breakdown. As I discussed above, a tool is merely what is available to us—that which we can use to move about in our everyday world. So, tools are also teaching practices, methods, understandings and routines. We can also experience breakdown with these tools. Here is my own example from a reading lesson:

> I had analysed my student data and had identified what reading strategies I needed to focus on. I knew how to teach this strategy and what procedure to follow in my lesson. So, armed with this knowledge, I went and implemented the lesson. I followed the formula I knew—activating prior knowledge, sharing the learning intention, developing the success criteria. Then one day a student responded in exasperation, "not this again—we always do this!" I tried to justify my actions to the child. But as I did, I realised I was needing to justify them to myself. I was no longer confident in what to do.

In this scenario, the tools that are being used are the methods that I was encouraged to use. Activating prior knowledge, sharing the learning intention, developing the success criteria are ways by which I navigated my interactions with the children. These techniques provide the lesson with a rhythm and flow. However, the child's protest abruptly interrupts the rhythm of the lesson. When I shared the learning intention, this technique was met with resistance. The child did not submit or acquiesce to the lesson's routine, but instead stood in the way. Consequently, my methods obtrude. What had previously been operating in the background of awareness now comes to the fore. The interruption of the lesson provides a revelation of the situation. I see more clearly the nature of my interactions with the children and how these were being shaped by certain methods and understandings. This breakdown provides an opportunity for reflection. The pedagogical situation has been more comprehensively revealed. I am able to see more clearly the tools I use, the contexts that these tools are a part of, and my projects and purposes. What was previously obscured has now been disclosed.

The experience of breakdown demonstrates the significance of uncertainty. In the everyday acting of teachers, they are absorbed in the routines of teaching and learning. The practices and meanings that structure the teacher's self-interpretation are tacitly followed. However, in situations of uncertainty, these self-interpretations can become available for reflection in two ways. First, we become more aware of the nature of our activity including our regular habits and routines; and second, we see that there are other paths and possibilities available to us. In the pedagogical moment, we find ourselves questioning things that were not previously available to us to question.

Not being at home in the world

Tool breakdown gives us a phenomenological basis for reflecting on the social orders that condition our involvements in the world. But tool breakdown does not go so far as to make the self conspicuous. In tool breakdown we are still directed towards entities and not being itself. For a reflection on being itself to be possible, this breakdown needs to occur at a more fundamental level—a breakdown of meaning at the level of our worldliness. As Heidegger (1962, § 40) contends, this is possible in the mood of angst. But before we directly consider angst, I will describe the more general disclosive significance of mood.

In Chapter 3, I mentioned the pedagogical significance of mood. As adults, we have a responsibility for the way a child finds themselves in the world. This is also significant for us. Our mood also determines how we find ourselves. It constitutes the way that the world is meaningful for us and matters to us.

By describing mood in his way, it is important to note that by mood we are not just talking about a superficial emotional state that lies on the surface of our experience of the world. Rather, mood is a fundamental attunement that enables us to have a world in the first place. We can only orientate ourselves towards objects if they in some way matter to us. Moods attach us to the world (Heidegger, 1962, p. 173/H. 134).

We cannot escape mood (Heidegger, 1962, p. 173/H. 134). Mood has a priority to both cognition and volition (Heidegger, 1962, p. 175/H. 136). Therefore, the researcher always does their work in some mood. Even the loftiest attempts to attain the vantage of a pure theoretical position never leaves the climate of mood (Heidegger, 1962, p. 177/H. 138). For this reason, Kenaan and Ferber (2011) and Mulhall (2011) contend that mood should be taken into consideration as a condition for our philosophising. Similarly, a critical consideration of our pedagogical thinking requires us to consider the mood that governs our research and writing.

This is equally true for non-phenomenological approaches to education. It might be thought that scientific understandings of pedagogy escape the consideration of mood since they endeavour to attain an objective, dispassionate and impartial perspective. However, even the scientist's work is conditioned by mood. Prior to their adoption of the scientific method, the scientist finds themselves in the world. Claiming an objective stance is not to evade mood, but rather to appreciate entities with a dispassionate disposition.

As I have argued in Chapters 2 to 4, rational, scientific and technological discourses are not adequate for disclosing the human social world. This indicates that there are some moods that are more disclosive than others. Some moods light up our world, whereas others dim it down. This dimming down also means that moods can obfuscate phenomena. Moods reveal but can also hide. In the context of practice, mood may conceal significant aspects of the pedagogical situation. Consequently, the teacher's mood interferes with their ability to notice, resulting in a failure to respond with sensitivity and tact. And in the context of pedagogical research, mood has a methodological significance. The mood of the researcher and their writing has the potential for revealing or covering over a phenomenon.

In Chapter 6, I will explore the methodological significance of one particular mood—*wonder*. As I will describe, in our everyday dealings with entities we see things as common, ordinary and mundane—hence, we lack the inspiration to give them our attention. The mood of wonder interrupts the taken-for-grantedness of our world. Instead of overlooking the mundane features of our world, we are awakened to a new appreciation where we can allow things to reveal themselves. In this way, the mood of wonder has a disclosive power.

In wonder, we can raise a question: How does interrupting the familiarity of things in the world implicate us? We have a closeness to the everyday entities that make up our involvements in the world. If we now become attuned to these entities in their strangeness, we are bringing into question the everyday ways that we are involved with these entities. But this web of meaning is what enables us to make sense of things. By interrupting this, we are bringing into question the sense of homeliness that we experience in the world. So, rather than purely being enamoured by a phenomenon, we become uneasy with its disclosure. What is strange is not just a novel and external phenomenon, but something that was previously meaningful and significant to us in our own lives. If, as I have argued above, an understanding of the self cannot be separated from how we find ourselves in the world, then when familiar entities become strange, this strangeness will have a residual effect on the self.

Let us take the above example of the reading lesson. We could approach such a situation in a mood of wonder, and consider the strangeness of how teachers are encouraged to talk to children in reading lessons:

> Today we are learning a reading strategy called making inferences.
>
> Can someone tell me what a good reader does to be successful at making inferences?
>
> I really like how Stuart used his prior knowledge to make an inference.

Such phrases make up a teacher's linguistic toolbox—helping them navigate a reading lesson. These phrases forge paths that overtime feel natural, familiar and ordinary. However, if we consider them in the light of wonder, we are struck by how strange this talk is. This language is cold and calculated. Reading becomes a matter of using specific strategies and techniques that we employ to succeed in comprehending the meaning of a text. It seems plausible that this is something we could train a computer to do—programme it to analyse the parameters of a text through set processes that in turn produce valid interpretations of a text. But does describing reading in this way capture what reading is like as a human phenomenon? How does it relate to our own experience, as children and adults, of entering imaginary worlds or engaging with dangerous ideas? Talking about reading through a technical rationality strikes us with the strangeness of such a discourse. It is strange how we talk to children... It is strange how *I* talk to children... *I am strange*.

When wonder moves from seeing the strangeness in entities to being unsettled in our sense of self, this marks a shift into the mood of angst. Angst indicates those uncomfortable moments in our lives where the meaning inherent in our lives slips away from us. When we're absorbed in our everyday activities we are animated by a sense of purpose and our tasks feel significant. But in angst, we lose our grip on this significance. Simon Critchley (2009), gives an enlightening description of this mood:

> [T]he human being finds itself in a world that is richly meaningful and with which it is fascinated. In other words, the world is homely (heimlich), cosy even. In [angst], all of this changes. Suddenly, I am overtaken by the mood of [angst] that renders the world meaningless. It appears to me as an inauthentic spectacle, a kind of tranquilised and pointless bustle of activity. In [angst], the everyday world slips away and my home becomes uncanny (unheimlich) and strange to me. From being a player in the game of life that I loved, I become an observer of a game that I no longer see the point in playing. (para. 7)

At the start of this chapter, I emphasised the homeliness that we experience in life, including in the life of teaching. It is precisely this homeliness that angst brings into question. We find comfort and stability in our familiarity with meaning. Consequently, when the familiar becomes unfamiliar, this is a disconcerting and disorientating experience. I am faced with the uncomfortable realisation that my everyday involvements do not provide me with an ultimate grounding and purpose. Rather, I glimpse a fundamental instability and groundlessness that is the basis of my being.

Angst robs us of our sense of homeliness. We become unmoored from the sense that our interpretations and understandings are fixed to some ultimate anchor point. This not only robs us of our world, but of ourselves. We see ourselves in terms of our everyday activities—I

see myself as a teacher, as someone who engages in particular tasks and acts in certain ways. But in angst, this sense of self unravels. I ask: Is this what living alongside children has to look like? Is this what it means to be a teacher? Is this who I want to be for children? In homeliness, the world gives us a way of understanding ourselves. In the unhomeliness of angst, we realise this understanding is a fabrication.

But angst also gifts me a revelation. I see that the stipulations of publicly available meanings do not fundamentally define me. My current existence may be structured according to certain interpretations of the world. But in my being, I have a potentiality that is existentially prior to these interpretations. In this way, angst is a fertile ground from which we can cultivate our freedom. The significance of our involvements is not fixed. Through our actions, we may find ourselves reproducing interpretations. But since these meanings are ultimately baseless, we may also find ourselves trying to explore different interpretations. In either case, angst shows us that meaning is always something that I enact. Angst individuates us. It reveals that existence is mine to carry. If the world cannot give us certainty, then meaning becomes my burden. Interpretation and understanding are something that I have a responsibility for. While angst undoes meaning, it also makes meaning more pressing.

The ethical significance of unhomeliness

In the above description of lived experience, I have described two converse directions that the self can take. On the one hand, we can become absorbed in the world and caught up in our involvements. On the other hand, we can direct ourselves away from this absorption and experience a freedom to pursue our own possibilities. Heidegger's work emphasises the latter of these directions. Heidegger wants to encourage us to reflect on the possibility of the self as capable of becoming a master of our everyday existence (Critchley, 2008). Angst leads us to a possible freedom in which the self can heroically take responsibility for its own potential. The experience of uncertainty becomes an opportunity for the self to no longer think and act as part of the herd, but to think and act *for itself*.

However, as Simon Critchley (2008) identifies, there is an issue with framing angst and uncertainty in this way. Our freedom becomes a non-relational possibility. It is concerned only with our own potential and our own future. Freedom tries to escape having our existence be dictated by others, but consequently conceives our existence without a consideration of others

and how they may be an important part of our possibilities. In Heidegger's account, the significance that other people have in our lives is downplayed.

Heidegger's philosophy lacks a full and serious consideration of our relationships with others. This is demonstrated in how he understands death (Heidegger, 1962, §§ 46-53). For Heidegger, my death is always my own. By realising that my death is only mine to bear, I recognise that my existence and possibilities are also only mine to bear. Since my death is mine, others do not share in my death and I do not share in the death of others. As Heidegger says, "The dying of Others is not something which we experience in a genuine sense; at most we are always just 'there alongside'" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 282/H. 239). However, for Critchley (2008), this statement is both false and ethically distasteful. Death enters our experience, not first as a realisation of our own finitude, but in experiencing death in terms of the death of an other—a parent, a friend, a child. Death is not just a possibility for ourselves, but a possibility for those that we love, cherish and share our lives with. Heidegger's hero is only concerned with his own possibilities—he does not mourn and he does not grieve. But do we want to adulate such a person? Or do we want to imagine our heroes as those who take the meaning of others seriously?

Our understanding of death should be able to encompass grief and mourning. Such an understanding requires conceiving the self as inescapably relational. Similarly, we need to understand uncertainty and unhomeliness relationally. In the experience of angst, we appreciate how interpretation and understanding are our responsibility. However, this hermeneutical responsibility needs to be informed by an ethical responsibility. We do not engage in hermeneutical reflection to only realise our own possibilities. Interpretation and understanding are important because our own possibilities are implicated by the possibilities of others.

A relational understanding of unhomeliness can be recognised in the ethical phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas. Like Heidegger, Levinas describes the self as being absorbed in the world. But whereas Heidegger's emphasis is on the world as the situation of our practical involvements, Levinas focuses on the world as the source of our enjoyment. The world is there for us. We savour the taste of good food, take in the scent of fresh air, and bask in the warmth of sunlight (Levinas, 1991b, p. 110). Then, my solitude is interrupted by the intrusion of another person. I am no longer alone. I realise the world exists not only for me, but also for the Other. The Other has replaced me as the centre point of existence.

The encounter with the Other is an experience of unhomeliness (Doukhan, 2010). The Other changes my relationship with the world. It is no longer there purely for my own enjoyment and nourishment. The world is not my possession, but is shared. My labour and possessions are recast as a gift for the Other. The Other is not just on object amongst other objects. I cannot possess the Other. The Other is not there for me, but I am here for the Other.

To use a grammatical metaphor, in solitude the self is an "I", but in the encounter with the Other, the self becomes a "me". "I" is in the nominative case—it names the one doing the acting; "me" is in the accusative case—it names the object of the action. The self is constituted by the Other who looks at me (Joldersma, 2001). The "me" holds precedence over the "I". The self can no longer give primacy to the claims, "I say", "I think", "I feel", "I do", but instead, finds themselves subjected to the presence of someone who addresses *me*.

In contrast to Heidegger, this unhomeliness is not the possibility of freedom but its impossibility. When faced with the Other, we are no longer free to act for our own self-interest but are required to act for the good of the Other. We have a response-ability for the life of the Other. The relation is ethical.

The encounter with the Other is also an experience of uncertainty. The Other, in virtue of being Other, is not reducible to comprehension (Levinas, 1996, Ch. 1). Consequently, the Other cannot be grasped through an intentional act of consciousness. Neither can the significance of the Other be captured through my interpretation and understanding. The Other exists in *alterity*—Otherness. Thus, in our everyday lived experience, we find ourselves in relation to the Other before we are able to think the Other.

To understand the world is to view it as a meaningful unity. Knowledge sees the world as a 'totality' in which reality is reduced to definitions, concepts and generalisations. This totality equates to a sameness—the world becomes domesticated and homogenized so that it becomes integrated with the self. As Levinas (1987) says: "Knowledge never encounters anything truly other in the world" (p. 68). To know something involves taking possession and subjecting it to our thought. But in so doing, we negate its Otherness. Knowledge becomes an act of violence. Alternatively, when we orientate ourselves to Otherness our sense of certainty is brought into question. The Other is revealed in their inability to be comprehended. We can only appreciate the Other with uncertainty.

The ethical significance of unhomeliness is a feature of our lives with children. Pedagogy is a lived relationality—and as Levinas shows us, this relation is fundamentally

ethical (Saevi, 2011). To appreciate the Otherness of children in our everyday acting, ethical considerations have a primacy over rational ones. Pedagogy is not about placing ourselves in relation with rational systems, but about being in relation with the child as Other.

The ethical meaning of pedagogy resides in its orientation to Otherness. For the pedagogical relation to be ethical, the child needs to be respected as the Other. This relationship, however, is not one of equals. The Other is not someone else like me who merely exists as part of a social web of symmetrical and reciprocal exchanges. Rather, pedagogy requires appreciating that I have a responsibility for the Other. As van Manen (2015) puts it: "Children are not there for us—we are there for them" (p. 35).

In the classroom, a child is under constant threat of losing their Otherness. Teachers assess and evaluate children, sorting, grouping and labelling them into abstract categories that have nothing to do with the child's world. Teachers understand children within psychological models and theories of learning. Consequently, their interactions with students become regulated through predetermined modes of action (van Manen, 2015). As Lippitz (2007) describes, the professional knowledge of teachers creates an order. Like all human orders, it is sustained by continuity, regularity and dependability. Yet, the child as Other eludes the thematization of any given order. They are foreigners in this strange world created by adults. And as foreigners, they are unable to integrate within the existing structures. In this way, children interrupt the continuity, disrupt the regularity and destabilize the dependability of educational orders. This then raises a fundamental pedagogical question: through our practice, do we maintain the ruling order or preserve the child's foreignness?

Saevi and Husevaag (2009) take up this question by considering the nature of social convention in the pedagogical relation. Conventions are the habitual, customary and ritual actions that constitute the way we go about our lives, including how we as adults live with children. Since conventions are so ingrained in our practice, we do not naturally reflect upon them. Therefore, we do not stop and think what significance our everyday acting has in the experiential lives of children. Our way of life comes so naturally to us that in our living with children, we are unaware that we are presenting a particular way of life to the child. But this way of life belongs to the adult world and is yet to fully become part of the child's world. By living according to the rules of convention, we forget what it is like to be a child. We expect the child to conform to the regular way of behaving and acting. Thus, our habitual practices anaesthetise us to the unique and unconventional experience of the child. Living with children in this unreflective mode of existence constitutes a pedagogical abandonment. We no longer

live with one another as part of an ethical relation, but out of habit and social custom. In pedagogical encounters we should be open to the discontinuity that the child's foreignness brings.

The foreignness of the child also means that their life is inaccessible to us. As adults, we live in an adult world that has a different quality to the world of a child. Even if I could reach back in time to my own childhood and remember what it was like to be a child, the Other before me is not the same child that I once was. While pedagogy requires us to reach out to the child, they will always be beyond our grasp. As Saevi (2011) describes: "Traces rather than evidence of how the particular child experiences the world leaves us with the possibility of a pedagogical relation, as the child is both visible and invisible to us" (p. 30). Pedagogical practice deals with questions of what the meaning of a situation has for the child and how this implicates how the teacher should act. But questions of meaning do not have fixed, discrete answers. They always remain open (van Manen, 1991a).

Thus, pedagogy deals with uncertainty. The ethical, relational and situational nature of pedagogical experience means that no definitive guidance can be given. Pedagogical acting requires 'knowing what to do when you don't know what to do' (van Manen, 2015). Consequently, the responsibility of pedagogy can never be perfectly fulfilled. Rational systems normally reconstruct ethical situations by stipulating a right course of action. As long as the moral agent makes the right choice, they are able to live in good conscience. But Levinas does not give us this luxury. We can never comprehend the Other, so we can never adequately respond to their call.

The pedagogical relation interrupts the certainty that we have in our knowledge and understanding. It also interrupts the possibility of a non-relational freedom. In the pedagogical relation, we are disallowed of any claim to be a master—neither through knowledge grounded in a fixed and immutable foundation, nor through an ungrounded freedom to realise our own potential. Instead, the pedagogical relation supplants our self-centredness through a concern for the incomprehensible Other. According to Lippitz (1990):

> [M]y responsibility springs from an obligation brought about by the Other, who acts as my master (maître). He or she enables me to do what I am not able to do myself: to discover myself as an I in my responsibility for the Other, to step out of the maelstrom of my own self-referential, economic existence... In other words, the Other, the stranger, the child is the condition for the possibility of my pedagogical activity. (p. 59)

The Otherness of the child is the condition of pedagogical practice. Pedagogy is defined by an ethical relationality that is more fundamental than my theoretical knowledge, more

fundamental than my interpretations and understandings, more fundamental than my freedom, and more fundamental than my sense of homeliness.

PART 2

Researching ethical uncertainty

6. A phenomenology of pedagogical practice

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe how pedagogy can be studied by using phenomenology as an empirical social science methodology. It is important to stress that phenomenology is not a unified field. As Paul Ricoeur states, "the history of phenomenology is the history of Husserlian heresies" (cited in Moran, 2000, p. 3). Phenomenology has been pursued in a variety of different ways, not all of which are reconcilable with one another. In Chapters 6 to 8, the phenomenology I present is primarily informed by the approach of educationalist Max van Manen.

My methodology draws from his two seminal texts: *Researching lived experience* (1990) and *Phenomenology of practice* (2014). Van Manen's approach is strongly philosophical, drawing from phenomenological and hermeneutical thinkers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur. It also has an interest in empirical research. Therefore, van Manen's phenomenology takes the form of a human social science. A further source of inspiration is the field of phenomenological pedagogy. Here, phenomenology is given a strong pedagogical orientation. It sees the lived experience of adults essentially bound in a responsibility to act for the good of children.

Consequently, it would be anachronistic to characterise van Manen's phenomenology as just simply a practical application of, for example, Husserlian phenomenology. We need to consider both how van Manen draws from philosophical sources, but also respect his brand of phenomenology as distinctive and unique. In discussing this approach, it would be cumbersome to have to continually refer to 'van Manen's phenomenology'. Therefore, it should be assumed that when I use the term 'phenomenology' in this chapter, I am primarily referring to van Manen's approach (unless context indicates otherwise) and not phenomenology as a broad approach in philosophy.

In this chapter, I introduce phenomenology as a social science. First, I will describe the importance of lived experience. Second, I will describe the primacy of pedagogical concerns in van Manen's approach to research. Finally, I will give a detailed description of the phenomenological attitude by expounding the epoché-reduction as an empirical and interpretive method. In the subsequent chapters, I will relate the phenomenological attitude to

the empirical data-gathering methods that I will use in my study of ethical uncertainty (Chapter 7) and the modes of writing that are important for a phenomenological study (Chapter 8).

Lived experience

In this study, I present a phenomenological account of ethical uncertainty in teachers' practice. Phenomenology is foremostly concerned with lived experience (van Manen, 2004). My concern with lived experience is both empirical and philosophical. It is empirical because I have collected descriptions from teachers about their experiences. It is philosophical because the teachers' descriptions provide the basis for me to engage in philosophical reflection about the lived experience of ethical uncertainty.

This emphasis on lived experience distinguishes my study from other qualitative approaches. I am not aiming to gather in-depth biographical or situational details of ethical uncertainty—as in narrative and case-study research. Neither am I studying the structural conditions that produce ethical uncertainty—in the manner of ethnographic research. Nor will I be using empirical data to inductively develop a theory of ethical uncertainty—as in a grounded theory approach. Instead, I am interested in the lived meanings of ethical uncertainty that are revealed in experience. The focus of this study is 're-presenting' these lived meanings through the interpretive method of writing.

By saying my interest is lived experience, it is important to distinguish between how we commonly think of experience from phenomenology's particular appreciation of experience *as lived*. Normally, we talk about experience as a person's first-hand engagement with a task or an event. Understood in this way, research into experience would feasibly involve asking participants about their observations. We would ask them to identify the facts and details of what they observed to develop first-hand accounts. But while such research might draw its data from experience, it is not phenomenological. Phenomenology is interested in the *lived* dimensions of our experience. Lived experience is about re-awakening ourselves to *life as we live it*. Therefore, experience is not just about our accounts of events but about rediscovering what Merleau-Ponty (2012) calls, a "naïve contact with the world" (p. xx). Events are not just something that we observe but are what we live through.

Phenomenology is a method of abstemious reflection (van Manen, 2014, p. 26). Abstemious is related to the term abstain—a holding back. For example, if we abstain from drinking alcohol, this involves restraining ourselves; we resist the temptation to have a drink.

In the case of phenomenology, abstemious reflection means that we restrain ourselves from assuming that we already understand something. We resist the temptation of imposing our beliefs onto the things in the world. For phenomenology, our genuine understanding of things is hindered, not because we know too little, but because we know too much. Instead of letting the things of the world speak themselves, we are prone to speak for them.

We are particularly susceptible to this in educational research. We can become tempted by the theoretical attitude (van Manen, 1990, p. 182). The theoretical attitude is about translating the complexity of the world into neat categories, moulding the world into a form that can be easily comprehended, measured and controlled. However, the world does not present to us neat categories and ready-made concepts. Conceptual taxonomies and theoretical frameworks are not things already in the world, lying dormant, waiting for us discover and dig them up like ancient fossils. Instead, life is messy and imprecise—and classrooms are especially so. The life of schools is made up of dynamic relationships and unique situations. Therefore, any theoretical or conceptual description of pedagogy is going to involve a simplification and an abstraction. These descriptions risk creating a distance from the very reality that we wish to describe (van Manen, 1982).

Theory does have the power to bring to light the meanings of our practices that are otherwise hidden from us. However, when we use theory there is also the potential danger of forgetting that our artificial constructions are only imitations of what is found in the daily life of teachers and children, not the things themselves. We might speak of our interaction with children in terms of data, outcomes, systems and programmes. Our thinking about education becomes about those things, and we are seduced into seeing them as more real than the real. By falling for a theoretical attitude, we forget that education is about the day-to-day lived relationships that we have with children.

An antidote to the theoretical attitude is the phenomenological attitude (van Manen, 2014). The phenomenological attitude is an attempt to get to the pre-theoretical layer of experience. It tries to grasp the meaning that arises in the lived moment of the ‘now’. But to appreciate this meaning, we need to set aside our assumptions—our theories and our concepts—and attempt to approach the world with a fresh curiosity. The phenomenological attitude is an invitation to openness (van Manen, 2014), a creative “not-knowing” (Kearney, 2011) that gets us out of our regular habits of thought and our familiar acceptance of the world so that we can appreciate things anew.

Phenomenology means the study of what appears. It attends to phenomena in the way that they reveal themselves to consciousness. Husserl's (2001) maxim of phenomenology is, "we must go back to the 'things themselves'" (p. 168), or as Heidegger (1962) puts it, "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (p. 58/H. 34). In educational research, there are many 'things' that are studied. The academic literature and traditions that we work in already carry understandings of things. We have developed concepts and words that delineate and name those things. Yet by naming our world, we sap it of life. We give precedence to the word in that when the thing appears, it is only an instance of what has been already named. The thing is robbed of a life of its own. To name is to destroy. "Adam is the first serial killer" as Critchley (2004, p. 62) puts it. In contrast, phenomenology attempts to allow the thing to reveal itself and give itself shape. In this primal contact, the thing is brought near in a way that maintains its strangeness, elusiveness and otherness.

Appearance is not restricted to how phenomena reveal themselves visually. Lived experience entails more than sensory data to include the emotional, relational and ethical ways by which we are engaged in the world. In the case of a phenomenology of ethical uncertainty, we are not particularly interested in how 'things' look, sound or feel. Instead, the main focus is on the relational and ethical features of experience. Since the pedagogical lifeworld is something that we are actively a part of, existence entails us finding ourselves caught up in relationships which require a responsiveness. A phenomenology of ethical uncertainty attends to how the phenomenon shows itself in lived experience with a relational and ethical significance. In this sense, the aim of my study is to give expression to the appearance of ethical uncertainty in teachers' everyday living with children.

The primacy of pedagogical practice

The value of phenomenology lies in practice (van Manen, 2001, 2007). We do not pursue phenomenology, foremostly, because we are interested in philosophy or in new perspectives on education. Its worth is not measured by how it caters to our academic and intellectual tastes. Instead, our primary interest with a phenomenology of practice is getting in touch with our everyday acting and living with children. Phenomenology is a means by which our lived experience gives shape to research. Through such research, the pedagogical lifeworld can be made the source and the purpose of our reflection.

Phenomenology begins in the lifeworld. Our interest in phenomenology is piqued by our pedagogical commitment. The phenomenological attitude is a pedagogical and ethical attitude. It puts us in touch with the ways that teaching is inseparable from the ethical entanglements and responsibilities that we have towards children. As van Manen (1990) asserts: "It is because I am interested in children and in the question of how children grow up and learn that I orient myself pedagogically to children in a phenomenological hermeneutic mode" (p. 40). This mode prompts an openness and a questioning. What does it mean to be a teacher? How does the child experience my classroom? What is the pedagogical good in this situation? It is only through being in the thick of these lived pedagogical concerns that these questions arise. Through phenomenology, we are wanting to show and question a form of life, because pedagogy involves the actual lives of adults and children. In this way, the lifeworld is the source of our phenomenological reflection.

Phenomenology also finds its end and purpose in the pedagogical lifeworld. By making lived experience our central concern, we resit tendencies towards abstractions. Instead, we are directed back towards our living with children. We study ethical uncertainty so that teachers can be more sensitive, thoughtful, tactful and ethical in how they navigate the daily demands of practice. Pedagogical practice relies on a hermeneutical ability—an attunement to the meaning and significance that our teaching has in the lives of children. By developing an understanding of ethical uncertainty, we can deepen this attunement by more richly understanding the lived meanings of classroom life. Consequently, we make contact with our world at a deeper level. In this way, phenomenology prepares us for practice.

Phenomenology is a pedagogical seeing. It is not about being an objective detached observer but about attaching ourselves to the pedagogical lifeworld. The researcher and teacher share the same commitment to the good of the child. Just like teaching, research is a 'pedagogic form of life' (van Manen, 1990) that requires seeing the child through a pedagogical lens. Therefore, phenomenology is not a disinterested description of experience; it is about understanding ourselves in an ethical relationality with children. In the following example, provided by van Manen (2002b), we see how a teacher observes a child skipping-rope with a pedagogical orientation:

> The teacher sees Diane skipping rope. He sees much more than a passerby can see, for he has known her for more than a year. She skips away from the other children, and he wonders what it will take for Diane to become one of them. She is academically the best achiever of her class, but her achievements are not the product of some irrepressible raw intelligence. Diane earns her accomplishments with a grim fervour that saddens the teacher. She has an over-achieving mother who

> fosters ambitious goals. Diane's mother intends to have herself a gifted daughter. Diane complies. She earns her mother's favour, but at the price of childhood happiness, her teacher thinks. As he sees her skipping, he observes her tenseness and contrasts it with the relaxed skipping of the others. It is the same tenseness that betrays her anxiety with every assignment, every test. Diane marches rather than skips through the hoop of the rope.
>
> The teacher also sees how Diane's eyes are turned to a half dozen girls who skip together with a big skipping rope. One of the girls returns her glance and gestures for Diane to come. Diane abruptly stops. The rope hits her feet and she turns toward the school door.
>
> What does the teacher see? A lonely girl who can relate to classmates only by constantly measuring herself by competitive standards. If only she could develop some personal space, some room to grow and develop social interests just for herself, away from her mother. The teacher is hopeful, for in Diane's eyes he has spotted desire—a desire to be accepted by her classmates. (pp. 24f.)

In the teacher's observation, he is concerned with the lived, personal and relational ways that Diane finds herself in the playground. She is lonely and unable to develop relationships because life has become about achievement and competition. When the teacher observes Diane's tenseness, then spots the desire in Diane's eyes to be accepted, he is reflecting on what is good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate, for Diane. The teacher is orientated to Diane pedagogically. Phenomenological research requires this same pedagogical orientation. We study ethical uncertainty because we find ourselves in the world in a particular way. As soon as we study ethical uncertainty in a way that abstracts it from our living with children, then our study ceases to be pedagogical. A phenomenology of practice is about reminding us to maintain an orientation where we see children in the light of a lived pedagogical relation.

The epoché-reduction

As described in the previous section, to get in touch with our everyday living and acting, we need to replace the theoretical attitude with the phenomenological attitude. This orientation to lived meaning requires a suspension of judgement. Husserl (2012) describes how this involves two complementary movements. First, the *epoché* is a preliminary movement that clears away obstructions that prevent as from approaching a phenomenon in its lived-throughness. The epoché prepares a way for us to access the phenomenon through the second movement of the *reduction*. Through the reduction we are led back to the originary and prereflective way that phenomena appear. In this section I describe the movements of the epoché-reduction in terms of wonder, openness, concreteness and approach. Finally, I discuss the reduction-proper and what it means to make direct and primitive contact with the lifeworld.

First, the epoché-reduction of wonder. Phenomenology requires an orientation towards the world in which we interrupt the way we take things for granted. Many of the objects in our world we experience day in and day out. Their presence is not surprising or special. They are common, ordinary and mundane. We do not question their existence. They are relegated to the background of our attention and reflection. The phenomenological epoché attempts to disrupt the way we take things for granted by reawakening our appreciation for the world through a disposition of wonder. Wonder rescues the things of the world from our inattention and apathy and brings them to the fore of our reflective capacities. Without wonder, things would remain largely overlooked. Through a disposition of wonder, phenomena are able to reveal themselves and we are able to more genuinely think the world.

We should not confuse wonder with fascination, admiration or amazement. We experience these dispositions when encountering things that are out of the ordinary: we are fascinated with how a machine works; we admire how a movie director is a master of their craft; we are amazed by the skill displayed by an athlete. All these examples are about recognising what is special and extraordinary. Wonder, on the other hand, is about stepping back from our quotidian existence to see the mundane as special, the ordinary as extraordinary.

As an example, a recent advertisement for the telecommunications company, 2degrees, gives a reflection on the phenomenon of clapping:

> When someone does something extraordinary, we show our appreciation by banging our hands together. Like seals. In fact the only thing we would want more than clapping is standing and clapping. That's like extra special clapping.

Clapping is a common and ordinary phenomenon that is so ingrained in the social performance of our bodies that we hardly ever stop and reflect on our actions. Yet the description in the advertisement interrupts and disturbs the taken for granted experience of clapping. To describe it as a 'banging' and as 'seal like' suddenly makes the familiar feel strange. Normally, clapping would not warrant our attention. Yet, this description makes us stop and, in wonder, reconsider the ordinary as something extraordinary. Van Manen (2002c) says: "Wonder is that moment of being when one is overcome by awe or perplexity—such as when something familiar has turned profoundly unfamiliar, when our gaze has been drawn by the gaze of something that stares back at us" (p. 5). From this starting point we can genuinely appreciate how a phenomenon appears.

Second, the epoché-reduction of openness. Phenomenology calls for a naivety in how we try to understand the world. If we approach what we study with a knowingness and a

certainty, we risk imposing our own meaning rather than let meaning disclose itself. Consequently, phenomena will only be available to us in the shape of our conceptions, beliefs and assumptions. Pre-understandings can obscure how a phenomenon appears.

In order to combat the tendency to make assumptions, phenomenology requires us to set aside our pre-understandings through the epoché-reduction of openness. To describe this, Husserl (2012) uses the metaphor of 'bracketing', borrowed from the field of mathematics. When working with an equation, the mathematician places part of the equation in parenthesis so that they can work on the other parts independently to the section that has been bracketed. In the same way, phenomenological bracketing involves putting limits around our own assumptions to mitigate their interference on how a phenomenon shows itself.

However, it is impossible to truly remove oneself from the understanding of a phenomenon. Gadamer (2013) argues that understanding is only possible through prejudice. Normally, prejudice is seen as detrimental to understanding. But all knowledge requires 'pre-judgements'. When we make judgements about things, we never do so from an abstract and neutral position. We are always involved in the world. Our experience of the world is never neutral. Even if neutral rationality was possible, it would always be outside of the world and unable to speak of the things inside the world. Understanding relies on how we find ourselves in the world and how we interpret the world to be meaningful for us. This does not mean that understanding is only the reproduction of our own prejudices. Rather, for Gadamer, understanding exists in a dialogue. While the self exists on their own horizon, they also exist in a world of other texts, things and events that also exist on their own horizon. Interpretation takes places in the dialogue between self and what is other—the interpreter and interpreted. This results in a 'fusion of horizons' where the interpreter is transformed through their dialogue with the world.

The ubiquity of interpretation in our lives means that I cannot remove myself from the research process. Phenomenological research will always be personal in that the research speaks from within my own world to others who also inhabit the world. My own prejudices about how the pedagogical lifeworld is meaningful provide the starting point on which my understanding of ethical uncertainty will develop. However, this development also needs to be dialogical. To develop my understanding through dialogue requires a radical questioning of my own beliefs and an openness to how a phenomenon is revealed through the anecdotal texts (written and spoken) of my participants. Like many genuine conversations, phenomenological

research can go in unexpected directions. True dialogue can only occur with a spirit of openness in which we are willing to be led by the conversation to transform our own understandings.

Third, the *epoché-reduction of concreteness*. Part of bracketing our pre-understandings also means suspending our use of abstract thematizations to understand the lifeworld. Much of educational research tries to gain insight into education through the implementation of conceptual understandings, theoretical frameworks, and measurable variables. Phenomenology brackets these artificial thematizations so that we can appreciate phenomena in their lived-ness. This creates the possibility for concrete and experiential meanings to come to the fore.

While phenomenology is suspicious of theoretical understandings of the world, there is still a place for theory within phenomenological research. Theory can be useful for providing insight into the lived meaning of a phenomenon. Many theories arise from the concrete concerns of the lifeworld. Theory can contain strong resonances with lived meaning. Therefore, theory plays a hermeneutical role in phenomenological research by contributing to an interpretive dialogue regarding the meaning and significance of a phenomenon.

Fourth, the *epoché-reduction of approach*. If we are to say that bracketing is an essential method of phenomenology, then our bracketing also needs to apply to the notion of method itself. Methodologies, particularly in objectivist approaches, are implemented upon the assumption that valid insight can be gained through adherence to specific techniques and procedures. As long as the researcher has a robust research design that is executed appropriately, a study will be successful in producing outcomes that can be validated. However, the epoché-reduction requires us to bring into question the power that method has to produce meaningful insights.

Early attempts at phenomenology sought to develop a definitive phenomenological method that would appeal to the authority of reason. However, later developments became sceptical about the ability of method to produce transcendental knowledge. Most notably, in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (2013) argues that the Enlightenment's reliance on method is detrimental to our pursuit of truth. Those who appeal to reason see it as unsullied by the fallibility of tradition. But for Gadamer, tradition has precedence over reason. Rationality is something that requires definition. And this definition, invariably, needs to arise out of a particular human and historical context. Thus, reason exists within tradition. There is no starting point for knowledge that we can establish outside of tradition because all understanding

begins within the traditions that we find ourselves a part of. All our thinking starts from our involvement in the world.

Phenomenology is about discovering the meaning that inheres in this fundamental involvement in the world. Yet, this meaning resists discovery by rational and technological methods. Methods are artificial constructions that, by virtue of their nature, produce artificial reconstructions. The real becomes reconfigured according to the frame of method. Consequently, the knowledge produced by method is drained of its lived meaning. As Roland Barthes (1986) asserts:

> Some people speak of method greedily, demandingly; what they want in work is method; to them it never seems rigorous enough, formal enough. Method becomes a Law… the invariable fact is that a work which constantly proclaims its will-to-method is ultimately sterile: everything has been put into the method, nothing remains for the writing; the researcher insists that his text will be methodological, but this text never comes: no surer way to kill a piece of research and send it to join the great scrap heap of abandoned projects than Method. (p. 318)

Method can give us clarity and certainty. So, to gain more clarity and more certainty, we demand more method. But in this pursuit, we can end up destroying what inspired our research in the first place.

While objectivist methodologies have the self-reassurance of established rules for producing knowledge, phenomenology does not grant itself this luxury. Phenomenological insight cannot be guaranteed through implementing certain procedures. Instead of depending on rigid rule-bound processes, phenomenology relies on the researcher's flexibility, creativity and inventiveness.

This should not be taken to mean that phenomenology is an unbounded process. The research is conducted according to the phenomenological attitude and the desire to produce a text with a revelatory power. The research can only be successful to the extent that the writing both exhibits and prompts reflection on lived meaning.

For the researcher's part, the success of a study is dependent on their ability to conduct the study with sensitivity, thoughtfulness and tact. This disposition is required: first, in developing a research question that is pertinent to the tactful practice of pedagogy; second, collecting empirical material that has an experiential quality; third, analysing the material through a sensitive appreciation for its lived meaning structures; and finally, thoughtfully interpreting the material through the creation of a powerful text.

The success of the study is also dependent on the reader. The phenomenological text should grant the reader access to a phenomenon and create a sense of wonder. Good phenomenological research carries the reader into the flow of lived experience so that a phenomenon can be appreciated with vividness.

This type of success cannot be guaranteed through adhering to rules. Thoughtfulness is a disposition not a process. The 'method' of phenomenology is an attitude and on orientation, not the application of techniques and procedures. But phenomenology can still use techniques. As I discuss in the next chapter, phenomenology does use certain procedures to gather experiential data. However, their power does not reside in the procedures and techniques themselves, but in how the researcher can use them in the phenomenological attitude.

Finally, the *reduction-proper*. Everydayness, pre-understandings, abstract thinking and method can impede our appreciation of phenomena in the lifeworld. The epoché-reduction described above removes these obstructions and clears a way for the reduction-proper. In the reduction, we are led towards how the phenomenon gives itself.

When approaching a phenomenon, our interest is with its essence. We ask: What makes this thing what it is? How is this thing unique? How is it different from other things? Our aim is to grasp the essential structures of the phenomenon in order to gain a rich and deep understanding. We need to distinguish between two levels of features for a phenomenon: there are the specific concrete details of an experience, and there are also the deeper essential structures. A phenomenological description is concerned with the latter.

In this regard, phenomenology distinguishes itself from empirical methods that are interested in the specific details of experience. While phenomenology does use empirical methods to gather lived experience descriptions, its main concern is not with the factual details of an experience, but with how these experiences point to deeper and more fundamental structures that make the experience meaningful. Phenomenology is not about the experiences of certain individuals, but about using individual accounts as examples of *possible human experience*.

A good phenomenological description resonates with us. This can be demonstrated in our experience of being moved by a novel or a movie. Even though we witness characters who lead a very different life to us, we still recognise their story as speaking to our sense of what is true about our own lives. It is not the factual details that we recognise, but the deeper meanings that the characters' lives point us towards. The superficial details are still important—without

them we would have no story to tell. But they are not important in themselves. The specific and concrete features of an experience lead us towards the essential meanings of human experience. We appreciate experience in its uniqueness and singularity, while also letting it speak at a deeper level where the experience of another resonates with us. In this way, phenomenology bridges the individual and the human, the singular and the essential.

While discovering deep structures of meaning is important for phenomenological description, the nature of a thing's 'essence' has been widely disputed in various phenomenological traditions. Descriptive phenomenological approaches maintain the possibility of a reduction that can establish transcendental and generalisable essences. However, my approach is more hermeneutical. The essences of an experience do not transcend the historical and cultural ways we are embedded in the world. Consequently, our arrival at the reduction is incomplete. Essences are only tentatively identified and phenomenological understanding is always open.

7. Empirical methods

Introduction

As I described in Chapter 6, my study of ethical uncertainty uses hermeneutic phenomenology as an empirical social science methodology. Empirical data is important for my study. However, it is important not because I want to make generalisations about ethical uncertainty, nor because I want to find out the details of how specific individuals experienced ethical uncertainty. Rather, I use empirical methods to gather experiential descriptions that can be used to understand and re-present ethical uncertainty as possible human experience.

In this chapter, I outline my empirical methods. I begin by expressing why it was important for me to use the experiences of other teachers. This is due to the pedagogical nature of my research. I am pursuing this research because of the specific concerns of what it means to live alongside children in the classroom. By using the experience of other teachers, my reflection is orientated to how we find ourselves acting and responding to children in the everyday moments of classroom life.

Next, I describe the methods and processes that I used. I recruited 10 participants who provided me with 33 relevant lived experience descriptions. I used these descriptions to create anecdotes. The anecdotes were analysed for their thematic content and used to help guide my writing.

Why use empirical methods in a phenomenological study?

The fundamental inspiration for my study is my life as a teacher. I am not foremostly pursuing this study to engage in philosophical reflection. A more primary concern is my pedagogical relationships and my professional practice. In understanding the methodology of my study, it is important to distinguish phenomenology as a way of doing philosophy from a phenomenology of practice. The latter is interested in using phenomenological methods to understand professional practice. For my purposes, I am using a phenomenology of practice in relation to pedagogy, and more specifically, teaching.

I am interested in using a phenomenological approach because of how it speaks to the specific concerns of teachers' everyday living and acting with children. My aim in using phenomenology is: first, to understand the structures of meaning that constitute our everyday

pedagogical concerns; and second, to promote thoughtfulness and tact. As previously described, pedagogy is concerned with doing what is good and right for a child. Thus, a phenomenology of pedagogical practice both discloses the meanings of situations, and furthermore reveals the practical nature of pedagogical situations. A reflection on the meaning and significance of pedagogical moments essentially involves a reflection on our own capacity to act for the good of the child. But since this reflection is phenomenological, it cannot be abstracted and separated from lived experience. A phenomenology of practice speaks to how we act and respond to children in the concrete situations that we share with them.

Since a phenomenology of practice is concerned with the lived, concrete, and particular nature of practice, it is appropriate that a phenomenology of practice draws upon empirical methods to gather descriptions of pedagogical experience. Since a phenomenology of practice prioritises existential concerns over method, it is not wedded to a particular approach. What is important is gathering lived experience material, not *how* this material is gathered. Thus, a phenomenology of practice uses many methods recognisable to anyone familiar with qualitative research—personal experience, interviews, observations, focus groups, etymological analysis, etc. However, when employed in the context of a phenomenological project, these methods need to be enacted with a phenomenological attitude.

Recruitment and participants

Having research participants is not necessary for a phenomenological study. Having worked as a teacher myself, I have first-hand lived experience of the phenomenon of ethical uncertainty. It would be feasible to conduct this study by only drawing upon my own experiences. However, I made the choice to gather lived experience descriptions from other teachers.

I made this choice in order to be able to borrow from the experiences of other teachers, and consequently have a greater wealth of experiential data. As van Manen (1990) says: “We gather other people’s experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves” (p. 62). While I can say that I have experienced ethical uncertainty in my teacher practice, through using participants in my research, I became more experienced through what they shared. I was enabled to be more sensitive to the rich meaning of the phenomenon of ethical uncertainty and provide a deeper reflection on its meaning.

It is important to clarify that even though my study uses participants, the goal of this research is not to ascertain how ethical uncertainty is experienced by these participants. One of

the biggest misconceptions that people have about phenomenology is that its goal is to describe how individuals experience a phenomenon. While phenomenological studies do collect such descriptions, these are only a starting point. Phenomenology is only interested in the specific life experiences of an individual in so far as they point to the deeper meanings of an experience that are relevant to more than a single person and situation.

In phenomenology, the interest is in the phenomenon itself. An individual's experience of ethical uncertainty is a means by which we can appreciate ethical uncertainty as a human phenomenon. It is less important that phenomenological data provides insight into a particular individual's experience. What is more important is how an individual's description resonates and reverberates with all of us so that we can gain insight into our own experience and life.

In this regard, factual accuracy is not a determinant for the quality of phenomenological data. Rather, good data are experiential descriptions that we can identify as plausible and as possible human experiences. For example, Sartre (1984) gives the famous description of being discovered peeping through a keyhole to illustrate the experience of being seen by the Other. The power of this description has nothing to do with whether the event actually took place. We appreciate it as a possible situation that has resonances with our own experience. In this regard, it is a rich and meaningful experiential description. In the same way, when I use teachers' experiential descriptions of ethical uncertainty, they take on a fictive form, used primarily to create experiential reverberations.

I recruited 10 participants for my study using four approaches. First, I contacted schools in Auckland, New Zealand via phone and/or email, requesting the opportunity to share my research at a school staff meeting. At these meetings, I gave a short presentation about my study and handed out flyers describing my research (see Appendix C). I invited potential participants to contact me at my university email address after the meeting to indicate their interest in participating. I contacted 34 schools using this approach. Of these, seven agreed for me to share at a staff meeting. Several other schools opted to share my research with their teachers via a poster or by forwarding my email.

Second, I phoned and/or emailed schools across New Zealand requesting that they forward, via email, my research invitation and flyer to the school's teachers (see Appendix C). With this approach, I contacted 50 schools and four agreed to forward my invitation to their staff.

Third, I created a Facebook post using my personal Facebook profile. The post briefly described my research and provided links to an electronic copy of the flyer for further information (see Appendix C). I tagged all my friends that have had teaching experience. I invited potential participants to contact me at my university email address to indicate their interest in participating.

Finally, I emailed my personal contacts with a description of my research and an invitation for potential participants (see Appendix C).

It is important to note that sampling issues are not relevant for my study. Sampling is normally important when research tries to make its findings generalisable. When making a generalisation, the size of the sample as well as proportional representations of certain social groups becomes an important way to strengthen validity. However, phenomenology does not attempt to make a generalisation but only present an interpretation of a phenomenon that is recognisable as a possible human experience. The validity of a phenomenological study relates to the richness, vividness, depth and strength of the text (van Manen, 2014). It is possible that a single lived experience description may be sufficient for a valid study. Conversely, hundreds of experientially weak descriptions would not provide enough data to produce quality phenomenology. Therefore, my efforts and methods to recruit participants were not about acceding to any notion of methodological validity, but about gathering rich lived experience descriptions.

Gathering lived experience descriptions

For my study, the main source of data was the lived experience descriptions obtained from teachers through either written anecdotes or a phenomenological interview. Teachers were given a written description of my project (see Appendix C) and were invited to be part of my project by sharing a short anecdote of a particular experience they have had. They had the option of sharing through either a face-to-face interview or by writing it down and sharing it via email.

In the case of gathering written phenomenological data, one of the main challenges is getting participants to maintain a strong orientation to the lived meanings inherent in the situation. When describing situations, we tend to talk in generalisation, provide explanations and give opinions. But this tendency detracts from our appreciation of the pre-reflective lived-thoroughness of experience. To mitigate this problem, participants were provided with the

following guidelines [See Appendix D. These guidelines were based on van Manen (1990, pp. 64f.)]:

> Think of a specific time when this happened.
> Tell me what happened but avoid explaining or giving opinions about it.
> Describe the experience as you lived through it.
> What happened? What did you do?
> What were you thinking and feeling?
> What did you say? What did the student, and others, say at the time?
> How did you and the student act, talk, and use gestures?
> What was the tone or feeling of the interaction?

In addition to these guidelines, participants were given an example of an anecdote (see Appendix D) via a hyperlink. This anecdote was about my experience of ethical uncertainty (that I shared in Chapter 1) and illustrated the above guidelines. When necessary, I emailed the participants, asking them to provide further information and clarification. In this email, I tried to orient the participant to the lived meanings of the situation they described. Thus, by providing guidelines, an exemplar, and email communication, I supported participants to provide data that was experientially rich and ripe for phenomenological analysis.

Since some participants preferred to share their experience verbally, I provided the option of participating through a phenomenological interview. In this interview, participants shared their anecdote and I then engaged in an open-ended discussion to explore the lived significance of the participant's experiences. I conducted and transcribed five interviews with six participants—four of the interviews were with a single participant, and one interview was conducted with two participants.

Through my various recruitment efforts, I collected 33 relevant lived experience descriptions. All of these descriptions were developed into anecdotes and analysed (in the manner described in the next section). However, not all of the descriptions are included in my text. Many were excluded because they shared similar thematic content to other anecdotes that more vividly communicated these themes. Other anecdotes were excluded because they did not capture the rich lived-throughness of ethical uncertainty. In my study, I share seven anecdotes. Five of these anecdotes will be presented in Part 3, and two anecdotes have already been shared—one in Chapter 3 and one in Chapter 4.

The anecdote

The next phase of my research was to use these lived experience descriptions to create anecdotes. An anecdote is a short and simple story that describes a particular incident. It is used as an example of a phenomenon. As a methodological device, the anecdote is at the heart of a phenomenological study. It is important to contrast the phenomenological anecdote with how anecdotes are used in other research methods. Often, the anecdote is merely an illustration of an argument that the researcher is trying to make. Here, the anecdote is used to engage the reader and provide clarity to help understand an abstract and conceptual argument. The anecdote becomes just a flourish in the presentation of a study but does not have any authority or academic heft in its own right. In contrast, anecdotes in a phenomenological study have primacy. They grant us access to the lived experience of the lifeworld. The job of the phenomenological researcher is not to make academic arguments that are buttressed with lived examples, but to use the anecdote as an opening in which the researcher continues to dwell. Inside the world of the anecdote we can tease out lived and existential meanings. Therefore, the anecdote does not only support an argument, but constitutes an essential part of the argument itself.

A good anecdote brings the reader into the realm of lived experience—it awakens us to a pre-reflective engagement with a phenomenon and to novel existential possibilities (Henriksson & Saevi, 2012). Our attention is drawn to the lived meanings opened up by the anecdote. A good anecdote is evocative. It draws us near and enables us to share in the experience that is described. To illustrate, here are two descriptions—given by van Manen (2014)—of the same phenomenon: holding hands with your child. The first anecdote is not well-crafted. It retreats from the lived-ness of the experience to an opinion about the experience:

> My youngest is hard to control. If I don't hold him by the hand, then he will just take off. He is just like his father that way. He took off a year ago and never came back. Well, good riddance.
>
> But I love my child, and I am always sure to grab his hand when we are in a crowded shopping mall or in a busy place. Even if he throws a tantrum. You know, I am not an easy mother. Sometimes I see parents who let their kids just run around. They have no control. Or they may be neglectful and irresponsible. Too often we hear how accidents happen, or how children get lost. (p. 53f.)

As a contrast, the next anecdote has a strong experiential quality that draws us into the experience:

> A couple of days ago I was doing some shopping with my 23-year old son in a local mall. At one moment, as we were talking and walking along, he took my hand. It

> seemed quite a sudden gesture. For a fleeting moment a memory came rushing back. A physical memory. It felt like he took my hand just as he used to do, when he was a young child. It is such a special moment when a child simply takes your hand—but perhaps I never was quite conscious of it until now! So, I momentarily re-experienced the same feeling I used to have when holding my son's hand when he was still small. It is wonderful to feel this lively hand in yours. I am not sure how to describe the experience: my own hand felt protective, connected, trusted, together...so not alone! It is not the same experience as walking hand in hand with my husband—that is also nice, but in a different way. Anyway, I felt so wonderful that my adult son so spontaneously went hand in hand with his mother in public! He did not seem embarrassed at all. In fact, if the truth be told, as we kept walking hand in hand, I felt a bit awkward myself. But I did not tell him. (p. 54)

In this anecdote, the concrete nature of the description preserves the uniqueness and singularity of experience. But the singular event also resonates and reverberates with us in such a way that we can recognise the experience as a possible human experience. Consequently, the description is at the same time someone else's experience and my experience. It prompts me to reflect on holding my own child's hand. In this way, a good anecdote is a concrete description of a unique situation that also involves us, implicates us, and transforms how we understand our own lives. Good phenomenological descriptions maintain the tension between the particular and the essential.

For an anecdote to be effective, it needs to be written in such a way that the form of the text helps facilitate the reader being brought into its world. A poorly written anecdote can prevent the reader from accessing the lived significance of the experience. It is important that the anecdote uses its form to speak to us in a way that enlivens lived and felt sensibilities. Van Manen (2014, p. 252) provides the following guidelines for an effective anecdote:

- An anecdote is a very short and simple story.
- An anecdote usually describes a single incident.
- An anecdote begins close to the central moment of the experience.
- An anecdote includes important concrete details.
- An anecdote often contains several quotes (what was said, done, and so on).
- An anecdote closes quickly after the climax or when the incident has passed.
- An anecdote often has an effective or "punchy" last line: it creates punctum.

This last point borrows from Roland Barthes' (1981) use of the term punctum to differentiate a photograph from a snapshot. For Barthes, a photograph has a point, a sting, whereas a snapshot is thoughtless and disposable. A photograph interrupts and speaks to us. This poignancy is the photo's punctum. Likewise, a good anecdote affects and stirs us. It causes us to stop and reflect. It helps provoke a wonder that causes us to sit up and pay attention.

The problem with obtaining experiential descriptions from others is that their anecdotes may lack the evocative qualities of a good anecdote. Consequently, it was necessary for me to edit and rework the anecdotes I obtained to enhance their vividness and bring about a sense of punctum. To do so, I identified the main point of the anecdote, disregarded extraneous material, and strengthened the concrete and vivid details in order to deepen the sting of the central theme or themes. As I was editing the anecdotes, I kept van Manen's (2014, p. 256) following points in mind:

- Remain constantly oriented to the lived experience of the phenomenon.
- Edit the factual content but do not change the phenomenological content.
- Enhance the eidetic or phenomenological theme by strengthening it.
- Aim for the text to acquire strongly embedded meaning. When a text is written in the present tense, it can make an anecdote more vocative.
- Use of personal pronouns tends to pull the reader in.
- Extraneous material should be omitted.
- Search for words that are "just right" in exchange for awkward words.
- Avoid generalizing statements.
- Avoid theoretical terminology.
- Do not rewrite or edit more than absolutely necessary.
- Maintain the textual features of an anecdote as described above.

One might argue that by editing my participants' experiences in this way involves putting words in their mouths and altering the data to serve making my research project seem richer and more insightful. But this would only be a problem if the purpose of my study was to accurately and factually reconstruct an individual's experience. But since phenomenology is interested in evocatively presenting possible human experience, editing my participants' accounts does not invalidate the analysis, but rather strengthens the ability of the study to provide a vicarious experience of the phenomenon for the reader.

Thematic analysis

The anecdotes I collected were analysed for their thematic content. However, this type of analysis cannot be completely separated from the creation of the anecdote itself. As described above, anecdotes are rewritten and edited to strengthen the presence of essential themes. Therefore, thematic analysis should not be considered as a distinct step that occurs after the creation of anecdotes. Rather the two processes inform one another. Thematic analysis is always a tentative and evolving process.

What is a theme? When reading and rereading an anecdote we ask ourselves: What is the point? What does this experience say? We look for places where meaning seems to intensify and the significance of the anecdote is brought into focus. As van Manen (1990) states, themes are "knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes" (p. 90). Themes are ideas that direct us to the deep and essential meaning structures of an experience. They help us understand what makes this experience the type of experience that it is; they help us make sense of the ways that the experience is lived in meaningful ways. But this meaning is not contained in the theme itself. Themes are intransitive. They allude and point to the phenomenological meaning so that the reader can recognise something in the experience that reverberates in their own being.

Discovering themes is a creative, rather than mechanistic, process. Outside of phenomenology, thematic analysis is usually described in terms of finding patterns through the coding and counting of data. In contrast, phenomenological themes are discovered through an inventive thoughtfulness, or what van Manen (1990) describes as a "free act of 'seeing' meaning" (p. 79). Thematic analysis is conducted according to epoché-reduction described in Chapter 6. It is only made possible by an openness and desire for meaning but cannot be guaranteed by method.

Even though phenomenological themes cannot be produced through techniques and procedures, van Manen (1990, 2014) provides three approaches that can help with the development of themes. First, in the holistic approach we reflect on the whole anecdote and come up with a sentence that captures the significance of the anecdote. We ask, what significant meaning does this anecdote contain about the phenomenon? Second, the selective approach involves selecting certain phrases where meaning seems to concentrate. We ask, what phrases are particularly important for how I understand the phenomenon? Finally, we take a detailed approach in which every sentence of the anecdote is analysed for its significance. We ask, how does this sentence contribute to my understanding of the phenomenon? When analysing the anecdote at these three levels, we search for the common threads that emerge through the different approaches. This can help us reflect on the deeper meaning structures of the phenomenon so that thematic statements begin to emerge.

However, themes are not significant in and of themselves. Themes are not the 'findings' of phenomenological research. They help start the interpretive process by providing the essential structures of meaning that inform the creation of the phenomenological text. As I discuss in Chapter 8, writing is the main method of phenomenology. Therefore, themes require

linguistic development. Otherwise, they wither into neat conceptual categories that fail to evoke lived meaning. As van Manen (1997) describes, writing needs to massage these themes to create meaning:

> We must discover the nodal points and the nerve endings of sensory sense; we must discern where a certain pressure or compressure may suddenly bring about linguistic liveliness. This working of the text with experiential accounts, evocative constructions, intensified language, and thoughtful reflections embeds and converts thematic claims into a narrative text that contains and safeguards phenomenological meaning. (p. 358)

Themes serve writing. We cannot reduce a phenomenological study to a list of thematic statements. Nevertheless, by attending to the essential structures of phenomena, thematic analysis helps guide our writing and make lived experience intelligible.

The themes that emerged from my study created the chapter structure and the presentation of my empirical data in Part 3. The five themes are: The risk of speaking; Hospitality and hostility; Others as the possibility of conflict; Different interpretations; and Being-seen.

Ethics approval

To conduct the research, an application (Ref. 021006) was successfully made to the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee. This application was approved on 21-Jun-2018 (see Appendix A).

In making this application, I needed to design my research in accordance with key ethical principles required by the university for research with human participants. For example, first, I needed to obtain the *informed consent* of participants by clearly communicating to them the nature of my research and what being part of the project involved. This was communicated through a participant information sheet and a consent form. Second, since I was using my professional contacts to find participants, I needed to ensure that my recruitment strategies did not involve *coercion*. So, I did not directly invite my personal contacts but only requested them to disseminate a general invitation. Additionally, since I recruited teachers during staff meetings, I needed to ensure that they were not coerced by their employer to be involved. To avoid this coercion, I asked participants to respond to me privately and assured them that their identity would not be disclosed to their employer. Third, my participants were given the *right to withdraw*. As stated in my recruitment documents, participants could withdraw participation at any time without giving reason and had the option to withdraw their data within a certain

timeframe. Finally, my research maintained the *confidentiality* of my participants and their data. Transcripts and audio recordings of interviews were only accessible to me and my supervisor. Similarly, I assured participants that I would not share the identity of anyone involved in the project, that all published materials would use pseudonyms, and that any recognisable features (such as school names) would be modified.

While the above ethical considerations are important, a question arises how these principles relate to the philosophical position I argue for in this thesis on ethical uncertainty. As I have discussed, ethics is not fundamentally about our relationship to abstract rational principles, but about our relationship to persons that we find ourselves living alongside. Ethics and pedagogy cannot be reduced to principles. Research ethics is no different. If research involves human participants, then there is an inescapable relational dimension to the research that will have ethical precedence other a purely rational concern (see Vermeylen & Clark, 2017).

The ethical issues of my project can be conceived from two perspectives: first, how my research conforms to research ethics principles, and second, how my research is inescapably a relational encounter between me (the researcher) and the participants. The first perspective corresponds to the institutional and professional guidelines that I am required to follow as a doctoral researcher. Prior to going out into the field, my research plan required approval from the ethics committee to ensure that my proposed plan follows certain principles. The second perspective is concerned with how my research involves developing relationships with my participants to hear their life experiences. In order to collect lived experience descriptions of ethical uncertainty, I had to make personal contact with people. Consequently, my project involves a lived relationality that is fundamentally ethical.

These two ethical aspects are in some ways connected. The pre-planned design of a research project will directly impact participants and how researchers relate to them. Consequently, planning appropriately and reflecting on important ethical issues is important for how researchers act towards participants. However, any plan will be insufficient at fulfilling the ethical demands involved in research. For my project, I found myself in lived moments with my participants that were unpredictable and dynamic. I could not determine in advance what my participants would share, where the conversation would lead, and how the participants reacted and felt. I asked teachers to share memories of when they felt uncertain in their relationships with students. These memories were deeply personal and touched on the teachers' sense of failure and regret. In the process of talking with my participants, there was laughter

and there were tears. These encounters were human moments that required me to be attuned and sensitive to what the participants were experiencing.

These issues connect to my discussion of pedagogical tact. Teaching requires an improvisational acting that is attuned to the lived meaning of a moment; likewise, being an ethical researcher requires being sensitive to how we relate to participants. Just like pedagogical tact, the tact of the researcher cannot rely on rules because it deals with unpredictable situations that cannot be entirely foreseen and planned for. Human research involves relating to people in singular and dynamic situations. Therefore, the researcher cannot purely rely on rules and principles to guide action.

Research principles, like the ones I described above, will always be inadequate in dealing with the issues we face when conducting research. The considerations of an ethics committee will always be detached and abstracted from what research is like in the field. The committee's assessment will always be prior to the actual research and will be disconnected from the human encounters that make the research ethically significant. In contrast to the committee, I found myself faced with the research participants as particular and unique persons in concrete and complex situations full of rich but contestable meaning.

Ethics committees assume that ethical issues can be addressed with clarity and certainty. However, as I have argued, whenever we seek certainty in ethical matters, we end up oversimplifying the meaning that ethical claims have in our lives. Taking the ethical concerns of my project seriously requires recognising their complexity and opacity, as well as admitting my own finitude and capacity to inadvertently act insensitively.

Therefore, my actions as a researcher are vulnerable to ethical uncertainty. By completing an ethics application, I might attempt to protect my research from unethical conduct. However, the lived moments I shared with my participants unsettled this attempt. I found myself both responsible and inadequate in these moments. I ask myself: Did I make my participants feel safe? When they shared something personal, did I demonstrate sensitivity? Did my participants feel like I was intently listening and cherished the stories they shared? When they shared something painful, did I come across cold or push too far? These were some of the important ethical issues that I faced as a researcher. Yet, no principles and no ethics application process could help me navigate these moments with a sense of clarity and certainty.

Ethics is an experience of fragility and finitude. Any honest reflection on ethics in a research project needs to contend with the impossibility to fully meet the ethical demands of

our relationships with research participants. As Josselson (2007) describes, if a researcher fastidiously follows ethical guidelines and believes their research to be beyond reproach, they lack a rich ethical imagination. An honest ethical position requires confronting the complexity and difficulties involved in dealing with real people in lived situations. A proper consideration of research ethics requires admitting its uncertainty.

8. Writing with uncertainty

Introduction

The intention of my study is to present an interpretation of ethical uncertainty. As I mentioned in Chapters 6 and 7, the primary way I provide this interpretation is through the creation of a phenomenological text. The success of my study is not about accurately conveying information, but by producing a text that enables the reader to enter the realm of lived experience and gain access to the lived meaning of ethical uncertainty.

Therefore, essential to my approach and methodology is the practice of writing. In this chapter, I reflect on the methodological significance of writing. To begin, I will describe why we should consider writing as the method in phenomenological research. To deepen this discussion, I then explore relevant phenomenological accounts of writing. I apply my discussion of homeliness (from Chapter 5) to language. I argue that writing can reproduce and preserve public discourse. In doing so, it becomes uprooted from lived meaning. However, language can also be used to explore new, creative possibilities and interpretations. On the writer's part, this requires a sensitivity to how language both discloses and obscures. I develop this in relation to notions of 'absence' and 'night' that can help us to understand the nature of phenomenological writing.

Writing is the method

The purpose of a phenomenological study in education is to bring to reflective awareness the life of pedagogy. The interpretation and lived meanings of pedagogical experience become manifest through the product of writing. Consequently, writing is not just the presentation of work that has already taken place. Rather, writing serves to reveal a phenomenon's meaning and significance.

Good phenomenological writing has a keen sensitivity to how the text can speak to a reader. Texts can express more than conceptual and theoretical understandings. Ultimately, the phenomenological text aims to speak in the same way that the lifeworld speaks. Phenomenological writing is less about communicating ideas, and more about opening up worlds for the reader. The text has the power to move us—both in terms of how it can stir

something inside us, but also in the sense of transporting us into new spaces where a phenomenon can be brought into reflective awareness for the reader.

The validity of phenomenological interpretations is found in their ability to disclose lived meaning. Valid interpretations produce resonations in us. When we read a good text we find ourselves nodding along (Buytendijk, cited in van Manen, 1990, p. 27). As van Manen (1990) describes, "a good phenomenological description is collected by lived experience and recollects lived experience—is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience" (p. 27). Interpretation is not about making up any meaning, no matter how novel or clever, but about directing us to our own sense of lived experience.

Just as phenomenology begins for the researcher through the epoché of wonder (see Chapter 6), the phenomenological text is only effective to the degree that it is able to foster a disposition of wonder in the reader. The text presents the phenomenon in a way that it appears strange and becomes the object of attentive questioning. In this regard, if conceptual clarity becomes a guiding concern of writing, this may prevent a phenomenon retaining its mystery. Using clear and definite language ends up reducing the complexity of phenomenon and the writing becomes removed from the ineffable quality of existence. But this does not mean that language should be deliberately opaque and bewildering. A good phenomenological text does not obfuscate, it reveals a phenomenon. Writing should give us access to lived experience. One of the conditions of this access is that we do not distort our understanding through artificial lenses that thematize and abstract. The text needs to reveal a phenomenon in a way that we can appreciate the existential richness, depth and mysteriousness that language always points to but can never fully capture.

Writing is a reflective practice. Phenomena are interpreted and brought into meaning through the text. This is true not only for the reader, but also the writer. Through writing, we demonstrate our insightfulness and sensitivity to lived meanings. As van Manen (1990) proposes: "To write is to measure our thoughtfulness" (p. 127). While writing requires us to stand back from experience to reflect, it also takes us deeper into experience. In writing, we meditate on the essential structures of lived meaning and are attuned to how we find ourselves in the world. Good phenomenological writing is only possible through dwelling in text as a space that opens us up to felt meanings (Saevi, 2013; van Manen, 2007). Only then are we able to sensitively draw out the meaningful structures of experience and produce texts that resonate with the life of the reader. Phenomenological research is about disclosing lived meaning; and

we do so through language. This is why van Manen (2014) asserts that "writing is the method" (p. 364).

Another challenge for disclosing lived meanings is that, on the one hand, all understanding happens in and through language; but on the other hand, phenomenology is interested in appreciating lived experience pre-reflectively where it is unmediated by language. By naming experience, we have already removed it from the flow of experience and damaged its existential richness. Yet language is how we create meaning. Phenomenology is sensitive to this tension. It attempts to resist the temptation of language to abstract using clear and precise terms.

When language is brought to the task of presenting existential meaning, it often proves inadequate. Our words fail us. While rigorous and formal language helps make the meaning of a text more self-evident, something of life is lost in the process. Formal language attempts to clearly delineate the borders of meaning. Yet words often seem to be cheap imitations of what they represent. Phenomenal meaning always exceeds the concepts that are contained in neat significations (van Manen, 2006). So where is the power of language that supports writing as the main methodological tool in phenomenological research? How can writing help disclose lived meaning?

Rather than rely on modes of language that try to express meaning directly, phenomenology draws its power from the indirectness of literary and poetic language. Poetic texts do not only communicate information. They contain a deeper meaning that is more than the sum of discrete words. If we wish to elucidate lived meanings, then writing needs to, as van Manen (1990) contends, reach "beyond the words, [to] the other side of language" (p. 112). Poetic language speaks to us both in the words that are used, as well as the silences between the words. Phenomenological writing requires a sensitivity to these silences in order to create living texts.

One of the main examples of poetic language in phenomenology is the anecdote. A good anecdote is more than a factual description of events—it has a deeper meaning. The anecdote speaks to us in meaningful ways by creating resonances and reverberations in our own life. Yet, in a strict sense, these meanings are not contained in the text itself. Instead, the anecdote points beyond itself to an abundance of meaning that cannot be grasped through a superficial reading. Therefore, the potency of phenomenological writing depends not only on the writer, but also the reader and their orientation to deeper meaning. Good writing needs to

not just try and present a phenomenon, but invite the reader to approach the phenomenon with openness and wonder. Poetic language, such as the anecdote, helps the reader to adopt this phenomenological and reflective attitude.

For writing to display a phenomenological attitude, the text needs to be orientated to the *concrete* nature of a situation (van Manen, 1997). The situation is described in a way where the reader can appreciate a phenomenon as a part of our everyday living and acting. Through the use of concrete imagery, the phenomenon becomes recognisable and accessible to the reader. Whereas abstract and conceptual language involves a reflection on experience that is divorced from the lifeworld, phenomenological writing brings us back into the midst of life. The texts bring a phenomenon into presence for the reader. Only once a phenomenon is seen as a part of our everyday experience can we expect the reader to be attentive to its lived meaning. Therefore, concreteness helps prepare the way for the reader to reflect.

A text needs to evoke lived meaning. Concrete imagery is not enough for reflecting on lived meanings. In addition, the writing needs to vividly capture the lived-through-ness of experience. Experience is not only an observation of the concrete existence of things, but an involvement in the world. Thus, phenomenological writing needs to help the reader get inside the experience. As Henriksson and Saevi (2012) contend, the phenomenological method of writing involves "writing the experience rather than writing about the experience" (p. 55). A text needs to speak more than information and more than a description. The text should come alive. An evocative text brings an experience near, bringing it into direct contact with the reader. The reading of the text becomes more than a being told, but a being shown. As a result, the reader 'sees' the phenomenon as an 'event in sound' (Henriksson & Saevei, 2012). Thus, writers of phenomenology need to heed Heidegger's (2013a) advice to "[learn] to live in the speaking of language" (p. 207). If texts do not have this lived quality, then the phenomenon will not be phenomenologically accessible; it will fail as a phenomenological text. However, if the writing vividly brings the phenomenon into presence, the reader will be encouraged to approach it with a wonder and questioning that will open them up to deeper meanings.

Meaning needs to be intensified through the form of a text. In informational texts, content has a priority over form. The reader needs to comprehend the information contained in the text. The form is important in so much that it should not hinder the clarity of the text. In this case, the form does not contribute to the text's meaning. We can summarise, paraphrase or reword the text without doing damage to its meaning. This is because meaning is weakly embedded—i.e., the text is meaningful primarily through the content. In contrast, poetic texts

have deeply embedded meaning. Both the content and form contribute to how the text is meaningful (Nussbaum, 1990, Ch. 1). When we read a poem or a novel, meaning is spoken through both what the text says and how it says it. If we attempt to summarise, paraphrase or reword the text, we damage its meaning. A phenomenological text is not a matter of reporting research findings, but disclosing the deep meanings of a phenomenon through both content and form.

A text's concrete description, evocative quality, and intensification of meaning through form, can create a moment of epiphany for the reader (van Manen, 1997). The reverberations and resonances of lived meaning should make meaning recognisable both as existential actualities and possibilities. A text moves us to see something in a new light—creating an 'a ha' moment. It also has a formative effect; we walk away from the text changed. This epiphany is the goal of phenomenology.

We pursue this epiphany because of the promise that it holds for pedagogy. A phenomenologically powerful text implicates the reader by bringing to light the personal, relational and ethical significance of our living and acting with children. It stirs in the reader a sense of wonder and openness that in turn provokes reflection on their own practice. The worth of a phenomenological study is measured by not only the thoughtfulness of the writer, but also the thoughtfulness it produces in the reader.

In the following sections, I take up some of the issues I have raised in this section and explore them through phenomenological discussions of writing. The first issue is that the texts we create to describe pedagogy often use an abstracted language that is existentially uprooted from lived experience. I discuss this in relation to the idea of 'being at home in language'. The next issue is that if language orientates us to lived experience, this experience has an ineffable quality that cannot be adequately reproduced in language. Consequently, writing requires a sensitivity to the limitations of language—we need to be attuned not only in what we say but also in what we do not say. I discuss this in terms of an absence that is an essential part of language, and the experience of writing in the night.

Being at home in language

In Chapter 5, I described how we find ourselves at home in the world. Things are familiar and clear to us. We find ourselves in a world that makes sense and already presents itself as meaningful. The world is disclosed to us by a certain understanding of things. This

understanding is even more fundamental than having the ability to explain things or articulate concepts. Understanding means that we are able to find our way around—we know what to do and what to say. We know what to do because our understanding opens certain possibilities that are familiar to us.

This basic understanding that structures our life directly relates to how we use language. The words that we use take on their meaning in the context of our activities and projects. Beneath our talking and writing there is already some understanding of a way of life. As Polt (1999) puts it: "More fundamental than any assertions we may make is our ability to do things in the world in the first place. We understand by taking a stand, so to speak—by seizing upon some way of existing and acting" (p. 68). Language is never a neutral medium. How we speak relies on an underlying interpretation of the world.

As teachers, we understand ourselves *as* teachers. We know the space we work in *as* a classroom. We treat the children who enter that space *as* students. We speak to the students *as* learners. These *as*-es make up our interpretation of the world. They make things meaningful for us. We inhabit this world of meaning and cannot escape interpretation. Phenomena are made meaningful by an interpretation which is made possible by a certain understanding. There is no pure intuition. So, there is no pure language. When we speak or write, we are bringing into language an understanding that has already been made available to us. For Heidegger (1962):

> That which is understood gets Articulated when the entity to be understood is brought close interpretatively by taking as our clue the 'something-as-something'; and this Articulation lies before our making any thematic assertion about it. In such an assertion the 'as' does not turn up for the first time; it just gets expressed for the first time. (p. 190/H. 149)

When we make an assertion about something, we already have a particular sort of involvement with it. In our speaking and writing there are certain possibilities that are taken-for-granted. Hence, language represents a way of life.

Models of language that see an unambiguous relationship between objects in the world and mental objects represented in language are insufficient. They do not take into account the rich ways that language operates within the meaningful contexts of human activity. The meaning that arises from language is not a pure objective knowledge. Rather, language is meaningful because it articulates how things are intelligible to us according to the possibilities available to us in our understanding.

To say that language derives from a particular understanding means that there are possibilities of meaning outside of our understanding that are not available to us in language. Language both reveals and hides. Public discourse provides an average interpretation of the world. This means that we can communicate with one another and come to a shared understanding. Language shines a light on particular meanings. But in so doing, it also places other meanings outside the reach of the light. Language obscures some meanings in darkness as a necessary by-product of disclosing certain forms of life. Furthermore, language also conceals the groundlessness of these interpretations. We speak with a certainty that what we say directly corresponds with reality, without realising that we are only articulating a certain interpretation of reality.

Consequently, language is a way that public discourse is reproduced, preserved and maintained. Our talk becomes a matter of, as Heidegger (1962) describes, "passing the word along" (p. 212/H. 168). Public discourse develops an authority and a taken-for-grantedness. We do not question this way of talking. We do not stop to reflect on the meaning underlying language. Instead, we just follow the script. We see things as just the way that they are disclosed in our regular ways of talking. Consequently, we do not allow things to show themselves as themselves. We accept how they are disclosed in language. Things are just the way they are said. Through conforming to public discourse, we disavow ourselves of the responsibility to face up to meaning and instead accept our everyday interpretations. For Heidegger (1962), when discourse becomes reduced to such talk, "it serves not so much to keep Being-in-the-world open for us in an articulated understanding, as rather to close it off, and cover up the entities within-the-world" (p. 213/H. 169). Discourse then discourages us from bringing into question our understanding, preventing us from being open to wider possibilities.

This can also be demonstrated in relation to educational research. At an explicit level, there are the tendencies to adopt particular vocabularies that frame our thinking in specific ways. One example of this is what Biesta (2015, 2016b) refers to as the 'learnification of education'. Biesta identifies a tendency in our educational discourse where a language of learning is overtaking how we talk about education. Children are referred to as 'learners', classrooms as 'learning environments' and teachers as 'facilitators of learning' who are responsible for creating 'learning opportunities' and procuring 'learning outcomes'. The problem with this tendency is that it reduces our reflection on education to questions of measurable outcomes. As such, it closes us from raising broader educational questions. Biesta (2015) argues:

> The problem with the language of learning—both the language itself and the ways in which it is used and contextualised in research, policy and practice—is that it tends to prevent people from asking the key educational questions of content, purpose and relationships. (p. 76)

In this regard, learnification is an example of adopting particular interpretations of how we are meant to live with children. Researchers and teachers then engage with this type of research by just 'passing the word along'.

Learnification is an explicit example. But the preservation of public discourse often operates far more subtly. One example I would proffer is the tendency to use formal language in academic texts. In some quarters, there is a desire to speak with a pure and scientific tone. Consequently, qualities such as clarity and precision are prized in how research is written. But what are the conditions that make clarity and precision possible? Lived existential meanings have an ineffable quality that defy clarity and precision. If we let things show themselves as themselves, phenomena do not neatly fit into the bounds of neat significations. Lived experience unsettles language rather than conforms to it. If our writing is to be clear and precise, then it must be existentially uprooted (Heidegger, 1962, p. 214/H. 170). Our writing must operate at the level of publicly available interpretations. Writing is clear if it signifies something that is familiar and obvious to both the writer and the reader. It must speak at the level of shared meaning. Therefore, clarity and precision depend on an averageness of understanding. In this way, the formal language of scientific and academic tone is a form of reproducing public discourse. Formal language might purport to give a more objective grasp of things, when all it is doing is preserving a certain interpretation.

As we pass terms and concepts along in our discourse, they become abstracted from lived meaning. This is not to say that concepts are devoid of lived meaning. Many of the concepts we develop arise from a meditation on lived experience. New ideas can help disclose something in the world that had previously been obscured to us. When new ideas are born, they often have an existential source. However, when they become formalised and enter the level of regular discourse, the trace of existential meaning grows fainter. Heidegger (2009) says:

> Even relatively original and creative meanings and the words coined from them are, when articulated, relegated to [public discourse]. Once articulated the word belongs to everyone, without a guarantee that its repetition will include original understanding. This possibility of genuinely entering into the discourse nevertheless exists… by means of words in such a way that certain new possibilities for [our] being are set free. Thus, discourse, especially poetry, can even bring about the release of new possibilities of [our being]. (p. 272).

In educational research, we might speak about concepts and terms that were deeply connected to lived meaning when they were originally created. However, as we adopt them, our use of them becomes less and less connected to the lived experience that they intended to speak about. Consequently, these words become sapped of their richness and vividness. They become mere abstractions of something that we have lost sight of in how we articulate them in language.

While language is a significant way that public interpretations are maintained, it also gives us the possibility to think about meaning beyond these interpretations. While language can unroot us from lived meaning, it can also direct us back and create new possibilities for meaning. I will explore these possibilities below.

Absence in writing

As researchers, we find ourselves in a double bind. On the one hand, we are inspired by a phenomenon. This inspiration moves us to engage in research and write up a description that we can share with others. On the other hand, we are faced with the problem of how to create a written description of the phenomenon in a way that is true to lived meaning. Husserl (2001) gives us the dictum to "go back to the 'things themselves'" (p. 168). However, when we do so, things never present themselves in an unambiguous and transparent form. When we let things show themselves as themselves, they do not exhibit a structure which is in turn mirrored in our language. Our language imposes a structure on our experience—obscuring a direct access to the things themselves. Therefore, writing a phenomenological study can never be a matter of recording and presenting our findings. To do so is to fall back on the publicness of our language and keep a phenomenon obscured.

This problem is the core of the critique of Husserl found in Derrida's work, *Voice and Phenomenon* (2010). According to Derrida, Husserl advances his project by maintaining two themes: first, that a phenomenological analysis requires bracketing out all our presuppositions and prior knowledge; and second, that the starting point for this analysis is language. For Derrida, holding these two themes concurrently requires a particular picture of language. The sign needs to be understood as an empty vehicle for knowledge that does not taint what is signified. If we were to admit that language contaminates our understanding of the world, then this would conflict with Husserl's aim to begin from a presuppositionless starting point. To avoid this contradiction requires a belief in the purity of language.

For Derrida, this reveals a ‘metaphysics of presence’ in Husserl’s work that is assumed without argument. In Husserl, language can be used in a way where there is a pure correspondence between what is said and what is spoken about. The object of this language is given a complete presence. However, Derrida demonstrates (on the grounds of Husserl’s own project) that the prioritisation of presence is unsustainable. If we take Husserl’s consideration of temporality and primal impressional consciousness, we see that our experience of the present relies on an anticipation of the future and retaining a sense of the past. For example, I do not experience a musical melody as a sequence of discrete sound events, but through a maintained awareness of where a musical phrase has come from and an anticipation for where it is heading. But this means that our perception relies on a non-perception. What is present to us in consciousness is continually shadowed by an absence that makes experience possible.

A lot of social science research also operates according to a metaphysics of presence. This can be seen in the production of academic texts that use formal language. These texts exhibit transparency and clarity. They give the reader clear and easy access to the concepts and ideas that the writer is presenting. However, what these texts are giving us access to are abstractions of what we find in lived experience.

Consequently, phenomenological writing needs to have a sensitivity to both the presence and absence that characterises meaning and language (van Manen, 2006). This is why poetic language plays such an important role in the phenomenological method (van Manen, 1990, 2014). To evoke lived meaning, the text needs to speak of the world in such a way that maintains its otherness. In this regard, poetic language has an advantage over formal language. The poetic has the ability to bring into language what is incomprehensible, to speak in the silences between words. Formal language assumes a metaphysics of presence, whereas the poetic creates a space for the interplay between presence and absence. The experience of phenomenological writing is about existing within this tension between the sayable and the unsayable. Models of language that maintain an unequivocal relationship between signifier and signified are inadequate for describing lived meaning. To write about a phenomenon is to desire to bring the meaning of the phenomenon into language, while also writing with an awareness that the word and the concept can never exhaust meaning.

Writing in the night

The desire to maintain the otherness and absence in our writing is explored by Blanchot (1982) in his essay, *The gaze of Orpheus* (cf. van Manen, 2002c, 2006). Here, Blanchot recalls the ancient legend of Orpheus and Eurydice. In the legend, Orpheus was a great poet and musician. His father, Apollo, had given him a Lyre. With it, Orpheus learnt to create music so beautiful that it beguiled everyone who heard it. Even the animals, the trees and the rocks were charmed by his playing. Orpheus fell in love with Eurydice and they married. Soon after, Eurydice was bitten by a serpent and died. In his grief, Orpheus sang a song about his lost love that touched everyone who heard it. Even the gods were stirred. So, they told Orpheus to follow Eurydice into the underworld to rescue his love. Orpheus made the journey. Along the way, he encountered the beasts of the underworld who guarded the way. At each obstacle, Orpheus would enchant them with his music, and they would let him pass. Finally, Orpheus came before Hades and Persephone, the rulers of the underworld. Initially, they refused to release Eurydice. But upon hearing Orpheus' music, their hearts were softened and they made a deal: They would release Eurydice and Orpheus could lead her out of the underworld. However, she would have to follow him at a distance and Orpheus could not look back to check that she was following. If Orpheus turned around to see Eurydice, then she would be taken back into the underworld, never to return. Orpheus agreed. In utter silence he climbed back through the underworld with Eurydice trailing behind. But as Orpheus was making the final ascent out of the underworld, desire overtook him, and he turned around. In that moment, his gaze glimpsed his love. They both reached out but were unable to grasp one another. Eurydice was snatched back down into the underworld, taken back into the darkness, disappearing forever.

Traditionally, this is a tale about Orpheus losing what he loves due to a moment of weakness and forgetfulness. But this is not how Blanchot reads the legend. For him, it is a description of a desire that surpasses the law. The desire for Eurydice drives Orpheus into the night of the underworld. He goes into the deep. But it is not the night that he pursues. There is something veiled in the darkness that he is striving for—an indefinite point somewhere in the night. He sings songs of Eurydice and his music opens up a path for him, allowing him to go deeper and deeper into the night. Yet his art can never grasp her. His music exposes a longing to have Eurydice present with him. But the song cannot conjure her presence. She still remains absent, obscured in the darkness beyond the reach of his music. Orpheus is given the opportunity to bring Eurydice into the daylight—the place where she can be given form and shape. Yet, this is only possible through obedience to the law. Orpheus cannot turn towards

Eurydice. His quest will only find fulfilment if he turns away from her. But Eurydice is the inspiration for his quest. He desires to see Eurydice's face where it appears in the night. Therefore, he sacrifices the success of his quest to catch a glimpse of Eurydice. The desire for Eurydice is in excess to the law. He commits the transgression to be faithful to his desire. Orpheus sacrifices possessing Eurydice in the daylight to keep her obscured in her otherness. As Blanchot (1982) says:

> All the glory of his work, all the power of his art, and even the desire for a happy life in the lovely, clear light of day are sacrificed to this sole aim: to look in the night what night hides, the other night, the dissimulation that appears" (p. 172)

Therefore, the movement of Orpheus to turn around is not a moment of weakness, rather it is a fidelity to his desire for Eurydice. Orpheus' gaze is an act of love. Love means that Orpheus cannot possess Eurydice in the daylight. To be true to his love means that she must remain beyond his grasp and beyond his power.

In this myth, we see a description of the experience of writing—especially phenomenological writing. To write is to share in Orpheus' fate. We find ourselves taken by meaning. It inspires us to take up the task of writing and create a work that will capture this meaning. In this pursuit we enter the space of the text. This is the space that the writer enters prior to committing words to paper. It is the experience of the blank page, a cursor flickering on our monitor. This space is the darkness of the underworld, Orpheus' night. We fumble about in a space of incomprehensibility, striving towards some obscure point. We are stirred by a meaning that we cannot yet talk about or give a name. The meaning that we search for exists before the word. Like Orpheus, we make our way in silence. The act of writing is conditioned by this silence. In the night, meaning does not manifest its presence in a certain shape and form. Rather, it beckons us as an absence that is no-thing. Blanchot (2001) sees this nothingness as the material of the writer: "The writer finds himself in the increasingly ludicrous condition of having nothing to write, of having no means with which to write it, and of being constrained by the utter necessity of always writing it" (p. 3). We can see this phenomenon at play in those common moments where we are 'lost for words'. This is not just because we do not have a mastery of language. Even the most skilled writers who readily have all the tools of language available to them find themselves in this condition of having nothing to say. For Blanchot (2001), "if [the writer] has nothing to say, it is not because of a lack of means but rather because all that he can say is at the disposition of this nothing" (p. 5). We find ourselves lost in silence, grasping for ways to express ourselves. Yet, the words we have available to us always seem

inadequate. The experience of having nothing to say is not always due to a lack of inspiration. Sometimes we have nothing to say because our inspiration surpasses what can be said.

The goal of the writers' quest is completing the work. We go into the underworld to rescue meaning from incomprehensibility, bringing it up into the daylight. The promise of presence finds fulfilment in the writer's work. Consequently, meaning becomes something that we possess, and language becomes an act of control and domination. Through our writing, we have given meaning definite shape and form. We have turned it into something comprehensible that can be contained in a word. But the word is always an abstraction, taking the mystery of meaning and domesticating it. In order to complete the work, we must leave the mystery behind and put our own creation in its place. In the allure of daylight, the word becomes more real than the real. We possess meaning by naming it. But we have destroyed it in the process.

According to the law given to Orpheus, the work can only be completed if we turn away from the source of meaning. We must maintain a distance between the text and the phenomenon, avert our eyes away from the site of its appearance, and keep our sight fixed on the daylight where our work will be fulfilled. But desire competes with this law. We cannot bear to lose sight; we cannot continue climbing out of the darkness if that means we have to forgo looking upon the face of our inspiration. Our inspiration is what first led us into the darkness of the text. It is in the realm of the ineffable that meaning seizes our fascination. When meaning becomes translated into the daylight, this fascination is replaced with shallow curiosity. Things become familiar and homely. But in the darkness, things lose their contours. They become strange and uncanny. It is here in the night that meaning finds its origin. We are called into the space of the text by the uncanniness of meaning (Critchley, 2004). Like Orpheus, our desire is not for the possession and domination of Eurydice, but to face her otherness. Likewise, our desire is to encounter meaning in the place of its obscure disclosure. The transgression of law is a fidelity to our inspiration.

Transgressing the law is not without consequence. By turning to face the origin of meaning, the writer sacrifices the possibility of the work. As Blanchot (1982) describes:

> Orpheus, in the movement of his migration, forgets the work he is to achieve, and he forgets it necessarily, for the ultimate demand which his movement makes is not that there be a work, but that someone face this point, grasp its essence, grasp it where it appears, where it is essential and essentially appearance: at the heart of the night. (p. 171)

For Orpheus, seeing Eurydice is more important than the work. In our writing, when we turn towards meaning we face the impossible origin of our work. Words can never fully describe

what our gaze moves towards. Meaning frustrates our abilities to be able to capture meaning within language. Our everyday use of language may seem unproblematic, but only when we speak through public discourse. If we stop and phenomenologically reflect on the words we use, we realise that meaning always falls away. When we re-present meaning in language, the re- betrays an absence at the heart of language. Like Orpheus, when we turn towards lived meaning we only catch a glimpse before it is snatched back into obscurity, lingering only in its absence. And so, at the heart of our work there will always be this absence. The work will never be able to be completed.

Since writing is the method for phenomenological research, it too shares failure as its destiny. The phenomenological attitude requires that we sacrifice our work in order to be able to write anything meaningful about our lived experience. Critchley (2004) says that: "Writing is not a desire for the beautiful artwork but for the origin of the artwork" (p. 36). In the same way, phenomenological research is fated to a worklessness. For some, educational research moves forward according to the possibility of establishing method that can in turn provide essential knowledge and insight. But if our writing is a desire for the origin of meaning, we must sacrifice this possibility. There are no instructional techniques that will solve all our problems. There is no possibility of a rulebook that can guide us in our decision making. And there is no rational system of ethics that can provide us with a final arbitration about what is good and right. Living with children involves constantly wrestling with ambiguity, uncertainty and equivocation. When we ask, 'What is the right thing to do and say?', our question will recede into silence. In writing phenomenological research, we are denied a movement of comprehension. Like Orpheus, we are left with our arm outstretched towards the darkness.

PART 3

The lived experience of ethical uncertainty

9. The risk of speaking

Introduction

In teaching we share moments of personal contact with children. This contact is possible when the child feels safe enough to let their guard down. However, a child has no reason to do so when the teacher is acting aloof. We encourage children to open themselves by our willingness to be open to them. Contact involves both reaching out to a child, but also the child receiving us.

An important way that adults and children share moments of contact is through language. Through speaking and listening, we share our lives with one another. This requires trust. We only open up to the other when we feel safe. We need to trust that the other will not abuse or disrespect what we share. But we can never be certain what the other will do. Therefore, speaking involves a risk.

This risk can be understood in three ways. First, there is a risk in sharing. By speaking, we make ourselves vulnerable by offering a part of our life to the other. Second, there is also a risk in listening and responding. If we receive and let ourselves be moved by what the other offers us, we are involving ourselves in their life. And third, speaking is also conditioned by others. Our words go into the world where they are caught up with the actions of others. Consequently, our words can take on a life that is quite independent to our own intentions.

In this chapter, I will describe how the risk of speaking is an important feature of ethical uncertainty. I will look at the ethical uncertainty experienced by one of my participants when a student, Claire, made a disclosure of sexual abuse. Over this chapter, I have broken the teacher's anecdote into three parts. I will discuss the first part of the anecdote in the first two sections of this chapter. The remaining parts will each be discussed in the remaining two sections.

The responsibility of opening dialogue

> Claire was cutting herself. So we went into my office and I tried to talk to her.
>
> I asked, "Claire, why are you cutting yourself?"
>
> "Oh, I was just in my room last night," she said. "I got the blade from my pencil sharpener. Did it just before I went to bed, before I went to sleep."

I'm trying to make sense of it. "Does it hurt?"

"No Miss. It doesn't hurt. It makes me feel better."

I had to ask, "Claire. Babe. What's happening?"

Claire paused. Took a moment. "My Grandpa. He touches me."

She wasn't giving me any more. But I knew Claire was dealing with something serious. I really wanted to help and couldn't bear the silence. I asked, "How long has your Grandpa been touching you?"

Claire carried on to talk about how the first time was on her eighth birthday. She remembered because her family had a big party. Then, Claire described how her Grandfather took her into her bedroom and proceeded to touch her. From the graphic details she gave, I knew she wasn't making it up.

At the end I asked, "Do you want me to help you with this? Or were you just wanting me to…"

"I want it to stop, Miss."

"Claire, I promise that I am going to help you."

Adults have a responsibility for how children experience the world. A child should find themselves in a world that is safe and nurturing—free of threat. Yet, a significant challenge of pedagogy is that the lifeworld of the child can be hidden. As teachers, we don't have direct access to a child's experience. Nor do we know the child's history or what their life is like outside of school. When we see a child like Claire at school, on the outside everything might look fine. But on the inside, their lived experience might be full of chaos and pain.

Claire is carrying pain and trauma. But she has hidden it from the adults in her life, enduring this burden all by herself. She has started to self-harm, etching marks in her skin with the blade from a pencil sharpener. The invisible pain that Claire feels is made visible through the marks of coagulated blood and scarred tissue. Her cutting is a conversation that Claire has with her own body so that her pain can be read on her arms.

We don't know whether Claire intended this to be a private conversation or whether it was a way to reach out for help. Nevertheless, by cutting herself, Claire's pain is made visible to the teacher. By seeing the marks, the teacher experiences a pedagogical moment. She realises that there is something going on in Claire's life and it is her pedagogical responsibility to act to find out more. It is not merely that the cutting is a problem that the teacher needs to respond to. Rather, the cutting hints that there is more to the situation that demands the teacher's response. The teacher finds herself needing to respond not just to what she knows and what she can see, but to what is unknown and opaque in Claire's life. The teacher's pedagogical responsibility stretches beyond what is readily apparent in the situation. It extends into the parts

of Claire's life that are hidden from the teacher. Responding to the call of pedagogy requires the teacher to listen beyond what can be heard.

Pedagogical responsibility is not limited by our capacity to comprehend and see. Instead, it further beckons us towards the areas of the child's experience that are shrouded and dark. Pedagogical action requires a curiosity to move beyond our own understanding. When the teacher sees the scars on Claire's arms, she is confronted by her ignorance about how Claire finds herself in the world. Thus, the teacher experiences a responsibility to find out more.

The way that the teacher finds out more is through language. Language is so ubiquitous in our lives that it can easily be taken for granted. It exerts an irreplaceable efficacy in our human projects. The everyday words that we exchange with one another help us to get stuff done. As J. L. Austin (1975) famously argued, language is performative. The words we speak are not limited to describing reality or communicating meaning. Words can act on reality. Likewise, in pedagogical situations, language has a prominent role in how we act in children's lives. In the above anecdote, we see that the way the teacher acts in Claire's life is predominantly through the words that she speaks.

An important instance of this is when the teacher tries to find out more about how Claire finds herself in the world. She acts through a question: "Claire, why are you cutting yourself?" This question is pedagogically significant. The teacher needs to discern the good and appropriate ways to respond to Claire's situation. But to do so requires the nature of the situation to be unconcealed. The teacher attempts to bring this about through asking the question.

However, asking the question does not guarantee that the situation is unconcealed. Its efficacy depends on how Claire responds. The question is only one part of the dialogue between the teacher and Claire. The way that the conversation continues depends on how Claire interprets the question and how she decides to respond. The teacher is trying to move forward with the conversation by creating a space where she can come into proximity with Claire. Yet, the teacher needs Claire to offer her words, and by so doing, enter that space where they can make contact with one another. This pedagogical moment is defined both by what the teacher does as well as how Claire responds.

Claire's response is not under the direct control of the teacher. Nevertheless, it does not fall outside the teacher's sense of pedagogical responsibility. In pedagogical situations, what we can control and what we are responsible for do not neatly map onto one another. Our

responsibility moves beyond the boundaries of what we control. If a child like Claire does not adequately respond to our question, a good teacher cannot comfort themselves by thinking, "oh well, at least I asked". Instead, when faced with a child's unresponsiveness, a good teacher might ask: Did I ask the right question? Should I have asked a different question? Did I ask the question in a wrong way? Did I use the right tone of voice? What was my body language? Did my eyes betray what I asked? What should I say next? Should I press further? Or do I need to back off? Good teaching involves a responsibility to open up dialogue with children. Thus, even though we cannot speak for the child, their silence still implicates us.

This demonstrates the asymmetrical nature of pedagogical dialogue. In pedagogical situations, adults are meant to protect children. Children are not expected to protect adults in the same way. Whereas a dialogue between adults is often symmetrical and reciprocal, in pedagogical dialogues the adult and child do not equally share responsibility for the conversation. The onus is on the teacher to lead the dialogue.

In the case of Claire, we see how the teacher tries to open the dialogue. Initially, Claire is reticent in her responses. She describes what she did—removed the blade from a pencil sharpener and cut herself before going to bed. She stops at these superficial details without going any deeper. There is a reluctance on Claire's part to share any more. But the teacher does not yield to this reluctance. She is still having difficulty understanding what is happening to Claire. So, she gently tries to continue the conversation. "Does it hurt?" The teacher is still not satisfied and she presses for a response. "Babe, what's happening?" Finally, Claire offers the words that disclose what she is going through. Through these words, the teacher is able to make contact with those unknown parts of Claire's life. This contact is made possible by the teacher taking the responsibility to lead the conversion.

Through language, the teacher is able to open a dialogue with Claire. By doing so, the teacher is also involving herself in Claire's life. By asking questions, the teacher is taking ethical and pedagogical action to take responsibility for how Claire finds herself in the world. If the teacher had been unable to open up the dialogue, then she would be unable to become involved. A failure to open the dialogue would be tantamount to an ethical and pedagogical failure since it would become impossible for the teacher to take responsibility. This is why Claire's initial evasiveness and silence is so significant. The teacher needs Claire to open up so that she can act. When Claire sits there in silence, not offering the teacher any more information, it is unbearable for the teacher. In her ethical experience, she desires to do what is good and appropriate for Claire. However, she is dependent on Claire to open up. The silence

cannot have the final word. So, the teacher needs to direct the conversation and encourage Claire to share more. To do otherwise would be to ignore the pedagogical call to become involved in Claire's life.

This is not to say that in such pedagogical situations adults should keep pushing a child to share more. In situations where we want to open a dialogue with a child, we need to be sensitive to how willing the child is to share. At times it is appropriate to prompt the child. But at other times, we need to hold back and give the child some space. In a pedagogical conversation, we do not coerce a child to talk but help them to feel safe and secure enough to open themselves up. We need to be attuned to the moment so that we know when to be firm and when to be gentle with our words.

Furthermore, progress in the conversation is made possible due to the personal and relational qualities of the dialogue. When the teacher asks, "Babe, what's happening?", the meaning of the question is not limited to the syntax of the sentence and the meaning of the words. The question is situated in a relationship characterised by care and personal connection. The question arises in the midst of the life shared by the teacher and child. They have a history and have developed a certain relationship replete with personal and emotional significance. In the lived experience of both asking and hearing the question, there is a felt meaning that goes beyond the organisation of certain words.

These felt meanings do not only colour what is said, but actually constitute what is communicated. When the teacher asks, "What's happening?", she is not just saying, "Tell me the reasons why you are cutting yourself". More significantly, the teacher is trying to create a shared understanding that Claire can rely on her to help with whatever she is going through. Likewise, when Claire responds, it is not just a matter of offering up the information. More significantly, it involves Claire sharing in the understanding that she feels safe enough to make herself vulnerable and let the teacher into the parts of her life that she has hidden from others. Their dialogue not only communicates information, but tacit felt meanings. These meanings create the possibility for the teacher to make contact with Claire.

The importance of trust

A specific feature of this dialogue that makes contact possible is trust. Claire has hidden the abuse from everyone as a defensive measure. Bringing the abuse out into the open will have an irrevocable impact on her life. Once she makes an accusation, she cannot take it back and carry

on as if she never said anything. If she is believed, it will have significant repercussions on her relationships and how others see her. But it is also possible that she will not be believed. In this scenario, her relationships will be damaged and she will have to carry rejection. Her pain and turmoil would be dismissed and belittled. In this way, to share involves risk for Claire. She is making herself vulnerable by putting her pain out for others to see. How others react to her disclosure is out of her control. By disclosing those painful parts of her life, she is delivering herself over to the other. So, when Claire decides to share with the teacher, she is putting herself at the mercy of the teacher. It is now up to the teacher to decide what to do with this information. The teacher could believe her and respond with care, or the teacher could react with indifference or rejection. For Claire, to take this risk requires trust that the teacher will believe in her and take her pain seriously. Trust is what makes this pedagogical dialogue possible.

Trust is an especially salient feature of this situation. To consider the nature of this trust, it is important to understand how trust is important for all human communication. As Løgstrup (1997) discusses, trust is what makes human communication possible to begin with. For example, when I meet up with a friend and they tell me what has been happening in their life recently, I trust their words. The conversation flows because I accept that my friend is being honest with me. My first instinct will be to assume that they are telling the truth. Later I might learn some new information and I begin to think that I was being deceived. So next time I meet my friend, I am wary and our conversation is impaired. Since I have this new information, I do not believe my friend. In this way, I need a reason to distrust someone's word; but I don't need a reason to trust someone's word. Trust is more basic than distrust.

This feature of communication is connected to how we lead our lives. We find our way through the world and engage in human projects because there is something about life and our relations with one another that we trust. As Løgstrup (1997) contends, "our life would be impaired and wither away if we were in advance to distrust one another" (p. 8). If in every interaction we began from an attitude of suspicion, then we would become incapacitated in how we relate to others and move about the world. I can enjoy my morning coffee because I do not think that my barista will try and poison me. I put my money in the bank because I expect that it will be available for me when I go to make a withdrawal. To get stuff done, we need to have this trust. Without it, our relationships would be stifled and we could not function in society.

The pedagogical implication of this kind of trust in life is described by Bollnow (1989a; 1989b; 1989c). He understands adults as being responsible to create an 'island of security' for

the child. Here, the child can be sheltered from chaos and turmoil so that they learn to trust the world. Claire was not sheltered in this way. The world she grew up in was chaotic and frightening. Claire has a reason to distrust. For Løgstrup (1997), distrust has a different significance for children and adults. An adult can have an overall trust in life yet learn to distrust specific people and specific aspects of their world. A child, however, is still developing this ability to compartmentalise their lives in this way. Consequently, when a child learns distrust, they do not distrust specifically but more completely. Distrust for a child can spread into a general distrust for people and a distrust for the world. So, when the teacher asks Claire what is going on in her life, the teacher has to break through the distrust that Claire has learned. Claire may not have a specific reason to distrust the teacher; but she does have a reason to be wary about adults who profess to care for her. For Claire, it is a heavy risk to make the disclosure because she needs to rediscover a sense that she can trust an adult in her life.

While this risk is heightened in Claire's situation, there are degrees of risk in all communication. To speak is to enter into a relationship with the other and offer something of ourselves. We present this offering in the space between ourselves and the other person, making us vulnerable to what the other person will do with our offering. This trust is demonstrated in even small situations where it is abused. For example: I'm walking down the corridor at work and say "Hi" to a colleague. They look at me incredulously, make a grunt, and carry on past me. It's a small interaction without any consequence. But I feel that there has been some, be it small, injustice directed towards me. I initiated a greeting in the trust that it would be respected by the other person. But the other person was left cold by my offering. Communication involves this risk. By entering into a dialogue, I become vulnerable to the other person's power to shape my world in some way. How they respond to my act of trust will determine my mood and will either facilitate or impede my pursuits. Trust and risk constitute communication—in small degrees with passing cordialities, and in larger degrees when one chooses to disclose being the victim of sexual abuse.

When Claire discloses that she has been abused, she is offering something of herself. She places this aspect of her life in the intersubjective space between herself and the teacher, and waits to see how the teacher will receive the offering. How should the teacher respond? One possibility would be to take a cautious and impartial approach. The teacher would take Claire's claims seriously, but would defer judgement until all the relevant facts had been gathered and Claire's statement could be verified. But while such prudence might be appropriate for some judicial processes, it does not meet the pedagogical requirements of this

situation. Claire has made herself vulnerable by letting her pain be seen by the teacher. This disclosure is not made as part of a prolonged judicial process, but as a concrete singular moment of trust where Claire is face-to-face with the teacher. Sitting in the office, on that particular day at that particular time, Claire has made herself vulnerable. She is asking for her pain to be seen in the here and now of this specific conversation. This is a moment for the teacher to believe Claire. Like all pedagogical moments, this situation demands that the teacher acts both appropriately and instantaneously. The teacher does not have the luxury of taking time to reflect and deliberate but needs to demonstrate an immediacy of discernment about this situation. The teacher needs to trust Claire immediately. To show caution and delay judgement would undermine the trust necessary to sustain the dialogue between the teacher and Claire. Prudence would present itself as mistrust.

The teacher does not have to show animosity towards Claire for this to be the case. For the teacher to show caution would mean that there exists some reservation to fully trust Claire. Claire would feel like her act of risk and vulnerability had been abused. If the teacher is reserved in her response, then she fails to reassure Claire that her trust will be protected. Consequently, Claire will need to become more guarded about sharing more. For the conversation to carry on, the teacher needs to trust Claire. She can't be indifferent or sceptical but needs to believe Claire and feel the weight of the pain she has disclosed. Løgstrup (1997) describes how, "in love and sympathy there is no impulse to investigate the other person's character" (p. 13). This is also true in pedagogy. The pedagogical dialogue can only open up if the child has assurance that their self-surrender won't be abused. If in our relationships with children, we begin from a position of suspicion and caution, then we are failing to give assurance to the child that they are safe to open themselves up. Therefore, in order to make pedagogical contact, not only does the child need to trust us, but we need to trust the child.

It is possible that Claire is not telling the truth and that she is betraying the teacher's trust. In the moment, the teacher does not have any certainty directly available to her. But pedagogical responsibility does not wait for epistemological certainty. The teacher needs to act against a backdrop of uncertainty. Hence, her response involves risk. A pedagogical response requires seeing Claire in a light of trust rather than being cautious.

The risk involved in engaging in dialogue indicates the ethical nature of speaking and hearing. For Løgstrup (1997), communication involves a silent demand. To speak is to surrender a part of ourselves to the other. This act of surrender contains within it the demand to protect what has been offered. In the case of Claire, she has taken the risk to share with the

teacher about her abuse. When the teacher listens to Claire, she has the responsibility to protect what has been shared. The teacher is not just learning about certain facts and events in Claire's life. To truly hear what Claire says means that her words cannot be received with an indifference or neutrality. Through hearing Claire, the teacher receives a demand to protect and respect what has been surrendered. This demand is silent—Claire does not need to explicitly make a plea for help for the teacher to be made responsible. A demand is made on the teacher just by hearing Claire describe the abuse.

Within the context of the pedagogical dialogue, trust gives power to the explicit words we speak. Above, I described how language is performative—speaking is a way of acting in and on the world. Since trust is involved in language (be it from lesser to greater degrees), trust plays a part in how we act in the world through language. As an example, take Claire's utterance, "I want it to stop". This is a performative utterance. Claire is not just describing her psychological state. While she is saying that she desires that her situation was different, furthermore, she speaks these words so that her situation can actually change. The words are spoken with the hope that they will act on the world Claire finds herself in. This action is made possible because of trust. Claire trusts that by speaking the words, the teacher will be able to help her to improve the situation. If these words were spoken without trust, then they would take on a very different significance. They would sound despondent, sapped of any hope and potency. Claire's words only have a performative power because they are inflected with trust.

An additional example is the teacher's utterance, "I promise that I am going to help you". Through language, the teacher is pledging that in the future she will take action to bring about change in Claire's situation. The teacher is involving her present and future self in Claire's world. This promise emerges from trust. The teacher both believes Claire and has opened herself to the weight of Claire's disclosure. These are the conditions of the teacher's promise. By promising, the teacher is assuring Claire that she believes in her and that she respects the gravity of what Claire is going through. This trust enlivens the promise with a greater force and pedagogical power. The teacher is communicating that Claire can trust her. The promise would be meaningless to Claire if she did not trust the teacher to keep her word. A relationship of promise is only possible if trust exists on both sides of dialogue. A true promise can only be given with trust and only received with trust.

Undoing trust

Looming in the background of the discussion so far is the reality that the dialogue with Claire happens within the specific institutional context of the school. This is a dialogue between a teacher and a student. The teacher is not just any adult in Claire's life. The teacher inhabits a professional role where she has obligations and responsibilities. Part of her role is to provide care for her students. When the teacher tries to find out what is going on in Claire's life, it is not as if this is a pedagogical moment that exists externally and independently to her professional role. This moment is intrinsically entangled with the institutional context to which the teacher belongs.

The dependency and risk that constitutes our relationships with children also constitutes our relationship with the institutions and social context we belong to. This creates additional complications to ethical experience. Despite our attempts to move towards the pedagogical good, these efforts can be scuppered by the context in which we act. We see this in how Claire's situation develops.

> I went and told the principal, Rachel, about what Claire said. We talked to the child welfare agency and they came and uplifted her at the end of that week. I felt like I had done my part. But then I found out that after the weekend she had been returned. Her mum had told Child Welfare she thought Claire was lying. (As a mother, that grates me. I knew Claire was telling the truth. How can you not believe your baby?). From Child Welfare's perspective, since the mother didn't believe Claire and there was no history of abuse, they wanted to avoid breaking up the family. But what really broke my heart, the mother lied and said the Grandpa wasn't living in the house. But he was. My heart knew that Claire was going back into the home with the person who was abusing her.
>
> I went in to talk to Rachel and we had a heated discussion about it. "So what now", I said. "We just do nothing? We can't do nothing!"
>
> "What we have to do is go through the right channels," Rachel said in her measured way.
>
> I couldn't accept that. I said, "While in the meantime, she's at home with her Grandfather who's been sexually abusing her. For three years! She finally asks for help. She's uplifted. And then put back in there!" I couldn't help but get emotional.
>
> "I know it isn't right," said Rachel, "but we have to do things properly."
>
> "Properly. Like letting her live with him!" But there was nothing else, by law, that we could do to have Claire removed and placed somewhere safe.

In the previous part of the anecdote, we saw how Claire trusted the teacher with her disclosure and how the teacher trusted Claire by believing her. Now we see the teacher following through. The teacher uses the power of language to put processes in motion that will

help Claire in her situation. “I told the principal.” “We talked to the child welfare agency.” By doing so, the teacher demonstrates that she respects what Claire has entrusted to her.

Making this intervention creates a sense of peace for the teacher. She has acted in Claire’s interest and now something was being done about Claire’s circumstances. She has done what is within her power to do. However, the entire intervention is not fulfilled by the teacher. She is a cog in a greater machine. Nevertheless, as this small cog, she has begun to get things moving so that the other parts of the system can also act for Claire’s interest. As the teacher says, “I felt like I had done my part”. Other people are now doing what needs to be done. This creates a sense of ethical cohesion and integrity for the teacher. While it might not be the teacher who is directly taking action, others are following through with what the teacher started. The actions of others in the system are concordant with the teacher’s intentions and what she believes is good for Claire. Thus, the teacher can feel at peace that she has acted rightly, fulfilling her moral obligations and keeping her word that she would help Claire.

Being a part of the system gives an efficacy to the teacher’s intentions. But this also makes her dependent on all the other people involved in the system to maintain the intentions of her actions. Unfortunately, not everyone involved sees the situation the same as the teacher. Even more unfortunate, it is the actions of Claire’s very own mother that undermines the teacher’s actions. The mother tells Child Welfare that she does not believe that Claire’s words are trustworthy. The teacher’s action was dependent on the mother. When the mother fails to extend the same trust towards Claire that the teacher did, the teacher’s actions are undone. The teacher no longer experiences an ethical cohesion. Prior to the mother’s actions, the teacher felt like she had done her part and that she had contributed to the pedagogical good. However, now her contribution has been voided. Claire is back in the same vulnerable position.

While language gives us a power to get things done in the world, the world can also make our words impotent. Our speech does not exist in isolation, but depends on other parts of the world for its performative power. When the teacher reports Claire’s testimony, her words leave her, and the actions she initiated leave the locus of her control. But just because they are no longer under her control does not mean that they now exist outside the experience of pedagogical responsibility. At first, the teacher feels assured that she has done her part. She feels at peace with her actions because she sees them having an effect in the world. But when the mother mistrusts Claire, the teacher’s actions become ineffectual. Consequently, the teacher can no longer feel assured in her actions. Yet nothing has changed on the teacher’s part—she is still the agent of the original actions. What has changed is the situation in the world. It looked

like the actions were going to have an impact. What prevented that impact was not a failure of the teacher or the inadequacy of her actions. Rather, it was the failure on the part of the mother. It is failures external to the teacher that recast the significance of her actions. But just because these factors are external, does not make them irrelevant to how the teacher understands herself. The teacher's sense of pedagogical responsibility is now tied up with the mother's words and actions.

In the teacher's ethical experience, the meaning of her actions cannot be understood independently from the consequences of her actions. This is because pedagogical responsibility is not first directed towards what we do, but towards the good of the child. For the teacher, her sense of responsibility is firstly concerned with how Claire finds herself in the world. The teacher's actions are significant only in relation to the bearing they have on Claire. Pedagogical action is not about discharging certain courses of action, but about finding ways of living alongside children. Therefore, if the teacher's actions end up not improving Claire's situation, this is significant for the teacher's ethical experience.

It also has a bearing on the teacher's sense of self. She is an adult in Claire's life who is responsible to act according to what is good and appropriate for Claire. The influence that our actions have on a child's life are caught up with our sense of her identity and agency. This is not restricted only to the intentional aspects of our actions. If our actions have unintentional consequences, or do not fulfil their intentions, it does not follow that we can detach ourselves from this situation. We do not understand our ethical selves as an autonomous will locked away from the world. Instead, ethical activity takes place in a world that bustles with many forces not under our control. Consequently, our agency is constituted by aspects of our activities in the world that arise from both our own intentions and from sources outside of us. As Williams (1981) puts it: "One's history as an agent is a web in which anything that is the product of the will is surrounded and held up and partly formed by things that are not" (p. 29). Even though it is the mother's words that result in Claire returning to the same house where her abuser is also living, the teacher cannot detach herself from the unfortunate turn of events. The mother's agency makes up part of a web of actions in which the teacher finds her own sense of self ensnared.

The teacher's actions have been undone by the mother. Furthermore, the teacher now finds herself unable to do anything more. The teacher is part of a bigger machine that has now stalled. This dormancy imposed on the teacher is not matched with a quiescence of the pedagogical demand. What issued the demand was Claire's situation of abuse. The teacher

responded, but Claire has ended up back in the same position that she started. Thus, the teacher's initial responsiveness has not neutralised the demand itself. The teacher still finds herself involved in Claire's life and responsible for how she finds herself in the world. The teacher cannot act, yet still needs to take action.

Initially the teacher was able to do *her part* only because she was *a part* of something. Her position as a teacher gave her both the opportunity to talk with Claire, and the resources to help Claire. The teacher's pedagogical action is fundamentally conditioned by how the teacher finds herself in the social space of the school. But since this condition is essential to her action, the teacher is also unable to detach herself from this context. At the beginning, acting within the institution wasn't an issue. The institution that the teacher found herself in had systems in place designed to act in the best interest of children—including in instances when abuse is disclosed. The institution provided the teacher resources to act for what was in Claire's best interest. The desires and intentions of the teacher were consonant with the design of the institution. However, when the processes broke down and the institution was no longer able to provide resources for helping Claire, a discordance was created between the teacher's agency and her institutional context. Now, the proper processes that need to be followed come into tension with the teacher's intentions. The teacher's words and deeds are caught up in a web of social relations and systems. This provides both the possibility and the impossibility of the teacher's pedagogical action.

The fragility of trust

Pedagogical responsibility and action cannot be abstracted from the influence of others. Neither can the pedagogical relationship be understood apart from how we find ourselves acting alongside others. If we are uncertain about what the world will do with our actions, then this uncertainty necessarily forms a part of the backdrop to our relationships with children. This is demonstrated in the final part of the teacher's anecdote. Here, the teacher speaks with Claire after she has returned home.

> Claire came to see me in my office. She looked at me. "Nobody believes me Miss."
>
> I tried to comfort her. "I'm doing my best…"
>
> Claire interrupted, "You said that you were going to help me!"
>
> "I am trying. I am trying hard to help you." I tried to appear confident to reassure her. "There's just lots of things that we need to do. Lots of people and agencies that we have to go through to get you the right help. It's just a bit difficult because…"

> "...mum doesn't believe me."
>
> "Yeah," I said. "That makes things tricky. I just need you to bear with me. I'm doing my best babe." The truth was I couldn't really do anything. I couldn't relodge a request for the same disclosure. If someone came forward with more information, or Claire disclosed a new incident, then maybe I could do something. But otherwise, nothing could happen until mum came around and believed Claire.
>
> Claire said, "My Grandpa's really angry with me."
>
> "Don't worry about that," I said. "If you feel like you are in a dangerous situation, you need to call the police." I'm thinking to myself, *what the fuck—here I am trying to equip an eleven-year-old to deal with the possibility of being abused again in her own home*.
>
> We finished our chat and I walked Claire to the door. She said to me, "you know Miss, you're the only one I can trust." I gave her a hug. After she left, I shut myself in the office and just started to cry. Fuck this. There was no one at home who had her back. It was just me. And I couldn't do a thing.

In their initial conversation, the teacher tried to encourage Claire to open up and share. The teacher found herself in the situation as someone who had a responsibility for Claire and someone who Claire could trust. But now, as they meet again, the situation has become more complicated. The teacher still has a responsibility, but her response-ability has been handicapped. Despite believing Claire, being transparent in her intentions, and acting in Claire's interests, nevertheless, the teacher does not find herself in a position where she can be trusted. While on the one hand, Claire says to her, "you're the only one I can trust", on the other hand, the teacher says of herself, "I couldn't do a thing". Thus, the teacher finds herself both the object of Claire's trust, yet without the necessary agency to be worthy of that trust. Claire's offering makes it incumbent on the teacher to give what she cannot provide.

This situation discloses the worldliness and dependency of pedagogical relationships. Our relationships with children play out on a field in which forces outside of our control exert their force on us. How we act in these relationships depends on our ability to navigate the world we find ourselves in. If the world is agreeable to our intentions, then we can move about in a way that seems free. However, as soon as the world is unaccommodating to our intentions, then the dependency of our actions is disclosed.

The teacher finds herself faced by the issue of what it means to trust and be trusted in a world that does not share in this trust. "You said you were going to help me," Claire tells the teacher. Despite the teacher's intentions and action, she finds that she can't be for Claire what Claire needs her to be.

Claire is living in the same house as her abuser. Now that she has made the accusation against her grandfather, the situation is even worse. Claire says: “My Grandpa’s really angry with me”. Unfortunately, this happened because Claire decided to trust the teacher. Claire had been hiding the abuse from everyone around her. Finally, the teacher was able to make Claire feel safe enough to bring the secret to light. Now it is out in the world. However, Claire’s testimony failed to have the potency to change her situation. But sharing the secret can’t be undone. So now Claire has to live not only with the abuse and her abuser, but also with not being believed. For the teacher, she is complicit in this situation: She was the one who encouraged Claire to let her guard down; she was the one who asked Claire to trust her; she was the one who promised that she would help. But because of the teacher, Claire is more vulnerable and more alienated from the adults in her life. By choosing to become involved, the teacher has had a hand in creating this situation. The teacher intended to help Claire by getting her out of danger. Instead, she is preparing Claire to go back into greater danger. As the teacher said: “I’m thinking to myself, what the fuck—here I am trying to equip an eleven-year-old to deal with the possibility of being abused again in her own home”. The teacher had made a promise to Claire that she would help her. In the end, the teacher is left trying to equip Claire to face a reality where that promise was not able to be fulfilled.

A basic condition of the pedagogical relationship is risk. The child needs to take the risk to trust us, and we need to also take the risk to trust the child. Furthermore, because the relationship takes place on a background of other people’s actions, essential to our words and deeds is the risk about what others will do with these actions. We trust others and we trust the world when we engage in our projects. Sometimes, our trust works. But other times, we find ourselves having to deal with mistrust. Trust, as trust, cannot make guarantees. It always involves risk. When we take this risk, sometimes we emerge as the ‘good guy’. Other times, we find that we are something else.

10. Hospitality and hostility

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I described the essential trust and risk that is involved in the pedagogical relationship. To make contact with the child, we have to offer something of ourselves and need to accept what the child offers us. Pedagogy requires trust for both the child and adult. In the case of Claire, the teacher could not be certain that Claire was telling the truth. Nevertheless, to act pedagogically required the teacher to act in the absence of this certainty.

This does not pose a problem when students, like Claire, come to us in earnestness. However, there is also the possibility that children might have nefarious intentions towards us. In this Chapter, I explore the implications of trust and risk in situations where others do not display trustworthiness. I begin by relating Levinas' conception of ethics (discussed in Chapter 5) to Derrida's understanding of unconditional hospitality. Second, I look at an anecdote from a teacher that describes a hostile encounter with a mother and her daughter. Third, I argue that if we understand ethics purely as a reflection on alterity, then it can devolve into a type of masochism. Fourth, I argue that accepting a hostile Other can undermine our pedagogical agency. Fifth, to avoid this tendency towards masochism, ethical experience requires an affirmation of self as an ethical agent. Finally, I describe how this tension between self-affirmation and being-for-the-other requires a hermeneutical recognition and reception of the Other. Consequently, interpretation is an integral part of our relation with alterity.

Ethics is hospitality

In Chapter 5, I described how Levinas sees the Other as eluding our ability to define and comprehend them. The Other will always be more than what I think of them. For our appreciation of the Other to remain ethical, we need to respect that they can never be possessed by my own understanding. To encounter the Other is an experience with transcendence.

This experience of the Other is contrasted with our general experience of the world. As we go about our everyday routines and projects, the world is meaningful for us. The objects in the world are given to us as useful and comprehensible. We labour and act to transform our resources to produce objects available for us to consume and enjoy. The moment of ethics

involves the Other interrupting and unsettling this experience of the world. The world is no longer experienced as being there for us, but as a potential gift for the Other.

The experience of ethics involves these two dimensions: the transcendence of the Other and our possession of a world. The encounter with the Other never occurs beyond our world, but within it. Furthermore, our possession of a world gives us the condition to be able to respond to the Other. While our nourishment, labour and possessions are brought into question by the appearance of the Other, they also make it possible for me to have something to give. As Levinas (1991b) states:

> The "vision" of the face as face is a certain mode of sojourning in a home, or—to speak in a less singular fashion—a certain form of economic life. No human or interhuman relationship can be enacted outside of economy; no face can be approached with empty hands and closed home. (p. 172)

While the Other is not a mere part of my economic existence, ethical experience cannot be detached from this existence.

Since we welcome the Other in a home, Levinas describes ethics as hospitality (1991b, p. 27). Derrida was inspired by Levinas' notion of hospitality (Derrida, 1999) and made it a central part of his understanding of ethics (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). For Derrida, hospitality is so central to ethics that we should not talk of an ethic of hospitality; rather, "*ethics is hospitality*" (Derrida, 2001, p. 17). Ethics is a matter of welcoming the Other. If we shut the door on the face of the Other, we are closing off the ethical relationship. The ethical demand requires us to open our doors and receive the Other.

For Levinas, this ethical demand is infinite and cannot be fulfilled (Levinas, 1991b; cf. Critchley, 2012). As soon as we reduce our relationship with the Other to laws and principles, we are tempering the original challenge the Other presents. Likewise, in Derrida, true hospitality is not governed by laws, norms, contracts, nor any reciprocal obligations. When we welcome the Other, true hospitality requires us to do so unconditionally. We open our home without any prejudice or expectation. As Derrida enjoins: "Let us say yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, or anticipation" (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 77). We do not require the stranger to obey the rules of our house or behave in a certain way as a condition of entry. To be the host for the Other means inviting them in with an unqualified "yes".

This hospitality is impossible (this is part of Derrida's point). With each act of hospitality, there is the possibility that we are welcoming an enemy. The guest can be hostile. Inviting them into our home brings the possibility that they could do harm to us and our house.

Hospitality essentially involves a risk. Since ethical experience takes place as part of our economic existence, we have something to lose when we host the Other.

Since an unqualified welcome of the Other is impossible, we end up putting conditions on our hospitality. By accepting the Other, we expect that the Other follows certain rules and requirements. This protects us from risk. However, our relationship with the Other is reduced to the enactment of roles and conventions, rather than an ethical encounter with Otherness. The responsibility towards the Other surpasses both our economies of reciprocity and exchange, as well as our comprehension of them as either friend or foe. So genuine hospitality is not first inspired by laws and rules of hospitality, but by our desire to respond to the Other as Other. As Dooley and Kavanagh (2014, p. 112) describe: "We should always desire *a priori* (prior to any experience and calculation) to welcome every other unconditionally". Conditional hospitality is a mere imitation of a more fundamental calling to an impossible hospitality.

Our concrete acts of hospitality take place in the tension between a conditional and an unconditional hospitality. These two poles interrupt one another. When we desire to give authority to rules and laws, we find these inadequate for how we should respond to the Other. At the same time, if we welcome the Other unconditionally, we risk providing hospitality to those that wish violence upon us.

We saw an example of this in Chapter 9 with how the teacher responded to Claire. When Claire made the disclosure, it was not enough for the teacher to follow the rules and procedures. Proper systems seemed inadequate when faced with the plight of the child. To get Claire to open up and trust her, the teacher needed to accept and welcome her. If the teacher placed conditions on how she would help Claire, the relationship would break down. When faced with Claire, it seemed inadequate for the teacher to merely act according to the mechanisms and laws of the institution. The teacher was compelled to act according to the higher law of the Other. But this response requires a risk on the teacher's part. The teacher could not confirm that Claire was telling the truth. She could be asking for help, or she could be deceiving the teacher. While the teacher cannot know for sure, she still needs to act. Pedagogical action is not premised upon an assurance about the trustworthiness of the child, nor having established reciprocity. Rather, we find ourselves responsible for the good of the child prior to all assurances. In the pedagogical relationship, we find ourselves needing to trust first.

In some moments, it is easy to trust. But in others, it is far more difficult. We might want to think of children as innocent and honest, only corrupted by the world of adults. But to judge children in this way is still a judgement by which we bring children under the power of our understanding. Unconditional hospitality does not mean that we see the stranger as friend opposed to foe—rather, we accept the stranger without knowing whether they are friend or foe. Unconditional hospitality is not the naive optimism that everyone is trustworthy. It is an openness to the Other that accepts the possibility of violence. Hospitality is always shadowed by hostility (Kearney, 2012, 2015). Similarly, the pedagogical encounter is a hospitality that contains the possibility of hostility. In the case of Claire, she was earnestly seeking help from the teacher. But what about those pedagogical moments where children betray our hospitality? In the following section, I explore an anecdote that describes this kind of experience.

Wolves in children's clothing

> In the middle of the year, I got a job at a new school, taking over a class of twelve-year-olds. I had only been at the school for a few weeks when they had the parent-teacher interviews. During the evening, one of the mothers came in, sat down, and forgoing any courtesies immediately began accosting me. "Look at Heather's spelling. There's only two terms left. What are you going to do about it?" I wasn't sure how to respond.
>
> Before I could say anything, the mother just continued on her tirade, attacking my teaching style. "You shouldn't be doing group teaching. That's what they do in primary school!" "My daughter hasn't gelled with you!" "She doesn't like the way you talk to the class!" And on, and on. I sat there listening to it all, stunned and hurt. I kept saying to myself, *Do not cry in front of her. Do not cry*.
>
> But then the mother said something that made me angry. "You're not fun." How dare she say that. I hated school when I was a child—so when I became a teacher, I strived to make sure the children I taught didn't have my experience. I put so much energy and time into planning engaging and interesting lessons, even if that meant sacrificing the quality time I get to spend with my own children. I strive not just to be a good teacher but an incredible teacher. And this mother thinks she can sit there and accuse me of not being fun.
>
> I crossed my arms, stood up, walked to the door, saying, "Our time is up. You need to leave now." She flew out the door and I continued with the rest of the interviews in a half daze. I somehow managed to get through the night. But the mother's words stayed with me.
>
> I felt absolutely ashamed that this had even happened to me. I've always felt like I was a great teacher. Over my career, parents have shared stories and written letters saying things like, "You're the Mary Poppins of teachers," and, "You have a fan club. We all want our children in your class." These memories helped me to get through the rest of the evening.

> I went back to school the following day, but I couldn't shake off the sense of shame. I felt sick to my stomach having to face my students and my colleagues. I no longer wanted to chat with the students in my class or try to build relationships with them. I couldn't trust them. They could take anything I say, twist it, and use it against me by playing me off against their parents. I no longer felt safe with those students. They're wolves in children's clothing.

In Chapter 9, I described how human interaction and communication is structured by trust. This feature of human life comes with an important qualification. In our everyday interactions, we do not trust unreservedly. The world would be a terrifying and traumatising place if we needed to constantly risk ourselves to complete even the most mundane tasks. Instead, we allay our vulnerability by engaging in 'conventional forms' of communication (see Løgstrup, 1997, p. 19f.). Rather than exposing ourselves to risk, it is common for us to trust reservedly in our social interactions. While some trust is necessary for us to engage in communication and our human projects, nevertheless, we are not secure enough in the world to fully trust one another. So, when we navigate our everyday lives, we use social conventions to facilitate our relationships with others. By operating according to social norms, we are able to engage in productive communication while also minimising the need for trust. Living alongside one another, we have a shared understanding of our social expectations. Returning to the example of greeting a colleague as we walk down the corridor—I try to be friendly and expect my colleague to reciprocate because it is conventional to be cordial with one another. We exchange pleasantries and engage in small talk. In such a case, my friendliness is more about acting in ways that conform with social norms than a genuine concern for the life of my colleague. The interaction will go smoothly if we both engage in conventional modes of communication without having to make ourselves unnecessarily vulnerable. We can exchange words while still being reserved in our trust.

In the case of the teacher above, she finds herself in a risky situation. She has started at a new job and is working in a new community. She does not know anyone, and they do not know her. In her previous job, she had developed connections with the community and had a reputation. The parents knew of her as the "Mary Poppins of teachers". She could go about her previous job feeling secure with this identity. But she had yet to establish a reputation in this new community. She finds herself both welcoming the stranger and being welcomed as a stranger in a strange land.

To survive such encounters, we find ourselves needing to rely on conventional forms. In the case of a parent-teacher interview evening, there are social protocols and rhythms that we find ourselves tacitly following. The parents wait outside the classroom until their allotted

time; the teacher greets them with a smile; they sit down and proceed having a discussion framed by the expectations of what a teacher and a parent need to say. Even though the teacher and the parents do not know one another well enough to trust one another, conventional forms make (conditional) hospitality possible.

However, in this case, the mother does not subscribe to any conventional forms. She does not exchange pleasantries. Instead, she comes in on the attack. The mother, "came in, sat down, and forgoing any courtesies immediately began accosting me". This is the teacher's classroom and she has created a space for the mother to come in. But when the mother comes in, she does not act like a guest should act. The stranger announces herself as foe and not friend.

Consequently, the teacher cannot rely on conventional forms to get through this meeting. She has been addressed in a way that is outside the normal protocol that structures this kind of meetings. As a result, there is no conventional way to reply. "I wasn't sure how to respond". The usual resources that help mitigate risk in our social encounters are no longer available to the teacher. Unable to hide behind these resources, the teacher is exposed and at risk.

Finding herself under attack, the teacher chooses to no longer host the Other. "Our time is up. You need to leave now." The mother is not welcome. She is no longer permitted by the teacher to share this time and space. Any offer of hospitality has been rescinded.

Without mutual trust or an agreement to follow conventional forms, the teacher and the mother cannot have a relationship with one another. This flows over into the relationship that the teacher has with the daughter. She had been going home and undermining the teacher. This child does not look towards the teacher with trust, but rather with malice. So how can the teacher develop her relationship with the child if she cannot move towards the child with trust? Any opening the teacher creates between her and the child makes her vulnerable to attack. Without the trust of both adult and child, the pedagogical relationship is impossible. Since, in this case, the teacher does not feel safe in the relationships, she cannot risk making contact with the child.

This points to an ethical difficulty in pedagogical experience. Taking responsibility for a child is facilitated and made possible by the trust of both the child and the adult—however, this trust is not a prerequisite of responsibility itself. In the above case, the daughter is a threat to the teacher. But this does not nullify the responsibility of the teacher. Returning to Levinas and Derrida, true hospitality is not conditional on the stranger being a good guest. True

hospitality involves opening our doors even if the stranger is an enemy who intends violence. Likewise, pedagogy involves a responsibility for the child that is independent of the child's willingness to reciprocate our benevolence. The call of pedagogy brings us into encounters with not only little angels, but also little devils.

This imbalance between adult and child structures the pedagogical relationship. Beginning when children are newborns, there is always more expected from adults than from children in their relationship. We provide food for the child, even if they spit it out and throw it on the floor; we calm them with our words, even when they shout and scream at us; when they fight us, we absorb their blows; when we are faced with displays of stubbornness and impertinence, we must act with sensitivity and tact; and when they reject us, we stay ready to accept them back. Like the father of the prodigal son, pedagogy requires us to welcome back the child with open arms. As the brother of the prodigal learnt, this call to pedagogical hospitality overrules appeals to fairness or economies of social relations.

Pedagogy requires adults to be long-suffering, tolerant and forbearing. However, there are obviously limits to what we *can* suffer. But there is an even more pertinent issue—are there limits to what we *should* suffer? In the above anecdote, the teacher is faced by an aggressive mother and a deceitful child. Is it the teacher's ethical and pedagogical responsibility to suffer their attacks and still open herself up to them?

Ethical masochism

One of Levinas' significant insights about ethical subjectivity is that our existence is not for ourselves but for the Other. Ethics would not be possible if we were only concerned with ourselves. We find ourselves beholden to the Other. This ethical relation is prior to our freedom. We do not choose to take responsibility; rather, we find ourselves as *already* being-for-the-Other. Strictly speaking, we do not take responsibility for others, but rather find ourselves responding to the Other on the basis of a responsibility that exists prior to our agency.

Since this responsibility arises from our passivity, it is not limited to only our own actions. We find ourselves obsessed with the plight of the Other. This means that we are not only concerned with our own actions, but also the actions of others. If someone persecutes the Other, we are implicated by those actions. Our responsibility is not firstly concerned with what we do, but with the life of the Other. This implicates us in all actions perpetrated against the Other. For Levinas (1996): "this means to be accused of what others do and to be responsible

for what others do" (p. 88). Levinas goes so far as to say that we are even responsible for those who persecute us (1996, p. 88; 1985, p. 99; 1991a, p. 57).

While the self is responsible for all, the self cannot say that its own responsibility is shared with others. My responsibility is always and completely my own. I share in the responsibility of others, but I cannot delegate my own responsibility. In his writing, Levinas quotes Dostoyevsky: "Each of us is guilty before everyone, for everyone and for every thing, and I more than others" (cited in Levinas, 1996, p. 144). My responsibility is always greater than the responsibility of others. Likewise, my guilt is always more than the guilt of others. I share in the guilt of others, but I can share my guilt with no one.

If ethics is grounded in a radical passivity, then a very different picture of ethics arises compared to one grounded in human autonomy. In the latter case, we picture the subject as inspired by goodness and benevolence to act for the Other and to live with a good conscience. However, when grounded in passivity, ethics begins with a persecuting accusation (Levinas, 1996, p. 88). The terms that Levinas uses to describe ethics are less about being at peace with ourselves, and more about facing something unsettling about our existence. Ethics involves an *obsession* with the Other in which we are a *hostage* (1996, p. 90), and exposed to *traumas* and *vulnerabilities* (1991a, p. 48). Levinas' ethics teeters on becoming a form of masochism (Kearney, 2003, p. 71). This leads us to wonder whether encountering the Other is not only an experience of the ethical, but is an encounter tinged with horror.

The idea of horror is not completely foreign to Levinas' work. However, the horrific is used by Levinas not in connection with the ethical, but in connection with the experience of the *il y a*. The *il y a* is the bare and impersonal 'there is' that remains when we imagine all beings and things falling away into nothingness. This nothing is not experienced as pure absence, but as a void that houses a murmur, a rumbling of being (Levinas, 2001). The *il y a* drops out of prominence in Levinas' later work. However, as Simon Critchley (2004) argues, Levinas never leaves it behind. The *il y a* continues to exert a silent force throughout Levinas's work, including his ethical phenomenology. On this basis, we can identify an ambiguity between the ethical relation and the *il y a*—that is, an ambiguity between a personal alterity and an impersonal alterity. As Critchley (2004) proposes, "Levinas's work always retains a memory of the *il y a* which could possibly provoke confusion on the part of the subject between the alterity of the *il y a* and the alterity of illeity" (p. 93). For Levinas, there is a strong association between alterity and the ethical. However, if alterity is always haunted by the *il y a*, then an equivocality is introduced into our experience of alterity. Even if we agree with

Levinas' description of ethical experience as a relation with alterity, it does not necessarily follow that all relations with alterity are ethical. This leads Critchley (2004) to ask: "Why is alterity ethical? Why is it not rather evil or anethical or neutral?" (p. 94). In experiences of alterity, not only is there an ambiguity between the personal alterity of the ethical and the impersonal alterity of the *il y a*, but also an ambiguity between goodness and evil. When Levinas characterises the face-to-face relation with the Other as an experience of goodness, this betrays a remnant of the ethical metaphysics that his phenomenology is trying to escape. Perhaps what is needed to understand the experience with alterity is a further bracketing of notions of ethics and goodness. Consequently, while alterity remains a basis for the ethical relation, nevertheless, there remains an ambivalence which we can never fully overcome.

If ethics is directed towards alterity without any consideration of the nature of this alterity, then we risk a destructive self-effacement. We see this tendency in Levinas' use of terms such as *persecution*, *obsessions*, *hostage* and *trauma*. Here, the ethical relationship seems to make the self completely insignificant. If we follow Levinas in this direction, then, encountering other people becomes, what Casey (cited in Kearney, 2003) terms, an "excruciating apprenticeship in suffering" (p. 243). Accepting the Other can come at a great cost. By welcoming the stranger we also welcome accusation, judgement and persecution upon ourselves.

Pedagogy and masochism

The teacher in our anecdote is presented with the tension between self-concern and concern for the Other. The mother holds the teacher responsible for the daughter's spelling problems, persecutes her for her teaching style, and accuses her of not having a good relationship with the students. The mother gives her a challenge: "What are you going to do about it?" The teacher finds herself needing to respond to this challenge. But how should she respond? In this moment, should she be concerned for the mother and daughter, or should she be concerned for herself?

For Levinas, the ethical demand requires that we overcome our egoism and direct ourselves towards the Other. If the stranger comes to us in vulnerability and weakness, then the ethical demand calls us to make ourselves vulnerable for the Other. But what if the Other comes at us with callousness and strength? The mother does not broach her issues with any sensitivity. She shows no regard for the potential pain that the teacher might experience. From

the boldness of the mother's assault, it is clear that if the teacher responded with hospitality, she would be opening herself to be wounded by the mother. The mother makes a demand on the teacher—but whereas the ethical demand calls us outside of ourselves, the mother's demand causes the teacher to coil back inwardly, back into herself. The teacher retreats in self-concern, guarding herself with crossed arms. "Do not cry in front of her," she tells herself. Her impulse is to not risk exposure.

As I described in Chapter 9, dialogue with one another involves risk. Through the words we share, we are opening ourselves up and offering something of ourselves to the Other. Since the mother announces herself with hostility, dialogue between the mother and the teacher is impossible. Their relationship cannot go anywhere. This also spills over into the relationship that the teacher has with the daughter and the other students. The teacher has been sharing her life with the students, sacrificing her time and energy for classroom life. However, this sacrifice was not recognised. The daughter had been bad-mouthing the teacher. So now when the teacher faces her class, she fears that "they could take anything I say, twist it, and use it against me by playing me off against their parents". Speaking to her students now comes with an awareness of this risk. The teacher does not feel safe and is unsure if she can trust the children. Consequently, she does not try to build relationships with the children. The deterioration of trust means that any attempt to move pedagogically towards the students is perilous for her.

Since the teacher chooses to protect herself, pedagogical contact becomes impossible. Contact is a touch—whether personal, emotional or physical—between two people (van Manen, 2012). It requires both persons to expose a part of themselves to create the site of contact. To make pedagogical contact, the teacher needs to expose a part of herself. However, the risk of exposure is untenable for her as it would leave her exposed and vulnerable.

In pedagogy, we must move towards the child with sensitivity and tact. Since the pedagogical relationship is asymmetrical, we are meant to act for the good of the child whether or not they act for our own good. In this way, pedagogy is structured by a concern-for-the-other above a concern-for-the-self. But while the pedagogical relationship is weighted towards the Other, is this without limit? Do the demands of pedagogy require us to be concerned for the Other, even to the point where the annihilation of the self becomes necessary? This returns us to the question from the end of the previous section: Is an effacement of the self necessary for ethics and pedagogy?

In more concrete terms, what does the ethical and pedagogical relation mean for us when we find ourselves in situations like the teacher? Do the demands of hospitality mean that we should still open ourselves to strangers like a mother who verbally abuses us and children who use our words against us? Does our relation with alterity mean that in such a situation, we are called to suffer the accusations and persecutions of the Other? In the next section, I want to propose an alternative route in which the recognition and support of our selfhood is an essential part to understanding the demands of the pedagogical relation.

Selfhood and alterity

If *I* find myself called by the Other, there needs to be an *I* that is addressed. The ethical demand is a demand because it places a demand *on me*. Furthermore, there needs to be an *I* that is response-able and capable of agency. Hence, some self-esteem is necessary in the ethical relation (Kearney, 2003, p. 79). In the ethical encounter, I discover that I am responsible for the Other. But to have responsibility requires a constancy of self-identity. I need to be a being that is capable of promising and keeping my promises. This requires me to be able to both recollect myself from my past as one who has made a promise, and project myself into the future as one who can fulfil my promises (see Ricoeur, 1992, pp. 113-139). Consequently, selfhood is an important part of our encounters with alterity. Our understanding of the ethical relation requires at the very least a modicum of affirmation for the self.

When the mother attacks the teacher, at first the teacher is stunned and upset. Cowering at the mother's advance, she is lost for words and upset. But then the encounter takes a turn. "You're not fun," the mother says. At this point, the teacher will not tolerate any more accusations. She is shaken from her daze by anger. Any hospitality that would allow the teacher to let the mother continue is now exhausted. The teacher stands up and sends the mother out of the room.

Why did the teacher experience this dramatic turn? Suddenly, this situation became more than an unpleasant encounter with a rude parent. The mother's words cut because they are aimed at something that the teacher values. Being a great teacher is an important way that the teacher understands herself: "I strive not just to be a good teacher but an incredible teacher". When the mother says that she's no fun, these words put pointed pressure on a significant part of the teacher's identity.

Insults do not affect all people equally. To one person, the target of an insult might have very little importance to the recipient. But to another, the same insult might touch on something that is an essential part of the person's self-understanding and self-worth. In the case of our teacher, their self-worth is deeply tied up with their sense of wanting to be a good teacher for children. Thus, being told that they're not fun will be painful. These words cut close to the heart of the teacher's selfhood.

The mother's words unsettle this teacher's ethical self-understanding. Her striving to be a great teacher is not about self-interest, but about a concern for others. She wants the children in her class to have a positive experience of school. Her desire is structured according to a responsibility-for-the-other. She exhibits self-sacrifice—going above and beyond in the time and energy she invests into her students. When the mother accosts her, she is not being accused in her egoity but in her efforts to respond to the Other. The accusation of the mother unsettles the teacher's sense of how she takes responsibility. In this way, the teacher becomes insecure in her ethical identity. By being attacked, she is undermined both as a teacher and as an ethical agent. Even though the mother says, "what are you going to do about it", this is experienced by the teacher not so much as a call to action, but a calling into question of her capacity for action.

When the mother leaves, the teacher's self-esteem has been damaged. Without confidence in her identity, she finds it difficult to function. "I felt sick having to face my students and colleagues." She has lost inspiration to make pedagogical contact with her students. "I no longer wanted to chat with the students in my class or try to build relationships with them. I couldn't trust them." Trust is necessary on both sides of the pedagogical relationship. To make contact, we need to be willing to make ourselves vulnerable. Since the teacher has been injured, she cannot make herself vulnerable. The pedagogical relationship is no longer possible because the teacher has lost trust.

In the pedagogical relation, there needs to be a moment for the adult to affirm their identity. When the self is faced with hostility, our relation with alterity needs to allow for some self-protection. If we only focus on alterity, there is the danger that we fall into a masochism which undermines our capacity to respond to the Other (Kearney, 2003, p. 79). While we can agree with Levinas that ethics is impossible for a being only concerned with itself, we also need to say that ethics is impossible for a being concerned only for the Other.

Interpreting otherness

In the teacher's experience, we see the importance that our self-esteem has for the pedagogical relationship. If we let someone damage our ethical identity, we are diminishing our capacity to be able to respond. At times, preserving our ability to pedagogically live alongside children requires that we protect ourselves. This self-protection involves discerning the degree to which we open ourselves to others, or whether we need to raise our guard.

This raises a problem. Discerning how much I should make myself vulnerable involves making a judgement about the Other. I am deciding whether the Other is friend or foe. However, this betrays the call of unconditional hospitality to accept the Other prior to any determination. Pedagogical contact becomes conditional, subjected to my own understanding. But in the ethical relation, I need to appreciate how the Other is beyond the grasp of my understanding. Neither my perception nor my imagination can create an adequate representation of the Other. So, how can I maintain the Otherness of the Other, while also protecting my ethical identity that makes pedagogical action possible?

While the Other cannot be captured by my efforts of representation, I do find myself face-to-face with someone. The Other has an appearance to me, even if I cannot claim to fully comprehend them. The Other is not pure presence (a thing), but neither are they pure absence (nothing) (Kearney, 2001, p. 10f.). They are available in experience as both presence and absence.

Just because the Other resists being subjugated to the representations of the self, it does not follow that they do not enter into our figuration. While words and ideas cannot adequately grasp the Other, we are not left mute and silent. In the case of our actions, we respond to the Other, not because we can provide an adequate response, but because we need to respond in some way. Even if our actions are feeble and lame, we cannot *not* respond. Likewise, the Other surpasses interpretation, but still calls us to speak of them.

To illustrate this, I want to use a non-ethical example. In Robert Zemeckis' (1997) film, *Contact*, the Jodie Foster character, Eleanor Arroway, travels through space. Eleanor is a scientist who concerns herself with evidence, values what is quantifiable, and extolls speaking in exact terms. As she says early on in the film: "Mathematics is the only true universal language". This rigour is what, in her eyes, qualifies her for this mission. However, when she is sent through space and is confronted by the beauty of the cosmos, she finds her expertise inadequate to describe what she sees:

No—no words.
No words to describe it.
Poetry!
They should've sent a poet.
So beautiful. So beautiful.
I had no idea.

Eleanor does not have the words or the ideas that are able to capture what she is experiencing. Nevertheless, the celestial sight still calls her to offer words. She both has no words but is inspired to speak. Being faced with beauty requires an utterance that does not claim a closure of meaning, but instead overreaches beyond the limits of language. Likewise, when we encounter the Other in their Otherness, they exhaust all attempts at interpretation. Nevertheless, we are stirred to interpret the presence of the Other in some way—even if our interpretations are tentative and meagre.

Our awareness of the Other assumes that the Other has some meaning and some significance to us. Even if something is beyond our reach, we still have a sense of reaching towards it. Like Orpheus, we reach towards an indefinite point in the darkness. In the ethical encounter, the Other is beyond reach but still remains what we reach for. According to Ricoeur (1992, pp. 335-341), Levinas makes too strong a distinction between sameness and exteriority. If there is a complete gulf between the self and the Other, then there is no contact. An ethical relation requires a point of contact, otherwise it becomes an irrelation. If we say that the Other makes a demand on us, then we need to admit that the self has at least a small amount of recognition and reception of the Other. As Ricoeur comments (1992): "One has to grant a capacity of reception to the self that is the result of a reflexive structure, better defined by its power for reconsidering preexisting objectifications than by an initial separation" (p. 339). From this perspective, selfhood and Otherness are not seen as being in opposition with each other; rather, self and other are engaged in a dialogical relationship. As Gadamer (2013) describes in relation to texts, meaning is not found in the text but in understanding. Interpretation is not a matter of discovering meaning, but having it emerge in the process of us questioning the text and having the text question us. There is no final and objective interpretation of the text because dialogue remains open. Similarly, in the ethical encounter, the Other can enter our web of figurations without being possessed and assimilated into our comprehension. Our attempt to create meaning remains open in the presence of the Other. The Other can bring the self into question because the self and other exist in this dialogical relation. Interpretation is not the complete domestication of alterity, but the possibility of letting ourselves be addressed by the Other.

In this way, interpretation is an important part of the ethical relation. For Richard Kearney (2003), hospitality requires discerning between different kinds of Otherness. On the one hand, Kearney agrees with Levinas and Derrida that we need to appreciate the Other in a position outside of our own categories, interpretations and representations. But on the other hand, Kearney does not want to abandon a discernment between the benign and malign in Otherness. Our response to the Other requires a critical hermeneutic that tries to distinguish what kind of Other we are face-to-face with.

To talk about 'kinds of Otherness' risks domesticating the Other to our understanding. However, for Kearney, ethical response occurs in neither the judgement of the Other according to our categories of the same, nor the transcendence of an unconditional hospitality, but in the tension and dialectic between the two. To make this point, Kearney distinguishes the terms 'other' and 'alien'. By 'other', he refers to the alterity of a stranger that calls for our hospitality; and by 'alien', he means the stranger that is subjected to our discrimination, suspicion and scapegoating. Our encounters with the stranger involve a dynamic between the two. The stranger as Other calls us to critically re-examine and move beyond our interpretations, while the stranger as alien asks us whether we should respond to the stranger with caution. As Kearney (2003) describes: "We need, at crucial moments, to discern the other in the alien and the alien in the other" (p. 67). This hermeneutical dialectic is the basis of our hospitality.

Discerning between different kinds of Otherness is also an important part of pedagogy. Like the teacher, when we are faced with hostility, it is important that we protect the part of ourselves that makes pedagogical contact possible. If we uncritically make ourselves vulnerable, the hostile other will end up destroying what makes our pedagogical response possible. However, this does need to be balanced with an awareness that in our relationships with children we are prone to discern too much rather than discern too little. The school system forces children into formal interpretations determined by pre-established categories and labels. Likewise, teachers make informal interpretations of children, using labels such as "stubborn", "vacant", and "volatile". The discernment of teachers leads to many children feeling like their possibilities are closed off and reduced. The primary challenge for many teachers in our system is to let the appearance of the child as Other bring the interpretations of the teacher into question. If hospitality involves a reflexive structure, then adults have the responsibility to make sure that children are given a strong voice.

11. Others as the possibility of conflict

Introduction

In Chapter 9, I described how our actions are structured by risk since they are conditioned by the words and actions of others. In this chapter, I further develop the implications that this has for ethical uncertainty. I describe how being thoughtful in our actions requires being aware of how our actions are conditioned by others, and that furthermore, our actions are for the child whose life is also conditioned by others. We cannot act as if the pedagogical significance of a moment is only contained within that moment, but need to be aware that we act in a world where what we do has implications in a broader, shared world.

A consequence of living with others is facing situations of conflict. In these situations, competing claims make demands on us. In such situations, we cannot fulfil all the claims, but need to choose one over the other. I explore this conflict through the anecdote of a teacher who is faced with the dilemma of either doing what is good for a child or supporting a colleague. Alongside this anecdote I provide a reading of Aeschylus' play, *Agamemnon* to develop our understanding of the teacher's experience.

I will explore how uncertainty is not necessarily an ethical deficiency or an inability to make the right decision. Rather, uncertainty can demonstrate, first, an interpretive sensitivity to the difficulties involved in situations, and second, the seriousness we give our social and pedagogical involvements.

Me, the other, and another

> During a non-contact period I was sitting at my desk doing paperwork when one of my students, Sabrina, walked into my classroom. This was strange because she should have been in class.
>
> Sabrina sat down next to my desk and said, "I'm not going to history."
>
> I stopped what I was doing. I asked, "Why not?"
>
> "Mrs Reed is racist," she said.
>
> I realised that this was an emotive situation. "What happened?", I asked.
>
> Sabrina told me, "We were learning about race relations. I'd done what Mrs. Reed told us to do. Then I just asked her what she thought about it. She got pissed. Said I was being a little madam."
>
> I had to make a call. Do I take Sabrina back to class? Or do I let her stay with me for the rest of the period so that she could calm down?

I saw that she was worked up and felt like she'd been treated unjustly. I knew that if she went back to class, it wouldn't be easy for her to calm down and bite her tongue. I played it out in my head. I would take her back, get her to apologise, and then take her seat. But then Sabrina would be sitting there seething inside. The situation would probably blow up and she would swear at Mrs Reed. Then she would get caught up in the cogs of the discipline system. Sabrina was already one of those fringe students with a poor attendance record. If this situation escalated, it would make it even more difficult for Sabrina to be here at school.

I wanted to avoid that. So, I decided to keep her with me and got her to finish some work from another class. But as she sat there doing her work, I knew that this was going to be frowned upon by the school management. In our last staff meeting, management had talked about the importance of everyone consistently following guidelines so that we could have each other's backs and maintain discipline. Which I get. But in this case, that wouldn't work for Sabrina.

Later that day, I went to talk to Mrs Reed to say what happened. "When Sabrina left your class, she came to me. She didn't just run away and bunk class."

"It's fine," Mrs Reed said. "It was probably better that she stayed with you." She just seemed relieved to have her out of the class. "But Sabrina can't behave like that. She missed class so she needs to get detention."

That's exactly what I didn't want to happen. A detention would just push Sabrina out of school. I needed to try and negotiate some space for her. But at the same time, I needed Mrs Reed to also feel like I was supporting her.

I said, "Sabrina was angry. But in her eyes, she tried to do the right thing. She could have just run away. But she came to me and did some study. I think it would be better if you just talked to her."

"Yes, I think we should both talk to her," Mrs Reed said. "But we will let her know that she will have to go to detention. If we start bending the rules for her, she'll start to think that it's okay to just storm out of class whenever she feels like it."

I felt so weary. I thought to myself, *What am I doing here?*

If we are to act with pedagogical tact, we need to first recognize that the situation demands our attention. In our lives with children, our failures are not always due to callousness. Often, our failure is inattentiveness. This is an easy trap to fall into. We busily go about our lives, trying to get various tasks done. When children appear in the midst of this activity, their presence may seem like a distraction and we place them on the periphery. For example, if we are having a non-contact period and a child comes into our classroom with a problem, we might want to quickly resolve the issue so that we can get back to our work.

But in this case, this teacher gives Sabrina her attention. The teacher orientates herself to the phenomenological nature of this moment. "I realised that this was an emotive situation." "I saw that she was worked up." The teacher is attuned to how this situation is significant for Sabrina. She becomes concerned about what actions would be good and appropriate for Sabrina. To make this decision, the teacher does not fall back on rules and procedures, but

reflects on what would be good for Sabrina in this particular moment. The teacher acts with tact and lets Sabrina stay with her for the rest of the period.

While pedagogical tact requires sensitivity to a particular child in a particular situation, this does not mean that all the pedagogically relevant factors are contained in this moment. As we saw with Claire's teacher (Chapter 9), our actions are conditioned by the words and actions of others. Additionally, our actions are for the child whose life is also conditioned by what others do. If we are to be thoughtful in our actions, then we need to be sensitive to the ways that our actions have ripple effects that go beyond the relationship between me and the child. What is good for the child is what will best help them navigate a world that is shared with others.

In Sabrina's case, the teacher is aware that they both have a relationship with Mrs Reed and the wider school. During this non-contact period, Sabrina and the teacher were not sheltered in their own, contained world. What happened in the classroom would have a significance outside those walls. At stake is not only how the teacher acts, but also what others could do. The teacher knows Mrs Reed. She is aware that Mrs Reed does not have the best relationship with Sabrina. While Sabrina may not be a model student, Mrs Reed is probably not completely blameless. The teacher senses what the situation was like and thinks that Sabrina was likely treated unfairly. While Sabrina and the teacher share a moment with one another, there are other relationships and situations that lurk in the background. These other relationships contribute to the meaning and significance of the moment. If the teacher is to act pedagogically and with tact, she cannot ignore these conditions.

The teacher's pedagogical tact requires imagination. To respond thoughtfully, she needs to not only be sensitive to how Sabrina is experiencing the moment that they share—she also needs to imagine the significance that the altercation with Mrs Reed would have had for Sabrina. Sabrina's lived meaning of that past moment directly bears on the teacher's consideration of the right action in this present moment. Is Sabrina just acting up and pushing boundaries? Then she should be taken back to class. Or does Sabrina legitimately feel like she was treated unjustly? Then it would be best for her to stay here.

Moments have a history and a future. Sabrina is a student who exists on the fringes. In the past, she has had irregular attendance. There is also the future danger that she might end up leaving school. When the teacher acts, she is sensitive to how the past makes this present encounter significant. The teacher also imagines what this moment might mean for Sabrina's

future. She plays the possible actions out in her head. If she sends Sabrina back to class, it could result in a chain of events: Sabrina would go back to class, simmering with anger. Mrs Reed would likely be imperious and end up saying something to Sabrina that would make her lose control. So, Sabrina would be disciplined, made to feel mistreated by the school, and end up dropping out. In this way, the teacher's small action could have significant implications. For a different student, it might be appropriate for the teacher to send them back to class. But knowing Sabrina, and knowing Mrs Reed, this action in this situation would be very risky.

Tact requires an imagination to reconstruct meanings that bear down on a moment but are not contained within it. This imagination is pedagogical because it is concerned with the pedagogical good. The right and best action involves sensitively and pedagogically imagining the ways that an action could unravel. To orient ourselves to how a child finds themselves requires being aware of how a child has a past and a future that intersects with others. Thoughtful action requires taking into account the broader web of relationships and meanings that an action is connected to.

Situations of conflict

The actions of others give rise to conflicts. Here, by conflict, I do not mean the ways we have altercations with one another. The conflict I want to draw attention to is when there is a disagreement in the claims made upon us. A conflict situation involves us needing to make a choice. We are faced with several options about what to do; however, it is not possible to choose all the options. By deciding on one course of action, we are also not choosing another action. Yet both these options make a claim on us. Even though we neglect a claim, we still take this claim seriously and it has a weight in our ethical experience. Normally, we would try to fulfil this claim. We only forsake it because we find ourselves in a conflict situation where responding to this claim would be at the expense of fulfilling another claim. We are forced to choose between claims that both are significant for us.

Conflict situations can take a range of forms. First, the conflict can be between non-moral desires. We face banal conflicts, say, when we are dining out and we can't decide between the dessert options because they all sound delicious. The chocolate fondant is calling us, but so is the strawberry cheesecake. Such conflicts have little to no bearing on our ethical lives.

Second, the conflict can be between a moral desire and a non-moral desire. In the teacher's case, she desires to be productive during her non-contact period but also desires to help Sabrina. This conflict is easy to resolve. The teacher has to sacrifice her work. She can always catch up another time. This sacrifice does not detract from her sense of leading a good life.

When faced with first type of conflict, our decision is trivial; and when dealing with the second type of conflict, it is usually clear what we should do. However, there is a third type of conflict in which we must choose between two desires that make an ethical claim on us. It is this type of conflict that is relevant to my discussion.

In a situation of moral conflict, we are forced by circumstance to act in a way that is contrary to what we would normally see as good and admirable. We do wrong. This failing is not due to ignorance or a lapse in judgement—we are fully aware of what we are doing and why we are doing it. Our failing is because we find ourselves in a situation where in order to pursue one good in our life, we have to sacrifice another. Moral conflicts are also diverse in nature. Sometimes it is clear that one of the moral goods is more important than the other. In such a case, the decision is clear. Nevertheless, we cannot avoid feeling regret because we have had to forgo a moral good that makes a serious claim on our lives. But in other situations, the decision is not clear. The goods we must choose between hold a similar weight and significance in our lives. By having to choose one good, the other has been lost. But we do not want to lose either, because to do so threatens our sense of goodness.

In the situation that the teacher finds herself in, there are several claims being made on her. First, she has an obligation to her school. The school wants to maintain a positive environment for the students by having clear expectations for how they should behave. The school wants teachers to promote these expectations by consistently encouraging students to not cross any boundaries. Second, the teacher has a responsibility to support her colleagues. It is good to be collegial and not undermine our peers. And third, Sabrina also makes a claim on the teacher. The teacher has the pedagogical responsibility to do what is best and good for Sabrina. These three levels of relationships make serious claims on the teacher. In normal circumstances, she would want to have positive relationships with her students, colleagues and leaders. Also, these relational claims have an ethical quality. For example, the relationship that she has with her colleagues is not merely functional. How we treat other people is included in our sense of what it means to be a good person. Thus, we cannot just jettison our relationships with our colleagues in trying to lead a good life. We value having positive and supportive

relationships. Therefore, the teacher is in a situation where multiple claims are being made upon her. Furthermore, these claims all have a degree of ethical significance.

These three claims do not necessarily conflict with one another. Enforcing school rules can be concordant with pedagogical responsibility. Some children flourish in an environment where there are high expectations put on them. Similarly, having good relationships with our colleagues can also help us in our work with children. We can work together and mutually support one another in our efforts to do what is good and right in the lives of children.

But in this teacher's situation, the claims of the school and her colleague come into conflict with what would be good for Sabrina. Following the school rules meant sending Sabrina back to class. But in this particular situation, sending Sabrina back would disregard her sense that an injustice had been done to her. Furthermore, this could lead to a more dire situation for Sabrina. Additionally, supporting Mrs Reed would mean supporting the decision for Sabrina to receive a detention. But for the teacher, this is not what is good and appropriate for Sabrina. Sabrina had tried to do the right thing by coming to her instead of bunking. Also, Mrs Reed likely did not handle the situation very well and is, at the very least, partly responsible for Sabrina storming off. A detention, for a child like Sabrina, would not encourage her to improve her behaviour. Rather, it would further entrench her sense that she did not belong at school. What Mrs Reed is asking the teacher to do works against the pedagogical good.

It did not have to be this way. We could easily reimagine the teachers' situation in such a way that there is no conflict or the conflict is minimised. First, there is a possible world where Mrs Reed was able to act towards Sabrina with sensitivity and tact so that Sabrina felt at home in history class and Sabrina never got angry, never stormed out of class, and the teacher got through her non-contact period without disruption.

Second, there is a possible world where Sabrina does storm out but Mrs Reed agrees that she should not get a detention. Then, the teacher would have done what was right for Sabrina without being against her colleague. All the teacher would lose would be a small amount of productivity during her non-contact period.

Finally, there is a possible world in which Sabrina is a very different child. The teacher could send her back to class without worrying about the consequences. If she did end up getting a detention, she would quickly bounce back and carry on unimpacted.

However, none of these worlds is the one that the teacher finds herself in. In her world, Sabrina has run to her because she believes she has been treated unjustly by another teacher.

To do what she thinks is good and right for Sabrina, the teacher must put herself at odds with her colleague and the school.

Living with conflict

This problem of moral conflict has long been explored by thinkers. One of the oldest and most notable examples is in the tragic play, *Agamemnon*, by the ancient Greek poet Aeschylus. In the play, King Agamemnon is ordained by Zeus to go to war. Yet out at sea, the goddess Artemis quiets the winds, stranding the fleet of sailboats. Over time, the fleet rots. The men slowly go mad and begin to turn on one another. Then Calchas, the seer, tells Agamemnon that to appease Artemis, he must sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia. So Agamemnon is faced with a choice—leave the fleet to its demise, or murder his own daughter?:

> If I obey the goddess, and kill my daughter—
> What do I become?
> A monster to myself, to the whole world
> …
> This is how I shall live on in men's minds.
>
> But if I deny the goddess, then what happens?
> …
> Disaster. As if I deserted this army,
> Disguised, a traitor to my oath,
> Shorn of honour,
> Shunning men, shunned by men.
> (Aeschylus, 1999, p. 14f.)

There are no good options for Agamemnon. He either disregards the life of his daughter or his men. Neither option is without guilt.

The question facing Agamemnon is not only 'What shall I do?', but also, 'What do I become?'. With whatever choice he makes, he will lose his honour and dignity. He decides that he must become a monster and commit the crime of murdering his daughter in order to save his men and to fulfil Zeus' commands:

> This decision, fixed in a moment,
> Drags him,
> As at the heels of horses,
> Into that future
> Where the blood of his daughter
> Collects and waits for him
> In a pool.
> (Aeschylus, 1999, p. 16)

This decision cannot be reversed. The cut of the blade will never heal and the debt of his daughter's life can never be repaid. From this moment on, he will never cease to be the father

who sacrificed his own daughter. This decision is one that he will have to wear in front of others for the rest of his life.

Agamemnon's action will live on. Similarly, the decisions we make in pedagogical moments have a future. As I described above, tact involves an imagination about how our decisions in this moment will continue to have an influence in a child's life. They can also be significant for how we are seen—both by children and adults. What if the teacher insists that Mrs Reed should not punish Sabrina? Mrs Reed would then see the teacher as a colleague that does not support her, undermines her actions, and disobeys the rules. But with the alternative option, what would it mean to Sabrina if the teacher sides with Mrs Reed?

How would Sabrina see her? Would she still be the teacher that you can run to when you feel like you've been wronged? Or would she be just another teacher who sides with the rival forces of the system.

The conflict experienced by the teacher is not due to her own negligence. The conflict is not of her own making, but arises from forces outside of her. These forces come against her when all she is trying to do is what is good and right. This is also the situation that Agamemnon finds himself in. Agamemnon goes to war because he is being faithful to the decree of Zeus. This is not a fool's errand or a haughty crusade. His mission has been pronounced by the gods. The sail is thwarted, not by a lack of skill or preparation, but by the whims of Artemis. It is not in Agamemnon's power to foresee or prevent this obstacle. Agamemnon is a victim of contingent and external forces. The dilemma of abandoning Zeus and his men or sacrificing his daughter arises only because of what is beyond his control. Now, due to forces outside of his agency, there is no course he can take where he can remain innocent. He left to fight a noble war but faces the necessity of returning guilty.

In the case of the teacher, she finds herself in a messy situation without making the mess herself: Mrs Reed has the acrimonious relationship with Sabrina; Mrs Reed stubbornly insists that Sabrina should get a detention; Mrs Reed wants the teacher to join forces with her against Sabrina. All the teacher wants to do is what is good for Sabrina and to support her colleague. But this is impossible—not because of the teacher's own actions, but because of the actions of others.

Doing what is good and right does not safeguard us from conflict situations. In fact, endeavouring to do what is right can actually make us more vulnerable. Agamemnon ended up stranded at sea because he was obeying Zeus; and the teacher found herself in a situation of

conflict because Sabrina ran to her for help. The teacher had developed a safe and trusting relationship with Sabrina. If this was not the case, Sabrina would have just ran away from school and the teacher would not have been involved in the situation. Furthermore, the teacher went to Mrs Reed to try and do the right thing by her colleague. She wanted to advocate for Sabrina and to help mend the relationship between Mrs Reed and Sabrina. But in the end, all the teacher's efforts accomplished was to get her further tangled up in the mess.

In trying to do what is good for a child, we can find ourselves mired in circumstance. When Sabrina came and saw the teacher, she could have just said: "This is between you and Mrs Reed. You two need to sort this out". If she had said this, then she would not have had to deal with this messy situation. But she did not say this because she had a sense of pedagogical responsibility for Sabrina.

Pedagogy requires us to become involved in the lives of children. We come closer to them and accordingly share in their lives. But the lives of children are not clear and unproblematic. They live fallible lives that are caught up in the fallible lives of other adults. If Sabrina was a perfect student with perfect teachers, it would be easier to be involved in her life. But Sabrina is a complex child who has fraught relationships with flawed teachers. So, it is not easy for the teacher to be involved in Sabrina's life. But this difficulty also gives more reason for the teacher to get involved.

Our sense of what is good and right does not always lead us down paths where we can guarantee that we come out the other side clean and innocent. Taking goodness seriously puts us in situations where we have no winning options. The actions of others complicate our efforts to act pedagogically towards children. Even when we know what is good and right for a child, our choices end up getting tangled up with the deeds of others. Consequently, we can find ourselves in a situation of conflict we are not responsible for creating, yet cannot escape being implicated in.

Regrettable situations

A significant feature of conflict situations is our experience of regret. In trying to understand the significance of this emotion, we need to distinguish some of the different ways that we experience regret. One way to do so is by considering the object of regret. Our experience of regret can be directed first, towards a state of affairs, and second, towards our own actions.

In the first type of regret, we see a situation as undesirable. We think how much better things would be if they were otherwise. To experience this kind of regret, it is not necessary for us to be actively involved in the situation. We can feel this regret when we hear of how other people have become victims of unfortunate events. While these situations stimulate our regret, they do not threaten our sense of goodness.

However, our goodness is threatened when the object of regret is our own actions. When we experience regret about what we have done, we recognise ourselves as being involved in wrongdoing. We regret what we did because it goes against our sense of how we should act. Consequently, the experience of regret highlights how our goodness is at stake.

These two types of regret hold very different ethical significance. In the first case, we would not think of ourselves as culpable for the situation by merely being a spectator. On the other hand, when it is our own actions that are concerned, then our responsibility and culpability are directly at issue.

But there are also experiences that break down this distinction. Bernard Williams (1981, Ch. 2) gives the example of the lorry driver: The driver is travelling down the road when a child suddenly dashes out from behind a car straight in front of him. He slams on the brakes but cannot avoid hitting the child. When the truck halts to a stop, he leaps out the truck to find the child dead.

We could imagine this situation in a variety of ways that would change our understanding of the driver's culpability: the driver was speeding; he was texting on his phone when the accident happened; he was driving under the influence of alcohol. In each of these cases, we would rightly say that the driver should feel a moral regret about his actions as they contributed to the death of the child. But what if he was driving responsibly and the accident was completely unavoidable? We would say that it is appropriate for the driver to feel regret about the state of affairs. However, there is more at issue for the driver than just witnessing a tragic event.

The lorry driver is more than a spectator—he is a participant. No fault can be laid on him, but this does not avoid the fact that he was driving the truck that hit the child. So, the driver's experience will be very different from that of a passerby on the sidewalk who saw the accident from a distance. As a spectator, they would regret the accident they witnessed. But the driver would regret more than this because he is more directly involved. He is a player in events where a child lost their life. The driver is not guilty, but he experiences guilt.

If we are there on the scene, we would want to comfort the driver. “I saw what happened. There was nothing you could do. It was not your fault.” But while we would fully mean our words, we would be taken aback if the driver took them immediately to heart. If his sense of regret readily and easily moved towards one comparable to a mere spectator, we would think that there was something deficient in the driver’s ethical sense of self. While we would agree that he is no more culpable than a spectator, we would still expect him to be feeling something more ethically significant.

When the object of regret is our own actions, this includes both voluntary and involuntary actions. From the point of view of moral reasoning, we would want to say that only voluntary actions are relevant to determining the moral guilt of a person. If an action is involuntary, then we would not declare guilt, just like we wouldn’t ascribe guilt to a witness. However, this understanding is disconnected from our ethical experience where, as we have seen with the lorry driver, our actions are significant to us, irrespective of whether they are voluntary or involuntary. Just the fact that *I did it* has a significance in our ethical experience (Williams, 2011, p. 196). In the case of the lorry driver, the fact that *he* was driving the truck might not be relevant to his moral culpability; nevertheless, it is still a pressing aspect of his ethical experience.

Considering Sabrina’s situation, how should we understand the teacher’s experience as a matter of regret? At one level, this regret could be directed towards the state of affairs. The teacher could wish that things were otherwise—that Sabrina had a good relationship with Mrs Reed, or that Mrs Reed wanted to avoid disciplinary action. However, the complexity of this situation is that the teacher’s actions are also caught up in the situation. She is faced with the dilemma of either standing up for Sabrina and standing against Mrs Reed, or supporting Mrs Reed and going against what is good for Sabrina. Both of these options will involve her feeling remorse about *how she acts*. Even though this choice is forced upon her, it is still her choice. She is not responsible *for* creating this situation, but still finds herself responsible *in* the situation.

When we find ourselves in situations where wrongdoing exists on both sides, perhaps it is clear to us which option is the lesser of two evils. Nevertheless, choosing the lesser evil still involves renouncing a claim through our own action. We can experience regret, even if we make the morally right choice. In the teacher’s situation, let us suppose that she chooses to take a stand against Mrs Reed and defends Sabrina. They may have an argument and damage their relationship. So, the teacher feels regret about what happened. Yet, if she could go back and do

things again, she might do it the exact same way. The teacher wishes that the situation was different and wishes that she wasn't forced to take that action; nevertheless, she does not wish that she acted otherwise (cf. Williams, 1981, p. 31).

Similarly, Agamemnon might regret sacrificing his daughter, but he would also regret leaving his fleet to rot. The choice is not between one that involves regret and the other that has no regret. Regret awaits either way. While Agamemnon regrets sacrificing his daughter, it does not follow that he would wish his choice to be different.

Another dimension of pedagogy that complicates regret is the difficulty in distinguishing between spectator and participant. With the example of the lorry driver, this distinction is clear. But in many pedagogical situations, it is not always possible to clearly place ourselves as either purely a spectator or as a participant. In the pedagogical relationship, we cannot put ourselves on the sideline. As I described at the end of the last section, pedagogy requires us to get involved in children's lives. Particularly when we sense that there is the need for pedagogical action, there is a push towards being a participant in children's situations. While this can also be true in our relationships with adults, it is not as acute. For example, say the teacher's situation was not about a student who had an altercation with Mrs Reed, but another teacher. There might be less of an impetus to get involved. In fact, the teacher might determine it best to stay out of the quarrel. She might regret that her two colleagues are not getting along. Yet, they are grownups that need to sort out their own issues. However, since Sabrina is a child, the teacher cannot opt to stay out of the situation. Children need adults to intervene in their lives. To stay out of their lives is a pedagogical abandonment. Pedagogical situations implicate our actions, whether or not we are directly involved.

Furthermore, pedagogical responsibility encompasses not only our own isolated relationship with the child, but also how the child finds themselves in the world. As we saw with Claire (Chapter 9), teachers are responsible for creating a world for children that is safe and nurturing. If a child finds themselves in undesirable circumstances, it is not enough to regret that the situation is what it is. There is a demand to make things better. So, Sabrina's teacher cannot sit idly by and remain a mere spectator. Pedagogy calls us to become a participant, and becoming a participant is consequential to our ethical involvement, and hence, our ethical experience.

An essential dimension of pedagogy is this risk. Becoming involved in children's lives makes us vulnerable to experiences of regret, irrespective of our own character and actions.

The more seriously we take the pedagogical call, the deeper our regret can be. For me as a researcher, and for you as a reader, we can regret what happened to Sabrina. Hearing the teacher's story might prompt us to think about moments of regret in our own lives. But in regard to Sabrina's situation, our experience of regret can never be the same as the teacher's. Our regret can only be that of an observer. But for the teacher, she lived through the situation. This means that she cannot distance herself from her actions by seeing them as involuntary or forced by external situations of conflict. It is her actions and her relationships that are implicated in the situation. The pedagogical demand draws us into the lives of others, even though there is a potential ethical cost for entry. In this way, experiences of regret can indicate both our desire that things were better, as well as how we are deeply involved in the lives of others and take our pedagogical responsibility seriously.

Goodness in the face conflict

One might object to the ethical significance I have given to regret. If regret cannot distinguish between, on the one hand, voluntary actions of wrongdoing, from, on the other hand, actions that are either involuntary or forced upon us, then perhaps regret has very little to offer us as an ethical feeling and how we should understand ourselves. From this point of view, regret should only be felt towards voluntary actions of wrongdoing. In other cases, we should either attempt to expunge or ignore it in our ethical experience.

If we took this seriously, then what picture of the self emerges? We have an example with Agamemnon. Above, I described the agony of the decision that Agamemnon had to make. When facing the possibility of having to sacrifice his daughter, he laments the situation and sees himself as becoming a monster. However, when he makes the difficult decision to make the sacrifice, something changes in him. He puts aside his pain and agony, and resolves to take his daughter's life with an unwavering hand:

> Then he put on the yoke of Necessity
> His mind veered toward unholiness,
> His nerve turned cold.
> (Aiskhylos, 2009, p. 18).

The conflict of the situation for Agamemnon is gone. He has determined what the lesser of the two evils is, and hence knows the right decision. He moves himself forward with the confidence of this conviction. As Nussbaum (2001, p. 35) says, "Agamemnon now begins to cooperate inwardly with necessity, arranging his feelings to accord with his fortune". Agamemnon tells

himself that he has made the best decision possible. He has saved his men and salvaged Zeus' mission. As he does so, he distances himself from any regret about what he had to do.

However, for Agamemnon to avoid regret, he has to loosen himself from his attachment to Iphigenia. Agamemnon reduces her to a mere sacrificial goat in order to make it possible to complete the task. For this callousness, Queen Clytemnestra condemns Agamemnon:

> ...when this monster
> Butchered his own daughter on the block…
> He found it easier
> Than sacrificing one of his precious cattle
> To butcher my daughter—
> Like somebody else's goat.
> (Aeschylus, 1999, p. 71)

> So when Iphigenia is strung up in front of Agamemnon, it is no longer his daughter
> hanging there with pleading eyes:
> Her prayers and cries of *Father!* her young
> life
> they reckoned at zero
> (Aiskhylos, 2009, p. 18)

Iphigenia's life no longer makes a claim on Agamemnon. He makes his daughter nothing. Only then can he appreciate his actions with pride.

How should we understand the way Agamemnon faces this situation? Above, I described the position that we should avoid letting regret factor into our moral understanding. This is premised on the idea that regret is not helpful in identifying moral culpability. On these terms, when Agamemnon turns away from regret, his thinking is in accordance with the nature of the situation; he is making the difficult decision to save his men, so he should consider his action with pride and without regret. However, culpability is not the only dimension of ethical experience that is important. To feel pride, Agamemnon turns away not only from regret, but also the dimensions of the situation from which his regret arises. To release himself from regret, Agamemnon hardens and blinds himself to what he has done. Iphigenia needed to take on the form of a goat—a familial tie of great significance had to become a matter of indifference. Only then was it possible to avoid the pangs of regret. Therefore, when Agamemnon turns from regret, he does not do so through a deeper appreciation of the situation, but by avoiding the meaning and significance of his actions.

Consequently, there is something ethically deficient with how Agamemnon faces the situation. Just like we expect the lorry driver to experience remorse about his accident, we expect that the heaviness of Agamemnon's decision would weigh upon him. We can admit that Agamemnon faced an impossible decision, and we might even approve his decision and agree

that he had no choice but to sacrifice his daughter; however, we cannot approve of his indifference and eagerness. What is ethically deficient about Agamemnon is not his actions but his emotions. We want to reprove him, not for what he did, but for how he feels.

According to Martha Nussbaum (2001, Ch. 2), the important lesson from Agamemnon is that moral praiseworthiness and blame concerns not only how we act or do not act, but also with what we feel or do not feel. How we feel about a situation is directly tied to our capacity to understand and imagine the significance of the situation. The moral deficiency of Agamemnon is his failure to understand his situation. By trying to resolve the conflict, he has made his understanding too simple. The conflict arises because of his concern for his men and their mission, as well as the deep importance of the familial bonds that he has with his daughter. To be resolute in his action, he must diminish the importance of one of these involvements. He ignores the true nature of the conflict in the situation and distorts it into something simpler. His failure is hermeneutical.

We can blame Agamemnon, not for choosing to sacrifice his daughter, but for failing to feel the full significance that this action has. If Agamemnon had an appropriate ethical understanding and imagination of the situation, he would not be able to face the situation with cold nerves and free of pain; he would not disconnect and disassociate himself from his relationship with Iphagenia, but instead face up to the true horror and ethical cost of his actions. As Nussbuam (2001, p. 42) describes:

> Agamemnon would have to allow himself really to see his daughter, to see not just the sacrificial goat that he allows himself to see, but all that the Chorus sees: the trailing yellow robes, the prayers, the cries of 'Father', the look of accusation in the silent eyes. He would have to let himself remember, as they remember, her sweet voice, her dutiful and loving presence at his table.

For Agamemnon, truly understanding his situation would deepen the sting of regret. Even if his actions are necessary, there is still an ethical cost involved. Agamemnon tried to blind himself to this cost. By doing so, he was not being true to the situation. He was ignoring the significance of what he has done.

How we feel is relevant to our ethical lives. Consequently, our feelings are significant in our pedagogical relationships. Teachers constantly find themselves inserted into situations that are not of their making. The contexts and circumstances of action can make doing what is good and right difficult, sometimes even impossible. But while many of the features of pedagogical situations can be outside of a teacher's agency, they still have control of how they interpret the situation. A teacher needs to use their imagination to understand the pedagogical

significance that a moment has. Good teachers need to both act appropriately and feel appropriately.

At the same time, having the right feelings is not enough. Children need us to assist and serve them, not just use our interpretative abilities to furnish our inner emotional lives. Nevertheless, concrete pedagogical action requires us to be in touch with the lived significance of a moment through imagination and feeling.

The presence or absence of certain emotions can indicate how well a teacher understands a situation. Lived meaning is both thought and felt. If a teacher finds themselves in a regrettable situation, they should recognise this in both thought and feeling. Thus, if a teacher is in a regrettable situation, even if they recognise it as such, if they do not feel regret, then it cannot be said that they fully understand the meaning and significance of the moment.

Perhaps we could say that Mrs Reed does not understand the situation. In her mind, Sabrina is expected to act a certain way. Since Sabrina did not act appropriately, she needs to face the consequences dictated by the school rules. In Mrs Reed's understanding, the situation has been shorn of all its complexity. First, she is not sensitive to the complexity of Sabrina's life and her relationship with school. Second, Mrs Reed places the responsibility of Sabrina's actions squarely on Sabrina, without considering how her own actions contributed to, or failed to prevent, what happened. And third, the detention is seen as a solution without considering the specific significance this would have for Sabrina. In short, Mrs Reed is clear about what to do because she has simplified the situation to a matter of the school rules and expectations.

The other teacher does not have this same clarity. By being engaged in thought and feeling to the meaning of this situation, she is sensitive to the complexity and difficulty involved in supporting Sabrina. She imagines what giving Sabrina a detention could mean, recognising how much is at stake in the decision. The decision has a weight for the teacher that it does not have for Mrs Reed. The teacher is also sensitive to the importance of her relationships with her colleagues and the school. These involvements have a significance in her life. Acting against her colleagues and her school would go against who she is and who she wants to be. She wants to support her school and Mrs Reed. But she also wants to support Sabrina. Unfortunately, not all these options are available to her. She realises that she needs to make a choice, but she also feels the loss involved in having to make this choice. She feels this loss because she understands the situation.

Regret and uncertainty are not necessarily ethical weaknesses. They can arise because we deeply understand the various claims involved in a situation. We experience uncertainty because we take these conflicting claims seriously. Even when a particular claim impels us with a stronger force, we nevertheless hesitate at having to make a sacrifice. In the case where we feel certainty, our resolve is not necessarily due the strength of our convictions or our knowledge of what is right. Instead, we can be certain because we are blind or numb to the seriousness of what is involved in a situation. Like Agamemnon, moving from a state of uncertainty to certainty may not be a matter of gaining clarity, but of losing sight.

12. Different interpretations

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have described how others complicate our ability to be what we need to be for children. Our actions for a child can be ruined, not because of a failure on our part, but because of the failures of others. In this chapter, I further explore this issue. Here, I specifically focus on how issues arise from all of us trying to do what is good for a child, but having a different understanding of what is good.

I argue that the pedagogical good is not a grounding principle that we can appeal to in our actions. Instead, the pedagogical question, 'How are we to act in the lives of children?', is a question that needs interpretation. How we answer will depend on how we find ourselves in the world. But since how we find ourselves will be different from how someone else finds themselves, it is inevitable that there will be conflicts between our interpretations of the pedagogical good.

I explore this by looking at the experience of a teacher who is planning to provide extra support for Timothy, a student who is struggling academically. The teacher has a clear understanding about what she needs to do. However, her plans are opposed by Timothy's mother. I describe how the problem with this situation is not that one person is in the right and one person is in the wrong. Rather, both the teacher and the mother understand the situation differently because of their different values. While both the mother and the teacher share a sense of responsibility for Timothy, they do not share the same interpretation about how to fulfil that responsibility.

Immobilised responsibility

> At my school, I had the responsibility of helping transition children from our kindergarten into our primary school. Timothy was one of these students. Even though he was at the age where he needed to make this transition, I immediately saw many issues related to his learning and social behaviours. Timothy had processing issues, very poor fine motor skills, struggled to articulate words and sounds, and struggled to socialise appropriately with the other children. So, I called in his mother. I raised my concerns and discussed some different ways we could support Timothy.
>
> The mother said to me, "He is just like his older brother and father. They were put into 'special' classes and they hated it. I don't want Timothy to have the same experience."

> I tried to convince her that it was important to put something in place for Timothy. I showed her all the evidence of my concerns. I described how we could support Timothy by putting him in a small group situation with our special needs teacher. We could then set up a programme for him in which he could experience success.
>
> But the mum remained adamant. "I don't want Timothy to be part of this group. I don't want him to be labelled and feel different in any way from the other children. Timothy is not going to have any type of intervention or be withdrawn from class for any reason."
>
> In the end, I couldn't get Timothy's mum on board which meant that I couldn't put any programmes in place for him. That happened three years ago. Now, Timothy's needs have become even more concerning. When I see Timothy now I feel deflated and helpless about the situation. Seeing him reminds me that even though I wanted to try my best to support him, I wasn't able to do anything.

To be a teacher involves operating within the organisational structure of a school. There are a variety of roles and responsibilities that teachers are expected to perform as part of their work in schools. In the case of the teacher above, she has a specific role to help transition new students from the kindergarten to the school.

We could characterise this role as a professional and an organisational responsibility. In other words, performing the role is a matter of the teacher doing her job and supporting the functioning of the school. However, this does not capture the full significance of the teacher's responsibility. Her role involves looking after the needs of children. There is something qualitatively different about this responsibility compared to, say, the overseeing accounts, following operational procedures, or even looking after the welfare of employees. A teacher's responsibility is pedagogical in nature. Hence it has a distinctly personal, relational and ethical quality.

When the teacher tries to help Timothy transition to school, there is a certain ethical weight and significance to this responsibility. She is not just facilitating the smooth functioning of the school. She is trying to help a child by acting for the good of the child. She cares, so also worries (cf. van Manen, 2000, 2002a). In the case of Timothy, there are plenty of reasons to worry. Timothy's development is falling behind the other children. By starting school, he is going into a world that is going to make demands on him to read, listen, talk and write. The other children are ready to be a part of this world. But Timothy is not. The teacher fears that he will struggle and fall further and further behind. If she does not do something, Timothy will not have a positive experience at school. The teacher needs to intervene to improve what the future could be for Timothy. She sees that Timothy has needs and sees herself as being the one that needs to address those needs. She has the pedagogical responsibility to do what is good for Timothy and to improve his possibilities.

As a parent, the mother also has a pedagogical responsibility for Timothy. But the responsibility of a mother is not identical to that of a teacher. While the teacher's relationship with a student should be understood as *in loco parentis* (van Manen, 1991b), being a teacher is not the same as being a parent. There is a particular quality to the responsibility involved in being a parent. Our own children are an essential part of our self-identity and they give us an intense sense of meaning in our lives (Taylor, 1989, Part 3). When our children go to school, we do not yield responsibility at the school gates. Rather, we continue to care about what we think is good and right for our child. So, Timothy's mother cares about what happens to Timothy within the school boundaries. Her pedagogical concern extends into Timothy's life at school. The mother wants the school to do what she thinks is good and right for Timothy.

Both the teacher and the mother see themselves as having a pedagogical responsibility for Timothy—they both want to do what is good, right and best for him. Specifically, they share a concern that Timothy will be different from the other children and will struggle to fit in. But the teacher and mother imagine this issue quite differently.

For the teacher, without an intervention, Timothy will not be able to keep up with the progress of his peers. By failing to keep up, it will become increasingly difficult for him to participate in the learning at the same level as the other children. This difference will be made more acute over time if the school does not act. He will experience less success and could potentially feel like a failure when he compares himself to his classmates. So, the teacher wants to take Timothy out of the class into a small group situation. Here, he can experience success and receive specialised support that will accelerate his progress towards a level closer to the other children. For the teacher, putting a programme in place for Timothy is about alleviating Timothy's issues. The teacher does not want Timothy to be different.

The mother, also, does not want Timothy to be different. She shares this concern with the teacher. But for the mother, to withdraw Timothy from the classroom is what will make him different. By joining a group, Timothy will be seen as 'special', marked out from the rest of the class. Timothy will see himself as different from everyone else. The mother pushes against the teacher's plan because it will set Timothy apart from the other children. To avoid this, Timothy should not be withdrawn but allowed to stay with his class. He needs to do what is normal so he will not be seen as different.

Both the teacher and the mother want Timothy to fit in at school. It might be thought that this concurrence of pedagogical concern creates some common ground between them—

some possibility for dialogue. But this is not the case. Their pedagogical concerns become the grounds of discord and disagreement. They both want to help Timothy to fit in, but their ways of doing so directly oppose one another. If the teacher withdraws Timothy from class to help him catch up with his peers, the mother fears that he will be stigmatised for being part of a 'special group'. If the mother insists that he stays in the classroom, the teacher fears that he will fall further behind and become stigmatised by his lack of success. In this situation, best, good and right become contestable terms. What is good for the mother is not compatible with what is good for the teacher. Good exists on both sides. The pedagogical good becomes a site of conflict. The teacher tries to take responsibility for Timothy and makes plans. But the plans of the teacher do not harmonise with the plans of the mother. The possibility for one of them to take responsibility for Timothy corresponds with an impossibility for the other to take responsibility. They both want to do what is good; but they do not agree on what is good; therefore, they cannot both do what they think is good.

From where we stand

What we see in the examples of Timothy's teacher and mother is that their experience is constituted by the particular orientations they have. These orientations are figured through the various values and goods that they see as important. Furthermore, their orientations are also defined by the strength that these values have for them. For the teacher, the value of academic achievement has a strong influence. While the mother likely also has this value, it is not as strong for her as it is for the teacher. Instead, it is outweighed by the value of social inclusion. In this way, the experience of the teacher and the mother is structured according to both the values that they have, and how they evaluate the importance of these values.

It is important to stress that this does not mean that they are blinded by their values. Values are the way that we interpret and understand how we find ourselves in the world (Taylor, 1985a, Ch. 1). This act of interpretation is not a contingent feature of our lives but is a fundamental part of human experience. To be human is to find ourselves in a world that is meaningful to us. Interpretation is essential. To lead a life means that we have certain goods available to us. We evaluate, and then value to varying degrees, these goods. How we do so gives us a sense of who we are. As Taylor (1985a) describes: "Our identity is...defined by certain evaluations which are inseparable from ourselves as agents. Shorn of these we would cease to be ourselves" (p. 34). There is no vantage point available for the self where they can

experience the world apart from value. Our everyday experience is essentially defined by what is important to us.

These values should be distinguished from our mere desires. As humans, while we have desires, we do not just act according to whatever we feel. Rather, we make qualitative evaluations about our desires. Our goods are not just what we want but are what we see as having worth. We pursue those goods that we judge as being admirable, valuable, and worthwhile. Our self-identity involves an understanding of how we interpret possibilities for our life. Regarding these possibilities, we ask ourselves: Are they noble or base? Are they important or trivial? Are they worth pursuing or can they be neglected? If we give the former answers to aspects of our lives, then these are the goods that we affirm over and above our desires.

We see the world according to what we value. This also implicates our sense of where we stand in the world and how we move about in it. By affirming certain goods, we are also putting ourselves in relation with these goods. Goods exist not only for us to recognise their value, but to also realise in our lives. What is important to us shapes our commitments and goals. Our values both give shape to our terrain and help us see the path that we want to take to navigate the terrain. In this way, value is essential to understanding human action. When we act, we act intentionally towards a particular goal that we see as being worthwhile. We do what we do because we see it as a good thing to do (Raz, 1999, Ch. 3). The worth of these goals is what motivates us to pursue them (Taylor, 1989, Ch. 4).

For Timothy's teacher, her values shape how she interprets both the situation and how she should act. She sees that Timothy is struggling academically, so she needs to help support Timothy with his learning. Her observation and decision are not arbitrary. The teacher values helping students to learn—that is why she became a teacher. It is an important part of how she understands herself and the relationship she has with Timothy. Being able to help children like Timothy is connected to what the teacher sees as being worthwhile and important in her life. She has spent time studying the best ways to improve children's learning and has experience with setting up programmes for children that need extra support. This is terrain that she knows well. She knows what she needs to do.

However, the way that goods are configured in the teacher's life are not universal. What she values is shaped by what she has inherited from her own history and her position as a teacher working in a school. There are many different goods that are available to all of us. Our

identity involves interpreting which goods are relevant to us, and evaluating the strength that they have in our lives. The teacher finds herself in the world as a teacher, working in a school, and belonging to a community of educators. Finding herself in the world in this way also means that she interprets the goods in her life in a particular way. There is no guarantee that two different people will appreciate a situation in the same way. This would be true of two teachers, and would be even more acute when comparing two people from different walks of life. What is important to pursue is a matter of interpretation.

What is important to us shapes how we see the lives of children. There are many ways to interpret what is good for a child and what is valuable in their life. While we say that pedagogical action requires doing what is good for a child, the meaning of 'good' is not predefined. It is part of our responsibility to work out what the pedagogical good is. When we hear the pedagogical call, it is in one sense unequivocal: "Help me. Care for me". It speaks with a clarity that precedes interpretation. But as listeners and agents, we find ourselves in language and having to respond in language. To do what is good, we find ourselves needing to interpret what is good.

When we say that something is good, we are not referring to the property of goodness that is shared with all things we describe as good. When an object is good it is good in some way (Thomson, 1997). A cup is good for drinking; a pen is good for writing. Likewise, a withdrawal group is good for supporting learning; and keeping a child in class is good for belonging. Pedagogical action is orientated to the pedagogical good. But this does not mean that we have available to us a universal criterion for identifying if something is good for a child. Orienting to the pedagogical good involves reflecting on what we see as good and valuable in a child's life. Acting in the best interest of the child is an open interpretative process about what we consider to be valuable and important for a child.

In Timothy's situation, a disagreement arises in how the teacher and the mother see what is good for Timothy because they have a conflict of values. These different values arise from the different ways that the mother and the teacher find themselves in the world. Their notion of the pedagogical good is entangled in their personal involvements and histories. In the case of the mother, she sees the good in the light of her family history. Timothy's issues mirror those of his brother and father. In their upbringing, the adults in their lives decided that it was best to place them in an intervention. This was not a positive experience. The mother does not want this undesirable history to repeat itself. If she concedes to the teacher's plans, then she is allowing the cycle to continue with Timothy. Thus, the pedagogical good for the mother

requires taking action to break this cycle so that Timothy does not have to share the same experience as his brother and father.

Similarly, the pedagogical good for the teacher arises from how she finds herself in the world. She works in a school and is responsible for making sure the children start school in a way that sets them up for a successful and positive school journey. In the teacher's history, she would have seen many students not make a smooth transition to school, and consequently struggle in the progressive years at school. For the teacher, the pedagogical good is tied to ensuring that these struggles are mitigated. She does not want Timothy to transition poorly and follow down the undesirable path she has seen similar students follow. Just as with the mother, there is a cycle that the teacher wants to break.

In the case of both the mother and the teacher, their human involvements and entanglements are what give weight to the situation. The mother is a mother. The pedagogical good is understood through the relationship between mother and child. To act for the good of the child involves acting as a mother. Likewise, the pedagogical good for the teacher is tied up with her roles and responsibilities in the school. What is good cannot be separated from how they find themselves in the world and how they are involved in Timothy's life. One might object that these personal involvements muddy the waters—what the situation requires is to step back to be able to objectively conceive of the situation. But it is the very subjective and personal entanglements that make this situation meaningful and makes their actions possible in the first place. In this case, the entanglements of the mother and the teacher conflict with one another. Therefore, the very possibility of their actions becomes at the same time their impossibility.

The rivalry of goods

There are many goods available to us. However, there is no guarantee that we can combine all of these goods into a cohesive unity. There are times when the goods in our life conflict with one another. We saw an example of this in the Chapter 11: it was important for Sabrina's teacher to do what was good for Sabrina and to also value supportive relationships with her colleagues. These goods were both important parts of the teacher's life. In that situation, the goods clashed with one another. Thus, the teacher faced having to preserve one good while sacrificing another.

When faced with two conflicting goods, we need to choose between them. Sometimes this is not difficult since it is obvious which good we should take more seriously. Say I am working with a child on a maths problem when I see another child trip over and break their arm. Going to the aid of the injured child should be taken with more seriousness than finishing a maths problem. It is not difficult to make this judgement. However, many other conflicts seem to make claims upon us with similar levels of significance. What do we do in these situations?

The problem in these cases is that it is difficult to compare goods in terms of their significance. While in our experience, we can easily identify something as being significant, its significance is not quantifiable. When two different goods are important to us, it may elude us to say definitively that one is more or less significant than the other. This is because many goods are significant because of their qualitative value. For example, we value our friends and some friends are more important to us than others. But it would be distasteful to the nature of friendship to rank and rate our friends. We value our friends in differing and complicated ways that cannot be reduced to placing them all on a single scale. Similarly, many of the goods in our life are important to us in different and complex ways. They can't be easily compared with one another because we appreciate one thing in our life very differently to how we appreciate something else. Goods are incommensurable with one another. Hence, there is no standard by which we can resolve conflict between goods. While we talk about 'weighing our options', there is no unit by which we can weigh goods since there is no singular and common property by which we can compare them.

The goods of pedagogy can be varied and diverse. This diversity is what gives rich meaning to pedagogical situations. But it also creates the possibility for a conflict of goods. We cannot at all times pursue all the things that are good for a child. But having to choose between these goods is more a matter of interpretation than judging them according to an external standard.

Consequently, we experience uncertainty in trying to do what is good for a child. We find ourselves having to choose between goods. Yet each good is important because of its own qualitative significance. Any decision will be a matter of interpretation rather than a blunt calculation or appeal to a grounding principle. Even when we might use such a principle or calculation to make our decision, this will still be a matter of interpretation. When we use a calculation or principle, we are interpreting that this is the consideration that is relevant to the

situation. In this way, interpretation will always be more fundamental. But interpretations are never final. Therefore, our decisions can never reach a point of absolute certainty.

This issue becomes even more complicated when we consider situations where our vision of life crosses paths with the visions of others. If we cannot protect ourselves from conflicts arising with our own values, then it will also be impossible to avoid situations where our values come into conflict with the values of others. We are not all involved in the world in the same way—including in our involvements with children. In Timothy's case, both the mother and the teacher are concerned with what is good for him. But since they find themselves in the world in different ways, the different ways they interpret what is good cannot be reconciled.

Faced with this vulnerability to conflict, our initial impulse might be to overcome the problem by establishing some standard that is independent of our self-interpretations. Then, we would be able to take different aspects of our lives and find ways to compare them according to a single standard. In education, for example, we try and gain clarity about our decision making by ranking possible actions according to their effectiveness. However, while effectiveness is valuable, it does not capture the diversity and range of values that make up our lives with children. While it might help us achieve commensurability for our decision making, it does so by sacrificing the rich and complex qualities of teaching that are important and significant for us.

Likewise, moral philosophy has tried to overcome conflicts of values by reducing rightness to a single principle or calculation. But again, this ignores how issues in our ethical lives cannot be reduced to a single consideration (Swanton, 2003; Taylor, 1985b, Ch. 9). Detached reason and calculation do not bespeak the richness of what it is to be a human trying to live a meaningful and fulfilling life. Ethical experience is caught up with our sense of who we are, how we find ourselves, what we value and how we see the world. In this sense, to try and conceive of an ethics independent of human subjects is a contradiction. The ethical is not a homogenous domain that we can use as an arbitrator of our differences. Instead, it is a contestable ground made up of a multitude of warring concerns and issues. Our ethical experience involves trying to negotiate some peace between these concerns—both within ourselves, and with others.

This conflict is undesirable. We do not want to experience conflict, either within ourselves, or with other people. So, it is tempting to imagine a world in which it was possible

to resolve such conflicts. Available to us would be some grounding principle or procedure that we could use to arbitrate our differences. However, by making such appeals, we would be sacrificing the qualitative significance our goods have. While a world without conflict might be initially appealing, it would come at the cost of many aspects of our lives that are important and meaningful to us.

Is this a world that we would want to live in? Using the example of the teacher, let us imagine that she finds herself in the same situation, but in this world she can access some grounding principle to resolve her differences with the mother. It is determined that Timothy should stay in class. The teacher's plan to support Timothy's learning is overruled, so the teacher carries on her way without any regret. There is no longer any conflict. But would we want to live in a world where what is important to us can be so blithely discarded? Like Agamemnon turned from Iphigenia, can we readily sacrifice what is important to us? The teacher gets fulfilment out of being able to support struggling children with their learning. Her ability and capacity to help children in this way is an important part of what it means for her to live a meaningful life. To live without conflict would mean having to forego this part of her life as being important.

What it means to live well cannot be reduced to a single consideration. To do so involves considering the qualitative differences between our goods as irrelevant. Yet, the incommensurable qualities of goods are what makes them valuable to us in the first place. That is, the very qualities that create conflict are also the qualities that are attractive to us. We cannot both imagine all our conflicts as resolvable while also being faithful to what makes a human life worth living.

While conflict is undesirable, we should not think of conflict situations as problems that we need to find a solution to. Ethics is not maths. For Timothy's teacher and mother, there is no answer we can give them which would solve the problem. They both understand the situation in important and meaningful ways. Additionally, they both have valid concerns and fears. As the mother realises, it is a very real possibility that Timothy will be stigmatised if he is put into a 'special' group. And as the teacher identifies, it is a very real possibility that Timothy will suffer academically if he is not involved in an intervention. It is not the case that one of the parties has the wrong facts or misunderstands the situation. Neither is it the case that one perspective is unequivocally better than the other. Rather, they view the situation from different perspectives which cannot easily be reconciled with one another. It is not possible for one party to concede their point of view without doing violence to their own position. Even if

the teacher is open and understands the mother's position, it does not follow that she can then abandon her own perspective and still be consistent with herself. Simple solutions require unambiguous agreement on the terms of the argument. But since the disagreement in this situation eventuates because the mother and teacher both validly conceive the situation differently, there is no simple solution.

The incommensurability of their positions also makes dialogue difficult. Their individual perspectives are coherent—the decided courses of action logically follow from their interpretation of the situation. Yet since their interpretations differ from one another, the logic of one perspective is lost when translated to the perspective of the other. For example, the teacher collects evidence, hoping that this can help sway the mother. However, the evidence has no weight in the argument for the mother. What constitutes evidence for the teacher is evoked by the particular way that she interprets the situation. Since the mother does not share this meaning, the evidence cannot speak to her. In order to convince someone of your own position, there needs to be some agreement on the premises of the argument. But in this case, the mother and teacher employ different premises. Thus, their discussions with one another remain a matter of pure assertion and counter-assertion (cf. MacIntyre, 1985, Ch. 2), never reaching the level of productive dialogue.

The mother and the teacher are unable to resolve and move beyond their disagreement. There is no dialectical movement in the discussion where they reach a vantage point that respects both their perspectives. To put it another way, we cannot combine the concerns of the mother with the concerns of the teacher to move towards a picture of the whole child. The child, understood as a coherent and harmonious whole, exists only as an abstracted ideal. Timothy, by contrast, exists for the mother and the teacher as a concentration of incommensurable goods that conflict with one another. As adults in Timothy's life, his mother and teacher find themselves needing to choose between these goods but disagreeing how to do so. Since their disagreement is about what is good for Timothy, to compromise would involve conceding their sense of ethical and pedagogical responsibility. What is at stake for both the teacher and the mother is how they are involved in Timothy's life and are responsible for him. The mother can only give in to the teacher's sense of the good by doing harm to her own. Likewise, when the teacher gives in to the mother's wishes, she is left feeling immobilised.

The pain of inaction

The consequence of the teacher's inability to change the mother's mind is an inability to act. The teacher wants to take action in order to help Timothy. And she has a plan—she knows what to do. The teacher has the knowledge and the capacity to put interventions in place that she believes will make a difference for Timothy. She knows this terrain and how to traverse it. But her ability to act depends on the mother supporting her actions. Without the mother's consent, the teacher cannot do anything. But since the teacher was unable to change the mother's mind, she was unable to put Timothy in a small group; she was unable to help Timothy; she was unable to take responsibility. The teacher's inability to establish a productive dialogue with the mother directly impedes her ability to pedagogically respond to Timothy. She sees Timothy in his vulnerability and his need. The situation demands that the teacher respond. But despite the teacher feeling like she should and can respond, she has to step back. The terrain has been blocked off and her plans are left dormant. The teacher goes from feeling confident and optimistic, to feeling helpless and deflated.

Even though the teacher is made to step back from the situation, it does not follow that the teacher has become ethically removed. Her ethical experience is still entangled in Timothy's life. This is despite being prevented from acting due to factors outside of her own volition and action. While respecting the mother's wishes might be the right thing to do, this does not diminish the teacher's sense that to intervene for Timothy is also the right thing to do. The mother's decision does not allay the weight of the pedagogical demand made on the teacher. She still feels responsible and compelled to act. The mother's decision does not change this aspect of the teacher's lived reality. So, the teacher is left not being able to do anything, but still responsible.

We might say that the teacher 'ought' to respect the mother's wishes. Nevertheless, this 'ought' does not mark the boundaries of what is ethically significant. Ethical experience is not confined to our moral obligations to others and what we ought to do. More so, ethics is concerned with what we value, admire and love. Selfhood and ethics are deeply intertwined with one another—we cannot understand one without the other (Taylor, 1989). So, when the teacher finds herself faced with Timothy's situation, the good thing to do cannot be separated from her sense of who she is. She is a teacher who helps struggling students. This is not just what she does to get a pay check at the end of the day. It is an important part of how she understands herself and what is important in her life. Being able to help Timothy is not just

about fulfilling her professional responsibilities. It is a part of what it means to live a meaningful and fulfilling life.

Our values and the goods constitute a vision of life. This vision is not just a matter of taste or personal preference but is an ethical orientation. The ethical question is not just, 'What is the right thing to do', but the broader consideration of 'What is it good to be?' (Higgins, 2011, Ch. 1; Taylor, 1989; Williams, 2011, Ch. 1). This latter question cannot retreat into an abstract reflection on principles and calculations but deals with our personal entanglements and projects in the world. Whereas the former question can have a simple answer, the latter question is far more difficult and faces irrecusable conflicts between various demands. According to Taylor, (1994a): "If this conflict is not felt, it is because our sympathies or horizons are too narrow, or we have been too easily satisfied with pseudo-solutions" (p. 213). We experience conflict because ethics is not first about solving problems, but more fundamentally about trying to lead a life.

Since ethics cannot be separated from the question of identity, the teacher's sense of what it means to be a good teacher is an ethical orientation. Likewise, the mother's sense of what it means to be a good parent is an ethical orientation. The teacher's inability to support Timothy is not a trivial frustration. The mother is not only stopping the teacher from doing her job—she is also stopping her from enacting what makes being a teacher worthwhile. The teacher's ethical agency not only concerns what she can and ought to do but is connected with her being a self who leads a life. The teacher cannot just move on from the situation, comforting herself by saying, 'I did what I could do'. Instead, the teacher experiences a deeply personal loss.

The teacher must abandon her plans to support Timothy. While this might be the right and necessary thing to do, she feels deflated. All she can do is watch from a distance, seeing her fears for Timothy realized. The teacher still sees that Timothy is struggling yet finds herself not doing anything to help.

The goods that are important to us are also how we judge ourselves. We pursue them because they are what we admire. Conversely, if we fail to realise these goods in our lives, this has repercussions for how we see ourselves. If we do not possess what is admirable, then we have failed to live up to the vision that we have for our life. Since our vision of life is an ethical orientation, then failing to realise this vision is an ethical disappointment. The goods that we value help us interpret what it means to live a good life; they also reveal to us how we have

fallen short. This is why we can experience ethical disappointment even when we have done what we ‘ought’.

13. Being-seen

Introduction

In the previous four chapters, three important features of ethical uncertainty have emerged. First, our actions are involved in a web of relationships with finite and fallible people. Second, these relationships are important to us, but they can also produce conflict. And third, this conflict arises because self-interpretation is both an essential part of what it means to lead a human life, as well as a point of difference and conflict with others. In this chapter, these three themes interact with one another through the phenomenon of being-seen.

I explore what it means to be-seen through the anecdote of a teacher who hesitates to comfort her student, Julianna, because of the judging glare of the imaginary other. The teacher is uncertain about what she should do. I argue that this uncertainty is not primarily due to being unable to justify the rightness or wrongness of her action. Rather, it is more to do with her sense of what she owes those people that she finds herself living alongside.

Next, I connect this phenomenon of being-seen with hermeneutical descriptions of shame. I will contend that being-seen is ethically significant because it provides a hermeneutical provocation. The experience of being-seen helps us to articulate, and consequently re-evaluate, our understandings of who we are and how we should live alongside students.

The ethical significance of being-seen

> It was the last school day of the year. I had said goodbye to the class and started tidying up the papers on my desk. The hubbub of laughter and shouting began to fade as the children headed away towards the school gate. I heard the door open and Julianna, one of my students, came in.
>
> "Everything alright Jules?" I said.
>
> She timidly replied, "I just wanted to say goodbye Miss."
>
> "See ya, Jules," I said. "Have a great summer."
>
> I continued to shuffle through the papers. Then I realised that Julianna hadn't moved. I looked up and saw that she was crying. A part of me wanted to race up to her and give her a hug. But I hesitated. It was quiet outside now and all the windows and blinds had been shut. Julianna and I were alone. I thought, what if I went to give her a hug and someone walked into the room? It would not look good.
>
> "Goodbye," I said from behind my desk.

Julianna turned and left.

Our lives with children are filled with moments when we become distracted, leading us to not notice something significant. Here, the teacher's attention turns to the disarray of papers on her desk, and she starts putting them in order. But in this momentary preoccupation she does not see that there is something more significant in front of her that warrants attention. The teacher dismisses Julianna as just saying goodbye—a trivial and customary way to part company. She fails to notice that this was not that sort of goodbye. Julianna had not gone on her way. Instead, she stood there, waiting for something from the teacher.

In our pedagogical relationships, children look to us to provide some moment of contact. In my own life, I have experienced this demand for contact while encouraging my son to go to sleep by himself in his room.

My son calls out to me. "Dad, I'm lonely."

I come into his room. "It's okay," I say. "I'm just down the corridor in my room. You know where I am."

"No Dad," he says, unsatisfied. "I'm lonely."

I try to reassure him. "I'll come and check on you now and then."

"No dad," he says, "come and check on me now and now."

Sometimes all that children wait for is a small moment of contact—our simple presence, a gentle touch, or a look that tells them that they have been seen and recognised in some way. Other times, children wait for us to intervene in their lives in particular ways. When, as adults, we find ourselves in such situations, we realise that these moments demand that we respond in some way. We can find ourselves attending to the child, or perhaps failing to make the contact the child seeks.

When the teacher looks up from her papers, she realises that this is one of these moments. Julianna is standing in the doorway, crying, waiting for the teacher to respond in some way. The teacher feels compelled to race up to her and give her a hug. What is it that compels the teacher? In the first instance, it is not an obligation to either a moral principle or professional code; rather, it is the lived, personal, relational significance of the situation. What compels the teacher is seeing Julianna waiting in the doorway, looking to the teacher for some type of comfort. The relationality and personal involvements that underpin our lives are fundamental to understanding why we act the way that we do, including our ethical decisions to try and do the right thing.

While it might be important to deliberate and to base our actions on justified beliefs, this type of 'rational action' does not characterize why we usually do what we do. Even when we find ourselves in situations trying to do the right thing, what has force in these situations is usually not a rational principle. Alphonso Lingis (2003) says: "To insert a reasoning between that imperative and my action is only to dally and hold up the urgency for what I have to do" (p. 200). For the teacher, seeing Julianna's tear-filled eyes is, to borrow Williams' (1981) phrase, "more convincing as a reason than any reason which might be advanced for its being a reason" (p. 81).

But the teacher does not respond. She hesitates because of the possibility of another look. The teacher says to herself: "What if I went to give her a hug and someone walked into the room? It would not look good". The demand to respond to Julianna comes into conflict with another demand. It is noteworthy how the teacher describes this second demand. She does not recall any institutional guidelines or professional obligations. Rather, the demand arises from the possibility of 'being-seen' by another. What has a force is how another person will see her.

Hence, there are similarities between the two conflicting demands. Both are given power due to their relational significance. In the first case, the teacher wants to act because she finds herself faced with a particular child who in some way needs the teacher to act in her life. In the second case, the teacher hesitates because of the very real possibility that a colleague or a parent might walk into the room and see the teacher in a negative light.

In this second case, the other is only an imaginary other and is not actually present. But the imaginary other imposes itself onto the self through its very absence. In its absence, they may exist in the abstract since it is not necessarily a particular person. Yet, the imaginary other takes a hold of the teacher because it looms as the very real possibility that it will manifest as a particular person that will see the teacher with particular eyes.

The teacher cares about how others see her. This is not just vanity. She cares because others are a significant part of the teacher's involvements and projects in the world. She sees herself as a teacher. This is an important part of her self-identity. But being a teacher is not just something that we do in isolation. It is something that is done in the presence of others and with others. Our relationships with others help us to reinforce our sense of identity. To sustain one's sense of being a teacher involves having others see us accordingly. In this moment with Julianna, the teacher feels that her identity could be possibly threatened by her colleagues

interpreting her actions as inappropriate. This is not just a problem of the teacher being judged unfavourably by someone. Furthermore, this judgement would disrupt the teacher's sense of being in the world as a teacher.

This is also true in the relationship that the teacher has with Julianna. When Julianna looks at her, the teacher realises that she is being-seen as someone who has a responsibility to care. Failing to respond would also disrupt the teacher's sense of identity as a teacher.

In this situation, the teacher is seen from two sides—on the one side by Julianna, and on the other side by the imaginary other. The complication for the teacher is that these two looks conflict with one another. Being-seen by Julianna involves a demand to move closer and give her a hug; but the condemnation of being-seen by the imaginary other prohibits this action. The teacher has to choose between responding to Julianna or conceding to the approval of the imaginary other.

While this situation does involve a conflict of values, it can also be understood as a conflict of relationships. It is the teacher's social relationality that creates her sense of obligation to both Julianna and to the profession. She experiences an uncertainty about what to do. But her uncertainty is not so much due to being unable to justify the rightness or wrongness of her action. More so, it is to do with her sense of what she owes those people that she finds herself living alongside.

Ultimately, this uncertainty causes the teacher to fail to respond to Julianna. From behind her desk, the teacher says goodbye to Julianna. The teacher is protecting a part of herself. But in the process, she is sacrificing another part of herself. Julianna was struggling with some emotional pain. She came back to the class, we think, searching for some kind of intimate moment with her teacher. But she left without receiving anything. Now, the teacher needs to continue with the knowledge of what Julianna saw in that moment—a distant figure standing aloof behind a desk.

Moving from a phenomenology of shame towards a hermeneutics of shame

To further understand this situation, I want to consider it in light of phenomenological discussions of shame. I will work towards a hermeneutical understanding by going through the contributions of Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas and Simone de Beauvoir.

Probably the most famous discussion of shame is Sartre's (1984, § 3.1.4) account of the peeping Tom. Sartre asks us to imagine that we are in a hallway crouching in front of an apartment door (that belongs, perhaps, to an ex-lover). We have been brought here by jealousy or a vulgar curiosity. We place our ear against the door to hear what's being said inside, and try to catch a glimpse of what's going on through the keyhole. We are fully absorbed in trying to figure out what is happening on the other side of the door. Our consciousness is directed in a direction away from us. But then in the hallway, we hear the creak of floorboards. We turn around. Someone is there, looking at us in our compromised position. I am no longer directed towards what's going on in the apartment. I realise that I am the object of someone else's gaze. I am not just someone that is seeing, but something that can be seen. I have an appearance for an other who is not me.

What makes this experience important is how it discloses how there are aspects of our existence that are not directly accessible to us. Our being cannot be completely apprehended by consciousness. Instead, we have an appearance that is appreciated by the other—we have a being-for-others. As Sartre (1984, p. 364) says, "I am ashamed *of* myself *before* the Other". Shame is structured through a relation between me, myself and the other. *I* am ashamed of *myself*; but this *myself* is only accessible to *me* through the *other*. In shame, I am made an object. To be made an object assumes that there is another person that can look at us and objectify us. For Sartre, this indicates that our existence is structured in a way that assumes the existence of others. Furthermore, by realising that we are objects for others questions the freedom that we have as a subject. I am myself only so much as I am an object to the other. Who I am escapes me.

There is a strong parallel between Sartre's description of shame and the experience of Julianna's teacher. The teacher realises that she is not only a subject absorbed in her actions. Seeing Julianna standing in the doorway, the teacher's attention is directed to Julianna. This situation may not be as morally questionable as the voyeurism of looking through a keyhole, but the structure of the experience is the same. The teacher is drawn forward to become absorbed in the situation. Julianna is there for the teacher to direct her consciousness and actions towards. But the teacher is interrupted by the sense of the gaze of another. Just like Sartre's situation, shame does not depend on the actual physical presence of someone. The peeping Tom might have turned around and seen that there is no one there. Nevertheless, he experiences shame because of the possibility that someone could have been there. Similarly with the teacher, she experiences 'a look', not because someone is standing there, but because

someone could be watching. The teacher might hear footsteps approaching, the creak of a door as someone enters the room. But even silence makes the teacher self-conscious. The absence of noise ominously intrudes on the teacher's imagination as the possibility that someone is watching without her noticing. Therefore, the imaginary other questions the teacher's freedom. Her actions are not just something that she performs as a subject, but also have an appearance in the world that is apprehended by the other. The teacher feels uncertain about how her actions could be seen.

The second understanding of shame I want to consider is presented by Levinas (1991b. See especially § 1.C). There are some similarities between Sartre and Levinas. For both of them, the encounter with the other brings into question our freedom. But whereas Sartre sees this as a source of instability and antagonism in our human relationships, for Levinas, it indicates the ethical responsibility that we have towards the other.

To start, the self has a freedom in which the world is there for our enjoyment. But when we encounter the other, we realise that the world is not there only for us, but is shared. By enjoying the world, we are taking away from the other. Our freedom then becomes our shame. When the other looks at us, we see their face (see Waldenfels, 2002). We realise that there exists someone else in this world who has needs that are not my needs. Therefore, to look at the face is not about seeing two eyes, a nose and mouth (Levinas, 1985, p. 85), but about hearing a plea: "care for me; be responsible for me". For Levinas, shame discloses the fundamental ethical nature of the relationship that we have with the other.

In the case of the teacher, we see this ethical relationality in terms of how she sees Julianna. To start, the teacher is egotistically going about her tasks. "*I* tidy up the papers on my desk", "*I* see Julianna", "*I* say goodbye". But then this *I* is interrupted and the self becomes a *me*. "Julianna is looking to *me*". The teacher is no longer free to act in her self interest, but is taken hostage by a responsibility to care for a life other than her own. In this moment, the teacher discovers that she is 'the one-for-the-other' (Bernasconi, 2002). The teacher is meant to be there for Julianna.

The ethical meaning of this moment is amplified by Julianna's tears. Julianna is revealed as vulnerable. And this vulnerability exerts a power over the teacher. The child's face speaks to her: "Here I am. What are you going to do?" The face is present as an appeal and a plea. It exposes the teacher as responsible. The teacher can no longer blissfully carry on filing her papers without consequence. Her freedom has been brought into question by shame.

Sartre and Levinas provide important insights about shame. However, when compared to Simone de Beauvoir's (2011) understanding of shame, both of their accounts fall into the same trap (Guenther, 2011). When positing experiences of shame, Sartre and Levinas both assume something akin to a pure subject. The subject that crouches against the door or encounters the face of the other, are both described in a way that is formless, contentless, and without any concrete particularity. We do not get a sense that this subject has any baggage that the world has made it carry. But for Beauvoir, subjects that experience shame have been formed by various social relations and experiences. These relations make it possible that they could even find themselves in situations where shame could arise. Sartre and Levinas might say that they describe shame in this way because they want to demonstrate the general structures of subjectivity that are not dependent on contingencies. However, for Beauvoir, ignoring these contingencies is less to do with philosophising from the point of view of a pure subject, but more about philosophising as a male subject. As de Beauvoir (2011, p. 650) asserts: "There is a whole region of human experience that the male deliberately chooses to ignore because he fails to *think* it: this experience, the woman *lives* it". Reflecting on the self as a pure subject is a luxury usually reserved for white men.

So, when Beauvoir discusses shame, she describes this phenomenon in a way that is directly connected to her being a woman. De Beauvoir (2011) relays the story of a girl describing an incident from her childhood: "A man, sniggering, made a comment about my fat calves. The next day my mother made me wear stockings and lengthen my skirt, but I will never forget the shock I suddenly felt in seeing myself *seen*" (p. 321). In this experience, we see how the shame this girl experienced cannot be separated from the particular way that she is seen. The look is not directed merely to a self, but to the fleshy body that the self inhabits. The girl finds that this body is undergoing changes. She is not willing these changes; her body is developing outside of her control. In this sense, her body betrays her. It is not an instrument of clear self-expression. Instead, it becomes something that she needs to hide to avoid the stares of others.

The body is a site of meaning. It is not just a physical object, but represents how we both understand the world and how the world understands us. For de Beauvoir (2011), "the body is not a thing, it is a situation" (p. 46). On the surface, the girl's body is inscribed with a particular social significance. This meaning is imposed on the body from the outside. Even though her body escapes her, the girl is tied to this body, and so is tied to the meaning that others give to it. The girl does not appear in the world by presenting herself. Instead, she learns

what it means to be a woman. Her emergence unfolds as a discovery about how she is seen by others.

This is important for our current discussion because it indicates how shame is inextricably tied to our being in the world. When we are seen by the other, we are seen in our body that is situated in a particular space, at a particular time, and in a particular context. The body that the other gazes at is an interface of historical, cultural, and political meaning. Furthermore, the other sees me with particular eyes. Their gaze, too, is conditioned by social meaning. Shame is an experience of meaning.

This is also the case for the teacher. The experience of 'being-seen' points towards questions of meaning. How does Julianna see me? How does the imaginary other see me? How do I see myself? And, how are these questions mediated through the meanings that constitute culture, space and history?

When we are seen by others, we are seen *as* something. In the case of the girl, she is seen in her body *as* a girl. Likewise with the teacher, when she is seen by either Julianna or the imaginary other, she is being-seen *as* a teacher. In regular acts of seeing, we always see in a meaningful way. We do not experience the world as a flood of sensory stimuli, but we understand something-*as*-something. A door is given to us in experience *as* a door; a desk is given to us *as* a desk. Seeing relies on an underlying interpretation of the world. When we are seen by others, we understand that how we are seen relies on interpretation. We are appreciated by the other in a particular and meaningful way. Therefore, shame is hermeneutical.

Interpreting our shame

Interpretation is essential to shame. Our experiences of shame assume that we find ourselves in a situation that can be understood, by others or ourselves, in a way that threatens our dignity. Following the *as*-structure I described above, we can follow Charles Taylor (1985a, p. 47) by saying, "to experience shame is to experience some object or situation as shameful". This statement may seem overly obvious. But it indicates three important features of shame.

First, shame involves *recognising* a situation as shameful. It is possible that a person could be caught in a situation that we all agree is shameful, yet not feel shame. This might be because of ignorance. A person may not be aware of certain features of the situation that make it shameful. Due to this lack of understanding, they do not feel shame. For example, in the penultimate scene of the film, *Dangerous Liaisons* (Frears, 1988), Glenn Close's character,

Merteuil, is at the opera in her box. She steps forward expecting to receive adulation from the crowd and her sycophants. However, what she does not realise is that the whole crowd knows how she has been depravedly scheming revenge against her ex-lover, causing the ruin of many lives and reputations. As she leans forward and smiles, a silence falls over the hall. The crowd stare at her and then begin to boo. Merteuil then realises that everyone knows what she has done and she stumbles away in shame. In this scene, the crowd recognises before Merteuil that this situation is shameful. To begin, she is unaware and ignorant. It is only once she realises that people know what she has done that she feels shame. Without this realisation, she may not have felt shame. Similarly, when we find ourselves in a shameful situation, it is not that we experience the emotion of shame and then try to figure out why we feel this way. Rather, in shame we already have a certain recognition about an object or situation. This recognition may only be partial. As Merteuil looked into the crowd, she may have been confused about why people were looking at her incredulously. She would have partially begun to understand that there was something shameful about this situation. Just the experience of being seen in this way would have entailed some initial shame. The full thrust of the shame hits her when she realises it is because people know. By fully recognising why this situation is shameful, she then experiences the full weight of the shamefulness of the moment. Any experience of shame involves recognition—even if this recognition is incomplete.

By saying that shame involves being aware that a situation is shameful, we are also saying that this recognition is a recognition *of something*. So, a second important structure of shame is that it identifies a particular feature of the situation that makes it shameful. For Merteuil, it is her insidious scheming; for Sartre's peeping Tom, it is the act of spying through a keyhole; and in Beauvoir's example, it is the girl's 'fat calves'. Shame points this feature out, bringing it to the fore of our experience and making it explicit. Experiencing shame involves being aware of the particular properties of the situation that make it shameful.

Shame recognises properties of a situation as shameful. These final words, 'as shameful', indicate a third important structure of shame. Shame is a *judgement* about our situation. For Taylor (1985a, Ch. 2), emotions are not merely attached to, or associated with, certain types of objects. They involve a judgement about objects. Joy judges something as beautiful; fear judges something as threatening; and shame judges something as shameful. This judgement is not about discerning objective properties of a situation. The judgement implicates our sense of self in the situation. In the experience of shame, our dignity and worth are threatened. Such a threat can only be understood in relation to our values and desires. What is

dignified or undignified involves a value judgement. The peeping Tom would not feel shame if he was a repairman trying to fix the lock. Being-seen in this way would not threaten his sense of self-worth. Rather, he feels shame because he knows that spying on his ex-lover is not a dignified way to act. He does not desire others to see him engaged in these compromised actions because it is incongruent with the values that constitute his sense of self. In making this judgement, shame interprets the significance that the situation has for the self.

These three features can be recognised in the teacher's experience of being-seen—by both Julianna and the invisible other. In the case of being-seen by Julianna, the teacher feels shame because she does not take action. The teacher *recognises* that this moment has the *property* of her inaction. The moment demanded that she make contact with Julianna; instead, she remained at a distance. This has significance because the teacher *values* providing comfort to a child that is upset. Since she does not provide this comfort, a dissonance is created between her self-understanding and how she actually acts in the moment. The teacher judges that her inaction threatens her dignity, providing the basis for her shame. This recognition cannot be a matter of indifference. She is implicated in this moment because she is the one who did not take pedagogical action. This failure is shameful; therefore, the teacher feels shame.

Being-seen by the invisible other also demonstrates this structure—however, the content of the experience is different. The object of her shame is the (imagined) hug. If people saw this hug, they could think that the teacher was being inappropriate. The teacher values what her colleagues think of her. If they viewed her dubiously, this would threaten her worth as a teacher. Thus, a hug would have the significance of being shameful. To avoid this shame, the teacher does not hug Julianna.

The teacher's experience of being-seen points to the necessity of meaning to understand action. Additionally, being-seen indicates the active role that the subject plays in enacting, engaging, or questioning this meaning. How the subject places herself in relation to this meaning demonstrates her self-understanding. As Taylor (1985a, Ch. 2) puts it, we are 'self-interpreting animals'. The experience of shame discloses the ways that we interpret who we are. How we feel about the situation points to what we feel as important; and how we decide to act involves positioning ourselves in relation to those values. So, the experience of shame is an interpretation of who we are. This interpretation is essential to shame. We can only experience shame as a subject that has a self-understanding, and we can only understand something as shameful because it threatens that self-understanding. Shame is an emotion that can only be experienced by the kind of subject that interprets itself.

The necessity of interpretation is also indicated by the way that the two ways of being-seen are conflicting. When seen by Julianna, a hug is dignified; but when seen by the imaginary other, a hug is shameful. The possibility of this conflict arises because 'shameful' is not an objective property of this moment. The hug requires interpretation. Experiencing conflict in how we are seen indicates that we cannot understand the emotion of shame independently of how we understand and interpret ourselves.

Since the teacher's self-interpretations come into conflict with one another, she has to choose between two competing shames. Her self-interpretation requires not only understanding what matters to her, but also what matters more or less. There are many goods that we desire and pursue. But, they are not all equal. Human life involves both pursuing certain goods, as well as seeing some goods as more worthy than others (Laitinen, 2008; Taylor, 1985a, Ch. 1). Self-interpretation involves an understanding of our goods as existing on a hierarchy. This hierarchy is not fixed, but can be continually contested and revised.

Being interpreted by others

Self-interpretation demonstrates the active role that the subject has in their self-understanding. Furthermore, our self-interpretations are not created in isolation. They are drawn from the meanings and understanding made available to us in our cultural context. Self-interpretation happens in the presence of others. Our being is fundamentally a being-with (Heidegger, 1962, § 26). In our everyday lives, we find ourselves as one among others. My self-understanding is about having a world that is shared. As Taylor (1994b) says, "discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others" (p. 34). Any self-interpretation I have cannot occur independently to the other people that make up the social world I belong to.

Even when we are alone, we cannot escape our being-with. In the quote above, Taylor hints at how even our internal dialogues have a social character. When we talk to ourselves, we are in a sense not actually talking with ourselves. Our conversation is propelled forward by meanings that evoke my social existence and cannot be claimed as my own.

We see this at play in the teacher's description of the imaginary other. Even though the teacher is alone with Julianna, they are not really alone. The meaning of the situation cannot be disconnected from the social world that the teacher is a part of. This world bears upon the situation. The closed windows and curtains only make its presence more conspicuous. Thus,

how the teacher understands herself in this situation involves a dialogue with others. “I thought, what if I went to give her a hug and someone walked into the room? It would not look good.” The teacher is having an internal conversation with someone. She imagines what the other person would say to her and what they would think about what she is doing. In that moment, the teacher would be playing in her head all the possible things that one of her colleagues might say. Meanwhile, Julianna is standing there—her face adding to the noise with her pleas for comfort. Through this cacophony of voices, the teacher is trying to work out her identity.

I’ve described how shame involves judgements about what I consider as dignified. Additionally, my inner dialogue is aware that others make judgements. How others might judge me has a bearing on how I am seen. “It would not look good,” as the teacher says. Shame not only involves our own judgements and values, but the judgements and values that belong to others.

This is why an innocent, kind and caring gesture like a hug can become the object of shame. The teacher knows that, for her, there would be nothing shameful about the hug. But her actions don’t exist in a closed system where the only things that are important are intentions, actions and outcomes. Her actions exist in the presence of others. The meaning of her action is conditioned by interpretations that are not her own. Her actions do not entirely speak for themselves; they are also spoken for. Consequently, there is an ambiguity in her actions. How will others speak about her actions?

Since our actions involve interpretation, there is the possibility of misinterpretation. As the teacher describes, at issue is not only what she does, but also how things look. While the teacher thinks that giving Julianna a hug would be the right thing to do and she knows that she has the right intentions, she is also aware that someone else might not see the situation that way. By giving Julianna a hug, there is the possibility that her action will be misinterpreted as involving inappropriate intentions.

This risk of misinterpretation is exacerbated since the teacher is alone with Julianna. If another colleague was in the room with her, then they could corroborate how this situation should be understood. Her colleague would see that Julianna had returned to the classroom upset, and that the teacher’s hug was a sincere act to comfort Julianna. The presence of this colleague would help reinforce a particular interpretation and would mitigate misinterpretation. The teacher would then be able to respond to Julianna without risk. But in this case, the teacher

is alone with Julianna. This means that she cannot establish a shared and agreed interpretation of the situation. Without this assurance, her actions and identity are more vulnerable.

Shame as a hermeneutical provocation

In the examples of shame I have discussed, the capability of shame to make moral judgements has been mixed. On the one hand, shame can help us realise that we have done something wrong. The peeping Tom crouching at the keyhole feels shame. Likewise, Merteuil feels shame when she realises that her debased actions have now come to public light. In both these cases, we might want to say that they rightly feel shame. If they didn't feel shame, we would say that there's something deeply defective about their character. But, on the other hand, what about the shame a girl feels when a man sniggers about her fat calves? She has not done anything wrong. In this case, the shame does not reveal a defect in the girl's character. If anything, the shame arises because the girl finds herself in a world where she encounters others who have defective characters. In this case, we do not want to say that the girl rightly feels shame. From these contrasting cases, we see that shame is an emotion that we can feel rightly or wrongly. This demonstrates an ambivalence in shame. We also see this ambivalence in the teacher's anecdote. Shame directs the teacher to both hug and not hug Julianna. This raises the question of how useful it is to reflect on our shame in helping us understand how to know what to do in our lives with children.

Shame is ill-equipped to evaluate itself. Yet, I still believe that shame has something to offer us. My reason is that shame is a hermeneutical provocation—it makes us reckon with how interpretation constitutes our life. I have described how shame is a self-interpreting emotion. But self-interpretation need not, and usually does not, involve rational deliberation or conscious reflection (Abbey, 2000). As we navigate our world, we continually act according to our innate sense of self. It is not so much that we apply our self-interpretation onto the situations we're in. Rather, we find ourselves already living out these interpretations. We do not need to have clearly articulated our values for them to be a condition of our acting. As agents in the world, we operate with a sense of what is important to us, whether we can or cannot say exactly what this sense is.

Nevertheless, shame makes reflection possible. Without shame, our self-interpretation and values are not an issue for us. In the experience of shame, our projects are interrupted and we become more aware of the situation and nature of our action. Consequently, our

interpretations are available to us in a way they were not before. In shame, we cannot just blithely carry on. Our dignity is being threatened. The issue of what we find dignified and undignified is brought to the fore.

In the experience of shame we can ask, 'What makes this situation shameful?' We can then try to articulate the meaning and significance that the situation has for us. By doing so, we both understand something about the situation and gain insight about ourselves. Something is shameful only in relation to our self-interpretations. To say what is shameful about our situation alludes to the interpretations that operate in our experience. So, shame harbours the possibility of bringing our values and desires to light. Shame can show us what matters to us in our lives, including what matters to others whom we also draw our identity from.

In the teacher's anecdote, the experience of shame shows us what the teacher values. On the one hand, when being-seen by Julianna, it is disclosed that the teacher values the relationships that she has with her students. She sees herself as being responsible for Julianna and desires to allay her suffering. On the other hand, when being-seen by the imaginary other, it is revealed that the teacher values being respected by her colleagues and does not want them to question her professionalism and character. In the teacher's everyday professional life, she innately operates according to these values. In the experience of shame, the interpretations assumed in her actions become more explicit. Furthermore, her actions reveal what she considers more or less important. Her decision to remain behind the desk shows that it matters more to her to not be judged by her colleagues than to comfort Julianna.

Shame enables us to articulate an interpretation of our situation and ourselves. By making this articulation, it becomes possible for us to evaluate our self-interpretations. An articulation of shame provokes us to reflect on whether we recognise ourselves in an interpretation. With the peeping Tom and Merteuil, when they see themselves from the perspective of the other they agree that they have compromised themselves and are deserving of scorn. In shame, the values of the subject and the other can align—there is agreement that this situation threatens one's dignity. But the case of the teacher is not this simple. Putting ourselves in her situation, we could imagine disagreeing with the imaginary other. We might want to say that it is more important to provide comfort to a child than save face in front of our peers. Yet, we also must reckon with the fact that we didn't comfort Julianna. Our actions showed us that we valued our own reputation above Julianna's needs. But just because we admit to these actions, we don't feel comfortable with them. In trying to articulate the values that make a situation shameful, these very values become an object of our shame.

Consequently, by inviting an articulation, shame provides the opportunity for us to assess, and reassess, how we understand ourselves.

Sometimes when we articulate our shame, we realise that our language is inadequate at capturing the meaning and significance of our shame. We are then led to find new articulations. Our descriptions might be weak because the concepts and terms available to us are limited in how they can speak about our situation. So, we search for a richer language. For example, the little girl who was made to feel shame for her fat calves may not feel like she can understand what was going on in the situation. But then one day, she grows up and reads Beauvoir. In those pages, she is given new concepts and terms that belong to a feminist language. Consequently, she is enabled to describe and interpret the situation in richer and deeper ways. With her new articulation, she finds herself in an uneasy relationship with her original self-interpretation. The little girl no longer sees the situation with shame, but with indignation. The values that the previous experience pointed to have now been revised. In this way, articulating a situation in a new language changes our understanding of both the situation and ourselves. Through articulation, we can change.

Articulation can change how we understand our values. It can also change how we understand our social involvements. The experience of being-seen is inescapably relational. Therefore, when we talk about how articulation speaks to our sense of what is important to us, this also implicates the issue of *who* is important to us. Shame is an experience of exclusion—we feel like we are judged as socially unworthy (Guenther, 2011). We can only feel excluded if we already have some sense of belonging. Shame is a threat to this belonging. By experiencing the threat of exclusion, our social interests and involvements are disclosed. The person who sees us in some ways matters to us and informs our identity. Shame shows us the meaningful ways that we emerge as a subject in relation to others

When shame reveals to us both our values and social involvements, it provides us the opportunity to evaluate them. Self-interpretations constitute us, but they do not completely determine who we are. We have some agency and responsibility in who we are and what matters to us (Taylor, 1985a, Ch. 1). But in order to take this responsibility, we need to be able to articulate our self-interpretations. Consequently, ethical responsibility should be understood in terms of a hermeneutical responsibility. Shame brings about the possibility to engage in a hermeneutical understanding of ourselves. It brings into articulacy what might have been hidden, tacit and assumed. Therefore, shame can help us explore interpretations of ourselves through the risky and social activity of imagining our ethical possibilities.

PART 4

The uncertainty of pedagogy

14. Conclusion

Uncertainty about how to interpret our practice

In this project, I have engaged in a hermeneutical and phenomenological analysis of ethical uncertainty. I have argued that hermeneutics is an essential and unavoidable part of teacher practice. By employing hermeneutics, I am not just wanting to apply a lens or framework onto the phenomenon of ethical uncertainty. Rather, I have described how engaging in practice involves living out an interpretation of what it means to be a teacher and what it means to live with children.

Our interpretations involve an understanding of what we value. When we find ourselves in the world, we value certain goods and evaluate which goods we value more or less than others. These values constitute our subjectivity and agency. Even prior to any reflection or articulation about what is meaningful to us, we are moving through the world according to what we find important. These implicit meanings give us our sense of who we are and make it possible for us to act. We cannot escape interpretation.

In Chapter 3, I described how thoughtful pedagogical action involves a conversation with the moment. To act with tact, we attune ourselves to how the child finds the situation meaningful and then try to find a way forward. When we conceive this conversation, we need to also consider the essential role of interpretation. The lived meaning of that moment is not something that we can discover as completely external to us. Attuning ourselves to meaning requires a listening—and listening involves our interpretive capacity to create an understanding. Pedagogical tact occurs as a dialogue. We are sensitive to the meaning of a moment because we are involved in interpreting this meaning.

In our pedagogical practice, we need to both direct ourselves towards lived meaning and acknowledge that lived meaning will always be the meaning that is lived by a self-interpreting being. We bring our prejudices and pre-understandings into a lived moment as a necessary part of creating meaning. While we need to be open to receive something new and not of ourselves in a lived moment, we also enter into a moment as someone already moving about the world with a particular understanding.

For example, our interpretations and values determine how we understand the pedagogical good (as discussed in Chapter 12). The pedagogical good is not something that is

out there for us to discover, nor is it something we possess and can use to inform our pedagogical acting. What is 'good' and 'appropriate' for a child requires interpretation. The pedagogical good is a contestable site of meaning where we need to engage with understandings of what is valuable and important in the life of a child.

Interpretation makes pedagogical practice possible. However, we often do not recognise that our practice is conditioned by interpretation, nor that these interpretations are contestable. Our interpretations give us a sense of homeliness. They help us feel grounded and certain in our knowledge. We experience security in our way of life with children. As a result, the pedagogical good becomes taken-for-granted. This enables us to go about our lives engaging in projects. But we are distracted from reflecting on other possibilities for our pedagogical thinking and acting.

This state of distraction is exacerbated when our reflection becomes dominated by evidence-based practice. Since we are anxious to have an authoritative way to interpret teacher practice, we let our understandings be shaped by empirically grounded evidence on what works. We take the complex and qualitive features of our lives with children and transform them into something simple, measurable and quantifiable. By interpreting pedagogy in this way, we gain precision, clarity and reliability in our decision making.

Evidence-based practice gives us a sense of certainty. But it does so at a cost. We end up focusing on what can be measured and quantified and become blind to the broader lived meanings of pedagogy. Our knowledge obscures the qualitative richness that constitutes so much of our lives with children. Consequently, evidence-based practice is both a seeing and a blindness, a knowing and an unknowing.

Evidence-based practice does not transcend interpretation but provides us with a specific way to understand our lives with children. The problem is that evidence-based practice claims to provide an objective way of understanding education. This objectivity gives evidence-based practice an air of authority. This can lead us to forget that we have lost anything in this style of thinking. The meaning of our practice becomes contained within a technological understanding of being.

Evidence-based practice narrows possibilities of understanding. While interpretation enables us to see meaning, it also conceals other meanings. In pedagogical situations, interpretation can help us to respond with insight and tact. However, if we only approach these

moments with a technocratic style of thinking, we will be dulled to the lived meaning of these situations. Consequently, our actions will lack thoughtfulness and sensitivity.

To become more thoughtful in our practice, we need to broaden our reflection to consider the qualitative and rich lived meanings of our practice. We are prone to forget this meaning and need reminders about how pedagogical practice is a human practice—it is lived, personal, relational and ethical. Additionally, we need reminders about how our interpretations condition our practice so that we can reflect on the adequacy, and inadequacy, of how we understand our lives with children.

Reflecting on ethical uncertainty provides us an opportunity for such a reminder. Our regular understandings and meanings break down. We are no longer absorbed in the routines of the classroom. Instead of tacitly following our self-interpretations, we meet some resistance that makes it difficult for us to just carry on. We become aware of what we are doing and how we understand the situation. Consequently, meaning becomes available to us in a way that it was not before. We question ourselves in a way that we could not question ourselves before. By *wonder*ing about who we are, we become strange to ourselves. Our knowledge becomes unmoored from the security of certainty, and we are left asking who I am as a teacher and what it means to live with children. I am no longer at home with my understandings. In the experience of ethical uncertainty, I am invited to call myself into question. Thus, it becomes possible to reflect on the hermeneutical nature of my pedagogical practice, face up to the baselessness of my interpretations, and reopen the question of the pedagogical good.

In this study, I have reopened the question of the pedagogical good by looking at the disruptions of meaning that arise through the lived experience of ethical uncertainty. By focusing on this phenomenon, I have highlighted the personal, relational and ethical qualities of pedagogy. Furthermore, I have emphasised the phenomenological aspects of pedagogy. In this regard, my research has closely followed the phenomenological approach of Max van Manen by utilising an understanding of pedagogy as lived, personal and relational. However, the pedagogical significance of uncertainty is not limited to the concerns of phenomenological pedagogy.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, pedagogy is about the relationship between older and younger generations. While this relationship involves ethical and lived dimensions, there are also other important educational questions that we need to ask. What do we want to pass on from the adult world to the next generation? How can we prepare children to participate in the

world? How can we create a space that allows children to 'become' in their own unique way and offer something new to the world? All educational research, implicitly or explicitly, is dealing with such questions. Yet, when pedagogical reflection becomes dominated by certain modes of thinking and agendas, our exploration of these questions becomes closed and impoverished. Confronting moments of uncertainty allows for disruptions that can reopen our reflection on these issues. In this way, uncertainty has important implications for the broader pedagogical and educational questions we pursue.

My study has been limited to the uncertainty of lived and ethical aspects of teacher's pedagogical practice. But there are further opportunities for educational research to apply uncertainty to wider educational concerns: How might uncertainty be used in initial teacher training and teacher's professional learning? How can uncertainty disclose to us the contestable political nature of teacher practice? How can uncertainty shape curriculum development? What role does uncertainty have in ethical codes and standards for teachers? What place does uncertainty have in school governance and policy? These questions are beyond the scope of my research question. However, the arguments I present in this thesis have the potential to create fruitful dialogue with these, and other, educational questions.

Uncertainty in the hermeneutical encounter with the other

Uncertainty is an important part of the encounter with the Other. When we are faced by the Other, as Other, they are beyond our comprehension. Our relationship with the Other precedes our capacity to think the Other. This has important hermeneutical implications. We move about the world living out our interpretations. When we encounter the Other as one who surpasses our interpretations, they also disrupt our sense of homeliness. The givenness and acceptability of our interpretations become unsettled.

In the classroom, there is the risk that the Otherness of a child becomes forgotten. Teacher practice can become consumed by social convention, habits and routines. Furthermore, our understanding of children can be reduced to the rational and theoretical frameworks that we use to interpret our practice. In the experience of ethical uncertainty, there is the opportunity to interrupt our regular ways of doing things and become more open to the child as Other.

Ethical uncertainty is ethical because it structured by this relation to alterity. This experience cannot be resolved by applying a moral theory or system. This would give precedence to the rational over the relational. While the encounter with the Other might

provoke our sense of what is wrong or right, the encounter cannot be defined by any moral categories. An ethical appreciation of the encounter will admit that prior to any moral understanding, we are in a relationship with the Other. Thus, the *ethical* is intrinsically connected to *uncertainty*. To place our self in relation to the Other is to bring into question any certainty we hold and give priority to the appearance of one who is beyond our understanding and interpretation.

As I argued in Chapter 10, the impossibility of interpreting the Other does not make interpretation irrelevant to ethics. While the Other will always be beyond the reach of our understanding and articulation, nevertheless, the ethical relationship requires hearing the call of the Other and attempting a response. Our response will always be inadequate, but this does not diminish the urgency of needing to act. Our actions are always meaningful in some way—our response to the Other is no different. To take responsibility for the Other requires responding in a way that is meaningful and involves our interpretations. Even though the Other takes precedence over our understandings, interpretation is necessary for us to make contact. Without interpretation, the encounter with the Other would disintegrate into an irrelation and would cease to be ethical.

By identifying the hermeneutical dimension of the ethical encounter, I also emphasise the dialogical nature of the ethical situation. The Other speaks to us, but we also try to understand what the Other says and attempt to speak to them. While this dialogue is asymmetrical, we still need to recognise the important role of the self in ethics. If I am responsible and I need to respond, then I need to have a sense of self that enables me to take responsibility.

Claire's (Chapter 9) and Sabrina's (Chapter 11) teachers were able to respond to the needs of the girls because they had a hermeneutical sensitivity to the meaning of these moments. The teachers had an understanding of what it means to live alongside Claire and Sabrina. If they had a deficient understanding, then they would have completely missed the opportunity to intervene in the girls' lives. The teachers' self-interpretations affirmed their ethical identity and their ability to notice the pedagogical significance of these moments.

I have also described the ethical importance of self-interpretation in situations where teachers have failed to act. Julianna's teacher (Chapter 13) stayed behind her desk and did not give Julianna a hug because her self-interpretations prioritised how her colleagues would judge her. Interpretation can both enable or disable our ability to act pedagogically for children.

The importance of the self in the ethical encounter also demonstrates the risk involved in ethics. We describe the Other as being vulnerable—this is demonstrated in the example of Claire (Chapter 9) who risks making a disclosure to the teacher. But the self is also vulnerable in the ethical encounter. The other brings the self into question. This is important because it reopens the question of the pedagogical good. But it is also risky because the Other could bring into question important parts of our ethical identity. We have something to lose in our relationship with the Other. It might be worthwhile to lose some parts of ourselves. Yet other parts might be important, both for who we are and for our ability to respond to the Other.

As I argued in Chapter 10, ethics is hospitality. Encountering the Other is about letting them be a part of our world. We welcome the Other into our home. But in so doing, we open ourselves up to a very real risk. Even if the Other has good intentions, their presence still unsettles the fixtures of meaning that help us navigate our lives. But if the Other is hostile, they could injure our ethical identity. Since ethical experience is dialogical, we cannot allow the encounter to destroy our sense of self. We need to both bring ourselves into question, while also maintaining and asserting some self-esteem; we need to open ourselves to being addressed by the Other, but we cannot sacrifice our ability to respond. Negotiating this tension requires a hermeneutical recognition of the Other.

The experience of ethical uncertainty is an uncertainty about our self-interpretations. It is also an uncertainty about who is the Other. Are they friend? Or are they foe? Should I open myself and make myself vulnerable to them? Or should I hold back and protect myself? It is not enough to understand ethics as only a matter of receiving the Other in a way that surpasses social convention and our everyday understandings. We also need to see ethics as a matter of discerning how far we extend our hospitality. The Other interrupts the givenness of our interpretations. But our response also requires affirming our interpretations.

Uncertainty from how to understand our actions in context

Ethical uncertainty involves an uncertainty about who I am and who the Other is. Also, it is an uncertainty about the world that provides the context for my relationship to the Other. When I act with tact, I am directed towards the child's experience. Just like I find myself in a meaningful world, the child finds themselves in a world full of meaning. The child's experience is intertwined with a past, a projected future, as well as various complex involvements and relationships with others. Therefore, when I intervene in the child's life, my actions will have a meaning and significance according to the context of the child.

It is impossible to fully understand the child's situation. I may not know what meanings my words and actions will have for a child. What they mean for me might be very different to what they mean to them. Even when I try to do what is good and right for a child, I may actually be causing harm. My everyday acting is conditioned by this blindness. Like the teacher who asked the girl to turn the pages at choir practice (Chapter 4) we may be completely unaware of the damage we are doing to a child because we lack a sensitivity to how they are experiencing the world. In the experience of ethical uncertainty, we are confronted by this blindness.

Ethical uncertainty arises from the ambiguity of what our actions mean for the child. This ambiguity is exacerbated by our actions being caught up with the actions of others. In Chapter 9, the actions of Claire's teacher caused Claire to make her disclosure only to be sent back to live with her abuser and a mother who didn't believe her. In Chapter 11, the teacher's efforts to do what was right and appropriate for Sabrina were complicated by Mrs Reed's insistence on punishing Sabrina with a detention. In Chapter 12, the teacher could not do what she though was right for Timothy because his mother disagreed about what would be best for him. And in Chapter 13, the teacher failed to respond to Julianna because she was worried that her colleagues would misinterpret her actions. In each of these cases, the teachers' actions were made meaningful in relation to the actions of others.

The pedagogical situation cannot be abstracted from the ways that the adult and child find themselves leading a life. The meaning and significance of the situation is not contained by the self-Other relationship. Our actions take place in a shared world. When we act, our actions leave us and become entangled in all the various involvements and relationships that make up this shared world. We do not have control about what the world and others will make of our actions. Consequently, the significance of our actions can morph and change beyond our initial intentions. There will always be this ambiguity and uncertainty in the meaning of our actions.

To act with sensitivity, we need to be aware that our actions are part of a shared world. Like Sabrina's teacher (Chapter 11), her pedagogical action required a hermeneutical imagination about, first, the meaning of Sabrina and Mrs Reed's relationship, and second, how the situation might unravel. To act with tact and thoughtfulness, the teacher needed to have a rich understanding about who Sabrina is and how she finds herself at school. If the teacher only acted according to what was salient in the isolated moment, then her actions would have been insensitive and could have led to a harmful situation for Sabrina. In this way, pedagogical action requires a keen thoughtfulness about how our actions take place in a complex world.

The contexts of our pedagogical action create challenges and ambiguities. But it is also what inspires us to act in the first place. In pedagogy, we are orientated to the child's experience because how the child finds themselves in the world is pedagogically significant. Claire's teacher acts because Claire finds herself in the world as a victim of abuse; Sabrina's teacher acts because Sabrina feels alienated in her relationships at school and is at risk of dropping out. In both these cases, the urgency to respond arises because of how the child is caught up in a difficult situation. The teachers act because they need to improve the life of the child.

If we determine that a child's life is too difficult to get involved in, we are turning our back on our pedagogical responsibility. The call of pedagogy demands that we intervene. This means that pedagogy requires us to act in situations where we can become ensnared in situations of conflict. We enter these situations with good and noble intentions but face the necessity that we cannot escape without guilt and regret.

We may not have created these situations. Nevertheless, these are the situations where we find ourselves pedagogically responsible. In the experience of ethical uncertainty, we are reminded that we cannot distance ourselves from the life of a child. The child's situation is conditioned by forces outside of our control. By involving ourselves in their life, we are entering into a world where we lose control over what meaning and significance our actions will have. This uncertainty is an essential part of responding to the child. To retreat back into a more certain and stable world is to abandon the child.

By recognising the situated nature of our actions, ethical uncertainty reveals how our context is implicated in how we relate with children. Our pedagogical responsibility not only concerns our own actions towards the child, but also the institutional contexts that we act within. For example, in Chapter 9, Claire's teacher was unable to act on the disclosure of sexual abuse because of the system she was working in. The system was both what enabled her actions and what undid them. Through the experience of ethical uncertainty, Claire's teacher recognised how her pedagogical responsibility relied on the school and the child welfare agency. Similarly, in Chapter 13 I described how the experience of shame disclosed to Julianna's teacher how her actions were being shaped by institutional pressures. The imaginary other exerted an institutional power over the teacher's actions. Additionally, this experience revealed how the teacher's values were not purely her own but symbiotically connected with institutional values.

These experiences demonstrate the importance our context has for how we act and what we value. In this regard, they provide a political provocation. If we are to act in ways that are good and appropriate for a child, then we must address the ways that our institutions thwart our pedagogical responsibility. Furthermore, we need to reflect on how our values and thinking are constrained by our political contexts, blinding us to pedagogical possibilities. The experience of ethical uncertainty provokes us to engage in institutional and political critique.

This political provocation is grounded in lived experience and in the ethical relationality we have with others. As such, it indicates the possibility of a phenomenologically based political critique. In Chapter 5, I discussed how phenomenology has been criticized for being incapable of identifying how experience is determined by social orders and cannot imagine change to these orders. In response, I argued that disruptions and interruptions in experience can disclose to us how we are part of a contestable world. This is demonstrated in the experiences of Claire's and Juliana's teachers. In the experience of ethical uncertainty, they realised how their action was part of a social order and that their pedagogical responsibility required a change to this order.

This points to the important political implications of ethical uncertainty. It also indicates the possibility for a simultaneously phenomenological and political understanding of teacher practice. Within the scope of this project, I was unable to develop these lines of argument. Therefore, there are further opportunities for research, both empirical and philosophical, to explore the political nature of teacher practice from a phenomenological basis.

The hermeneutical responsibility of pedagogy

So far in this concluding chapter, I have brought together three important threads from my study. First, ethical uncertainty helps us recognise how we are defined by certain understandings and how these understandings are not fixed. Second, ethical uncertainty involves the Other bringing into question our understandings. And third, ethical uncertainty confronts us with the ambiguity of how to understand our actions in a shared world. With all three of these threads, I have emphasised how understanding and interpretation are an essential part of ethical uncertainty.

Additionally, I have argued that this hermeneutical aspect has significant pedagogical and ethical implications. First, in relation to the self, it is important that we assess and reassess our self-interpretations in relation to what we consider to be worthwhile and admirable. Second,

this opportunity arises in the encounter with the Other—their presence invites us to recast our self-understandings in light of our ethical responsibility, while we also affirm interpretations that enable us to respond. And third, when we do respond, we need to be sensitive to the complexity of understanding the pedagogical significance of our actions in a world where meaning is not always under our own control. In short, pedagogical responsibility requires a hermeneutical discernment about who I am, who the Other is, and how we both find ourselves in the world.

When I act according to publicly available interpretations, I am disburdened of any responsibility for the meaning of my actions. The moral significance of my actions becomes limited to a rational system's determination about what I ought to do. Likewise, the pedagogical significance of my actions becomes limited to how they are informed by research evidence and professional expectations. However, in the experience of ethical uncertainty, I am reminded that interpretation is my responsibility. It is not enough to just live out taken-for-granted interpretations. I must wrestle with the very way that I interpret my life and how I understand my relationships and involvements.

Acting pedagogically in the lives of the children requires a hermeneutical discernment that allows for a rich understanding of pedagogy as a human practice. Pedagogical action requires an openness and an imagination that helps us see and understand moments in deeper ways. If our vision is myopic and we lack imagination, we are dulled to the lived meaning of pedagogical situations. Consequently, we can end up acting insensitively and causing damage. Like Agamemnon (Chapter 11), our failure might not be what we do, but how we understand.

When we experience certainty, this may not demonstrate a proper understanding, but rather, how we dogmatically hold to public conventions and beliefs. In our certainty, we become closed off to the ambiguity and difficulty involved in leading a life. Therefore, experiencing ethical uncertainty is not necessarily a deficiency for teacher practice. We feel uncertain because we deeply understand what is at stake in a situation.

Ethical uncertainty is a hermeneutical provocation. When our practice merely follows our everyday habits and routines, we are unaware of how interpretation structures our existence. To help develop a hermeneutical discernment, our implicit interpretations need to become explicit. Ethical uncertainty is an opportunity for meaning to become available to us, making us more aware of how we understand ourselves, others and the situation.

The teachers' descriptions of ethical uncertainty I present in my study demonstrate how these experiences brought to the fore what matters in their lives. In some cases, what was important for them was admirable. However, in some cases, what ethical uncertainty revealed became a matter of shame (Chapter 13). Either way, to reflect on our understandings, we need to be able to articulate them. Once we have articulated our values, and the relative importance of these values, we can then engage in the hermeneutical task of assessing and reassessing who we are. We realise that interpretation is not fixed. It is our responsibility to imagine new possibilities for how we understand ourselves and how we live alongside children. Pedagogical responsibility is a hermeneutical responsibility.

In this way, hermeneutical responsibility is an important part of pedagogical practice. It also has important implications for how we conceive educational research. In trying to bring research and practice closer together, there is the danger that we make research easily translatable and applicable. To persuade teachers about the value of research, we end up promising good news about the best principles and rules teachers should follow. But to proclaim this optimistic message, we need to smooth off any complexity and remove any contradiction and ambiguity. However, as I have argued, this removes the lived richness of pedagogy as a human practice. We end up spreading a fantasy of pedagogy that is disconnected from what teachers and children experience in the classroom.

Educational research has a hermeneutical responsibility. This involves opening up, and keeping open, the question of the purpose of education and the pedagogical question of what it means to live alongside children. Furthermore, we need to interrogate the rationalities and understandings that we use to answer these questions. So much of our thinking about education has become consumed by scientific and technological discourses. By engaging with pedagogy as a human social science, we can ask hermeneutical questions and consider the importance of interpretation and meaning to how we understand what happens in classrooms.

My study has only touched on this part of the hermeneutical task of research. My main focus has been on how this hermeneutical responsibility can directly inform practice. As I described in Chapter 3, research has the power to do something with us. Research can reawaken us to lived meaning through demonstrating a hermeneutical sensitivity and openness in the text. By engaging with this research, the reader is called to become more attuned to lived meanings and be more thoughtful in their practice.

By presenting my research on ethical uncertainty, my hope is that it will do something with the reader. I have tried to have this influence, first, by sharing the anecdotes of my participants. By articulating their experience of ethical uncertainty, these teachers demonstrated a sensitivity to the lived meanings of their practice. These experiences are meant to produce resonances with the lived experience of the reader. We can enter the teachers' worlds, recognise these moments as possible human experience, and consequently see our own experiences in these descriptions. Second, I have tried to demonstrate a hermeneutical sensitivity in my analysis of the teachers' experiences. My work has sought to explore the meanings that structure the ways that these teachers live alongside children. If I have done an adequate job, then my discussion has produced resonances and epiphanies for the reader and invited them to reflect on the similar ways that meaning structures their own experience.

By exploring experiences of ethical uncertainty, I am not merely wanting to describe how my participants experienced this phenomenon. Furthermore, I am inviting the reader to experience ethical uncertainty in the act of reading my text. Through the anecdotes and discussions, the reader can enter a space where they are confronted with the strangeness of their everyday living with children, can articulate and reflect on the interpretations that structure their practice, and have the opportunity to imagine new possibilities.

Beyond my project, educational research has the responsibility to not merely tell teachers what to do, but to help them become more sensitive and thoughtful to the lived meaning of practice. The value of this kind of research lies in its very uncertainty. If research only purports itself with certainty, then it is reduced to merely passing the word along of taken-for-granted interpretations, abandoning its hermeneutical responsibility. Research needs to remind us that good teaching involves experiencing uncertainty. What is important in our lives with children is unpredictable and vulnerable to luck. When acting with sensitivity and tact in a child's life, we cannot avoid what is outside of our control. Pedagogy requires us to take seriously the uncertainty and ambiguity of living with children and others. If pedagogy is a human practice, then it will always be fallible, just like us.

End Matter

Appendix A

Approval of ethics application

Research Office
Post–Award Support Services

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Level 10, 49 Symonds Street
Telephone: 64 9 373 7599
Extension: 83711
Facsimile: 64 9 373 7432
ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz

UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE (UAHPEC)

21-Jun-2018

MEMORANDUM TO:

Prof Barbara Jones
Te Puna Wananga

Re: Application for Ethics Approval (Our Ref. 021006): Approved with comment

The Committee considered your application for ethics approval for your study entitled **Teachers' lived experience of the tension between effective and relational practice**.

Ethics approval was given for a period of three years with the following comment(s):

1. Please note that since the participants' identity will be known to the researcher, anonymity is impossible. Rather the researchers will keep the participants' identity confidential. Please change any references to "anonymity" or "anonymous" with "confidentiality" or "confidential" in your PIS, Facebook post, consent form etc. Please refer to the Applicants' Reference Manual §6.4.6 for the difference between anonymity and confidentiality.

2. Please provide assurance within your public documents that the identity of participants will be treated confidentially and that the identities of your participants will not be known to each other.

3. PIS:
• Please proofread your PIS for grammatical sense.
• Consider changing "on your employees" to "on their employment".
• Under your data storage heading please amend "Anecdotes will be stored on secure email servers" to "will be stored on a password protected University of Auckland computer, backed up by a server." Please amend your public documents to reflect this and arrange for this to happen.

4 .All advertising material, including flyers, advertisements, invitation emails, and all other electronic invitations must include the UAHPEC approval wording (Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on [insert approval date] for three years. Reference number XXXXXX).

The expiry date for this approval is 21-Jun-2021.

If the project changes significantly you are required to resubmit a new application to UAHPEC for further consideration.

If you have obtained funding other than from UniServices, send a copy of this approval letter to the Activations team in the Research Office, at ro-awards@auckland.ac.nz. For UniServices contracts, send a copy of the approval letter to the Contract Manager, UniServices.

The Chair and the members of UAHPEC would be happy to discuss general matters relating to ethics approvals if you wish to do so. Contact should be made through the UAHPEC Ethics Administrators at ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz in the first instance.

Please quote Protocol number **021006** on all communication with the UAHPEC regarding this application.

(This is a computer generated letter. No signature required.)

UAHPEC Administrators
University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee

c.c. Head of Department / School, Te Puna Wananga
Dr Matheson Russell
Andrew Madjar

Additional information:

1. Do not forget to fill in the 'approval wording' on the Participant Information Sheets, Consent Forms and/or advertisements, giving the dates of approval and the reference number. This needs to be completed, before you use them or send them out to your participants.

2. At the end of three years, or if the study is completed before the expiry, you are requested to advise the Committee of its completion.

3. Should you require an extension or need to make any changes to the project, please complete the online Amendment Request form associated with this approval number giving full details along with revised documentation. If requested before the current approval expires, an extension may be granted for a further three years, after which time you must submit a new application.

Appendix B

Participant information sheet (Principal)

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

Te Puna Wananga
School of Māori and Indigenous Education

Epsom Campus
Gate 3, 74 Epsom Ave
Auckland, New Zealand
T +64 9 623 8899
W education.auckland.ac.nz

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92601
Symonds Street
Auckland 1135
New Zealand

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(Principal)

Project title: Teachers' lived experience of the tension between effective and relational practice

Name of Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Professor Alison Jones

Name of Student Researcher: Andrew Madjar

Researcher introduction

My name is Andrew Madjar. I am a student at the University of Auckland, in the Faculty of Education and Social Work. I am currently enrolled in a PhD.

Project description and invitation

I would like to invite you to participate in my research. The aim of this project is to understand teachers' experiences of situations where the personal qualities of the teacher-child relationship are in tension with the demands for "effective practice". I want to gather anecdotes of your experiences where you experience this situation. I hope that the study's findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities and difficulties involved in the relationship between teachers and children. Your involvement in this project is voluntary and much appreciated.

Project Procedures

Your involvement in the project will involve me sharing about my research and inviting teachers to participate. This would be held during one of your regular staff meetings for approximately ten minutes. No further involvement would be required from your school. Your school's

involvement requires your assurance that teachers' participation or non-participation in the project will have no impact on your employees.

Teachers' involvement in the project will involve writing an anecdote (one or more) about a concrete example where they felt constrained in how they could relate to students in personal and ethical ways.

Teachers' anecdote only needs to be approximately 200-500 words and should be able to be completed within 30 minutes. Their anecdotes will be emailed to myself (Andrew Madjar). If teachers would prefer to share their experiences orally, I am happy to arrange a time for them to share their anecdote in an interview that will be digitally recorded.

If teachers would rather remain anonymous, they can send their anecdote to my supervisor (Professor Alison Jones). She will remove any features that could possibly identify the teacher or the school and then pass the anecdote on to me.

In a situation where I require any further information and/or clarification, a maximum of one email will be sent to teachers. The requested information should take no more than ten minutes to provide. However, teachers' involvement in the project does not obligate them to respond.

Some teachers who provide a written anecdote will be sent a request to have a follow-up interview about their experience. Their participation in this interview is voluntary. Submitting an anecdote does not oblige them to take part in this interview. This interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

These interviews can take place at a location to suits teachers, such as their home, workplace or the University of Auckland Epsom campus. This interview will be recorded (with teachers' prior written consent) with a digital audio recording. Even if teachers agree to being recorded, they may choose to have the recorder turned off at any time without needing to give a reason. If teachers wish, they can receive a copy of the digital audio recording by contacting myself or my supervisor.

Data storage/retention/destruction/future use

Anecdotes will be stored on secure email servers. In the case of being involved in the interview, only myself and my supervisor will have access to the digital audio recording. Only those who are recorded will be given the opportunity to review their own recordings. Transcriptions of interviews will be made by me and will only be accessible to myself and my supervisor. Teachers can request a transcript of their interview from me or my supervisor. If they wish to edit, add to, or delete any information in the interview transcript that they do not want to be included in the study, they can contact me or my supervisor before December 1st, 2019.

Digital audio recordings will be stored separately from transcripts or other identifying material; they will be securely stored on a network drive on the University of Auckland server using filenames that do not identify teachers or the schools that they work in; they will be destroyed after six years. Transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet separated from other data on university premises under the control of my supervisor for the required period of six years.

Data from this research will be used for my PhD thesis, presentations, teaching and publications. Any such reports, including any interview quotes, will be presented in a way that does not identify individual participants.

Once the research is completed, I will send a short summary of the main findings to schools and teachers who request a copy of the report. This report will be written in a way that protects the schools' and teachers' identity.

Right to withdraw from participation

Schools have a right to withdraw access to their employees at any time without giving reason, but do not have the right to withdraw participant data already given to researchers as part of the study. This data can only be withdrawn by the teachers themselves. Teachers have the right to withdraw from participation at any time. If they wish to withdraw their data from the research, they must let me or my supervisor know by December 1st, 2019.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Neither the supervisor nor I will share the identity of anyone involved in this project. However, confidentiality or privacy cannot be upheld by the researcher where the life or health of any person may be at risk. To ensure schools and teachers are not identifiable from the published reports, every care will be taken to exclude any identifying information such as names of people and places. Additionally, if any direct interview quotes are used, they will be chosen with care, and if necessary edited by removing any information that could lead to schools or teachers being identified.

Contact Details and Approval Wording

If you have any questions or concerns, you are invited to contact myself, my supervisor or the Head of School/Te Tumu.

Student researcher:	*Principal Investigator/Supervisor:*	*Head of School/Te Tumu:*
Andrew Madjar Email: a.madjar@auckland.ac.nz	Professor Alison Jones Email: a.jones@auckland.ac.nz Phone: +64 (0) 9 923 8117	**Dr Te Kawehau Clea Hoskins** Email: tk.hoskins@auckland.ac.nz Phone: +64 (0) 9 923 4213

Faculty of Education, Epsom Campus, N452, The University of Auckland, PB 92019, Auckland 1142.

For any concerns regarding ethical issues you may contact the Chair, the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, at the University of Auckland Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 ext. 83711.
Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on …… for three years. Reference Number 021006

Consent form (Principal)

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

Te Puna Wananga
School of Māori and Indigenous Education

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T +64 9 623 8899
W education.auckland.ac.nz

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92601
Symonds Street
Auckland 1135
New Zealand

CONSENT FORM

(Principal)

THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

Project title: Teachers' lived experience of the tension between effective and relational practice

Name of Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Professor Alison Jones

Name of Student Researcher: Andrew Madjar

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree for teachers in my school to be approached to participate in this research.
- I understand that the school's participation is voluntary.
- I give my assurance that participation or non-participation in the project will have no impact on my employees' employment situation or their relationship with me.
- I agree to giving the researcher access to the employees in our school.
- I understand that the school has a right to withdraw access to our employees at any time without giving reason, but do not have the right to withdraw participant data already given to researchers as part of the study. This data can only be withdrawn by the participants.
- I understand that the school will not have access to the identity of the participants, the digital audio recordings of the interviews, or the interview transcripts.
- I understand that the benefit of the study will be a deeper understanding of the complexities and difficulties involved in the relationship between teachers and children

- I understand that this research will be used for the researcher's PhD thesis, presentations, teaching and publications.
- I wish/do not wish to receive a summary of findings, which can be emailed to me at this email address: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on …… for three years. Reference Number 021006

Participant information sheet (Teacher)

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau
NEW ZEALAND

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

Te Puna Wananga
School of Māori and Indigenous Education

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The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92601
Symonds Street
Auckland 1135
New Zealand

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(Teacher)

Project title: Teachers' lived experience of the tension between effective and relational practice

Name of Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Professor Alison Jones

Name of Student Researcher: Andrew Madjar

Researcher introduction

My name is Andrew Madjar. I am a student at the University of Auckland, in the Faculty of Education and Social Work. I am currently enrolled in a PhD.

Project description and invitation

I would like to invite you to participate in my research. The aim of this project is to understand teachers' experiences of situations where the personal qualities of the teacher-child relationship are in tension with the demands for "effective practice". I want to gather anecdotes of your experiences where you experience this situation. I hope that the study's findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities and difficulties involved in the relationship between teachers and children. Your involvement in this project is voluntary and much appreciated.

Project Procedures

Your involvement in the project will involve you writing an anecdote (one or more) about a concrete example where you felt constrained in how you relate to students in personal and ethical ways.

Your anecdote only needs to be approximately 200-500 words and should be able to be completed within 30 minutes. Your anecdote will be emailed to myself (Andrew Madjar). If you would prefer to share your experiences orally, I am happy to arrange a time for you to share your anecdote in an interview that will be digitally recorded.

If you would rather remain anonymous, you can send your anecdote to my supervisor (Professor Alison Jones). She will remove any features that could possibly identify you and then pass your anecdote on to me.

In a situation where I require any further information and/or clarification, a maximum of one email will be sent to you. The requested information should take no more than ten minutes to provide. However, your involvement in the project does not obligate you to respond.

Some participants who provide a written anecdote will be sent a request to have a follow-up interview about their experience. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. Submitting an anecdote does not oblige you to take part in this interview. This interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

These interviews can take place at a location to suit you, such as your home, your workplace or the University of Auckland Epsom campus. This interview will be recorded (with your prior written consent) with a digital audio recording. Even if you agree to being recorded, you may choose to have the recorder turned off at any time without needing to give a reason. If you wish, you can receive a copy of the digital audio recording by contacting myself or my supervisor.

Since I have previously worked as a teacher and that I have recruited participants through my personal professional contacts, it is possible that I may have a pre-existing relationship with you. To address this you can choose to share your anecdote anonymously be emailing it to my supervisor, Alison Jones.

Data storage/retention/destruction/future use

Anecdotes will be stored on secure email servers. In the case of being involved in the interview, only you, myself and my supervisor will have access to your digital audio recording. Only those who are recorded will be given the opportunity to review their own recordings. Transcriptions of interviews will be made by me and will only be accessible to myself and my supervisor. You can request a transcript of your interview from me or my supervisor. If you wish to edit, add to, or delete any information in the interview transcript that you do not want to be included in the study, contact me or my supervisor before December 1st, 2019.

Digital audio recordings will be stored separately from transcripts or other identifying material; they will be securely stored on a network drive on the University of Auckland server using filenames that do not identify you; they will be destroyed after six years. Transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet separated from other data on university premises under the control of my supervisor for the required period of six years.

Data from this research will be used for my PhD thesis, presentations, teaching and publications. Any such reports, including any interview quotes, will be presented in a way that does not identify any individuals or schools.

Once the research is completed, I will send a short summary of the main findings to participants who request a copy of the report. This report will be written in a way that protects the participants' identity.

Right to withdraw from participation

You have the right to withdraw from participation at any time without giving reason. In the case that you have been recruited through a school, your principal has given assurance that your participation or non-participation in the research will not impact on your employment situation or relationship with your employer. If you wish to withdraw your data from the research, you must let me or my supervisor know by December 1st, 2019.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Neither the supervisor nor I will share the identity of anyone involved in this project. However, confidentiality or privacy cannot be upheld by the researcher where the life or health of any person may be at risk. To ensure you are not identifiable from the published reports, every care will be taken to exclude any identifying information such as names of people and places. Additionally, if any direct interview quotes are used, they will be chosen with care, and if necessary edited by removing any information that could lead to you being identified.

Contact Details and Approval Wording

If you have any questions or concerns, you are invited to contact myself, my supervisor or the Head of School/Te Tumu.

Student researcher:	*Principal Investigator/Supervisor:*	*Head of School/Te Tumu:*
Andrew Madjar Email: a.madjar@auckland.ac.nz	Professor Alison Jones Email: a.jones@auckland.ac.nz Phone: +64 (0) 9 923 8117	**Dr Te Kawehau Clea Hoskins** Email: tk.hoskins@auckland.ac.nz Phone: +64 (0) 9 923 4213

Faculty of Education, Epsom Campus, N452, The University of Auckland, PB 92019, Auckland 1142.

For any concerns regarding ethical issues you may contact the Chair, the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, at the University of Auckland Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 ext. 83711.

Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on …… for three years. Reference Number 021006

Consent form (Teacher)

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

Te Puna Wananga
School of Māori and Indigenous Education

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W education.auckland.ac.nz

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92601
Symonds Street
Auckland 1135
New Zealand

CONSENT FORM

(Teacher)

THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

Project title: Teachers' lived experience of the tension between effective and relational practice

Name of Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Professor Alison Jones

Name of Student Researcher: Andrew Madjar

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to take part in this research.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary.
- I understand that participation requires writing an anecdote of approximately 200 to 300 words, which should take approximately 30 minutes. Alternatively, I can request sharing my anecdote orally through a face-to-face interview.
- I understand that I may be emailed to provide further information and/or clarification, which should take no more than ten minutes to provide, and that I am not obligated to complete this request.
- I agree / do not agree to participate in an optional interview if requested.
- In the case of being interviewed:
    - I understand this interview will be approximately 60 minutes long.
    - I agree / do not agree to be audio recorded.
    - I wish / do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.

- I wish / do not wish to receive a transcript of my interview for editing.
- I understand that I have the opportunity to edit, add to, or delete any information in the interview transcript that I do now want to be included in the study before December 1st 2019.

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without giving reason, and to withdraw any data traceable to me up to December 1st, 2019
- I understand that my participation or non-participation will not be revealed to anyone, including my employer.
- In the case that I have been recruited through my school, I understand that the principal has given assurance that my participation or non-participation in the research will not impact on my employment situation or relationship with my employer.
- I understand that if the information I provide is reported/published, this will be done in a way that does not identify me as its source, nor the school that I work in.
- I wish / do not wish to receive the summary of findings which can be emailed to me at this email address: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on ..... for three years. Reference Number 021006

Appendix C

Invitations

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

Te Puna Wananga
School of Māori and Indigenous Education

Epsom Campus
Gate 3, 74 Epsom Ave
Auckland, New Zealand
T +64 9 623 8899
W education.auckland.ac.nz

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92601
Symonds Street
Auckland 1135
New Zealand

Facebook Post

Kia ora friends,

I am looking for teachers or former teachers to be part of my PhD research who have worked in early childhood, primary, intermediate or secondary schools.

My research is looking at teachers' experiences of building relationships with students. In particular, I am interested in how the demands for 'effective practice' can sometimes constrain teachers' ability to relate to children. This can lead teachers to act, or fail to act, in ways that they feel uneasy and uncertain about.

Being part of the project involves writing a short anecdote of a particular experience that teachers have had. This anecdote only needs to be about half a page (200-500 words). If participants would prefer to share their experiences face-to-face, I am also happy to meet in person. The identity of participants will be kept anonymous.

If you know of anyone that might be interested in being involved, could you please forward this invitation. Anyone who would like to be involved or would like more information can contact me at a.madjar@auckland.ac.nz.

Alternatively, if you would like to be involved in the project but do not what me to know about your involvement, you can contact my supervisor Professor Alison Jones at a.jones@auckland.ac.nz.

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on …… for three years. Reference Number 021006

Email to Professional Contacts

Kia ora [*name*]

I am looking for teachers or former teachers to be part of my PhD research who have worked in early childhood, primary, intermediate or secondary schools.

My research is looking at teachers' experiences of building relationships with students. In particular, I am interested in how the demands for 'effective practice' can sometimes constrain teachers' ability to relate to children. This can lead teachers to act, or fail to act, in ways that they feel uneasy and uncertain about.

Being part of the project involves writing a short anecdote of a particular experience that teachers have had. This anecdote only needs to be about half a page (200-500 words). If participants would prefer to share their experiences face-to-face, I am also happy to meet in person. The identity of participants will be kept anonymous.

If you know of anyone that might be interested in being involved, could you please forward this invitation. Anyone who would like to be involved or would like more information can contact me at a.madjar@auckland.ac.nz. Alternatively, if you would like to be involved in the project but do not what me to know about your involvement, you can contact my supervisor Professor Alison Jones at a.jones@auckland.ac.nz.

Ngā mihi nui

Andrew Madjar

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on …… for three years. Reference Number 021006

Email to School Principals

Kia ora [*name*]

My name is Andrew Madjar. I am a PhD candidate at the University of Auckland. I am looking for teachers to be involved in my research. I am requesting the opportunity to invite the teachers at your school to be involved. To do so, I ask for ten minutes to share about my research during one of your regular staff meetings. I do not require anything more from your school.

My research is looking at teachers' experiences of building relationships with students. In particular, I am interested in how the demands for 'effective practice' can sometimes constrain teachers' ability to relate to children. This can lead teachers to act, or fail to act, in ways that they feel uneasy and uncertain about.

Being part of the project involves writing a short anecdote of a particular experience that teachers have had. This anecdote only needs to be about half a page (200-500 words). If teachers would prefer to share their experiences face-to-face, I am also happy to meet in person. The identity of the participants and the school will be kept anonymous.

If you would like me to come to one of your staff meetings, please contact me at a.madjar@auckland.ac.nz. Additionally, if you know of anyone that might be interested in being involved, feel free to forward this invitation.

Ngā mihi nui

Andrew Madjar

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on ..... for three years. Reference Number 021006

Flyer

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau
NEW ZEALAND

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

Project Information

What my project is about

I would like to hear about times when you've felt unable to respond to a child in a way you were happy about, making you feel uneasy.

As teachers, there are expectations for how we should act with children. A lot of the time we can just 'get on with our job'. But there are some moments where 'doing our job' holds us back from doing what is right for a particular child in a particular situation. As a consequence, we feel uncomfortable and uncertain. We might act 'as a teacher', yet this doesn't seem right.

For my project, I am wanting to collect anecdotes describing an experience where you felt that the demands of being a teacher held you back from relating to a child or a group of children in authentic, personal, and sensitive ways. This situation may involve you:

- acting in ways that you felt uneasy and uncertain about
- feeling uneasy from failing to do something
- 'breaking the rules' to do what you felt was best for the child.

What being part of the project involves

Being part of the project involves sharing a short anecdote of a particular experience you have had. This can be shared through either a face-to-face interview or by writing it down and sharing it via email. Your participation will be kept confidential.

If you are writing the anecdote, it only needs to be about half a page (200-500 words).

When telling me about your experience:

- Think of a specific time when this happened.
- Tell me what happened but avoid explaining or giving opinions about it.
- Describe the experience as you lived through it.
- What happened? What did you do?
- What were you thinking and feeling?
- What did you say? What did the student, and others, say at the time?
- How did you and the student act, talk, and use gestures?
- What was the tone or feeling of the interaction?

Here is an example of an anecdote.

How to get involved

To arrange a face-to-face meeting, or to share your written anecdotes, email me at:

a.madjar@auckland.ac.nz

If you wish for your identity to remain anonymous to the researcher, you can email your anecdotes to:

a.jones@auckland.ac.nz

Further information and links

Find out more about me.

For more detailed information about the research project see the Participant Information Sheet.

By submitting an anecdote, you are consenting to the terms of involvement.

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 21-Jun-2018 for three years. Reference number 021006.

Appendix D

Anecdote guidelines

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau
NEW ZEALAND

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

Te Puna Wananga
School of Māori and Indigenous Education

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The University of Auckland
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ANECDOTE GUIDELINES

Write an anecdote describing a particular concrete experience you have had where you felt that the demands for 'effective practice' constrained how you could relate to students in authentic, personal and appropriate ways. This situation may involve you:

- acting in ways that you felt uneasy and uncertain about
- feeling uneasy from *failing* to act
- 'breaking the rules' to do what you felt was best for the child.

As a guide, your anecdote should be around 200 to 500 words and take approximately 30 minutes to write.

When telling me about your experience:

- Think of a specific time when this happened.
- Tell me what happened but avoid explaining or giving opinions about it.
- Just describe the experience as you lived through it.
- Say what happened and what you did, but also describe what you were thinking and how you felt.
- Recall what was said by yourself, the student and by others.
- How did you and the student act, talk, and use gestures?
- What was the tone or feeling of the interaction?
- Do not use names that identify the school, the children, the teachers or any other participant. Please use pseudonyms. If you do inadvertently provide identifying information, it will be removed by me to ensure anonymity for all people involved.

Email your anecdotes to a.madjar@auckland.ac.nz

If you wish for your identity to remain anonymous to the researcher, email your anecdotes to a.jones@auckland.ac.nz

ANECDOTE EXAMPLE

It was the first day of a new term. There was an air of excitement as the children began to arrive at class. From the back of the classroom, I said hello to a group of girls chatting at the front. Smiling and giggling, they talked with one another about their holidays.

Soon their attention drew to the printout of the new maths groups for the term where I had grouped the students, as per the school's practice, according to the test results from the previous term. The girls scanned the names, looking for which friends where in their group. Gemma was thrilled because she had moved up a group. However, her joy pricked something inside me. I had always felt uncomfortable with grouping the students. In effect, I felt I was creating a hierarchy in the class. So I purposefully never told the children what the "top" or "bottom" groups where - but everyone knew.

Behind the girls was Jordan. He had heard the girls discussing the new maths groups and excitedly raced up to see what group he was in. Jordan was acutely aware that his academic abilities where well below the level of his peers across all his subjects. In his previous year, this had caused him to be resentful and melancholy about school. However, I was given hope when I saw that he had begun the year with an optimism and enthusiasm. He had become determined to catch up to the rest of his peers and not be left behind. And now, I could tell, he was excited to see that he was no longer in the 'bottom' group.

But he still was – his name had not moved. Despite making wonderful progress, he was still working at a lower ability to most of the rest of the class. I tensed as I anticipated his disappointment.

The girls were still gathered around the printout. Jordan's self-consciously slight stature prevented him from seeing the names, so he had to wait for the girls to disperse. He then giddily hopped to the whiteboard. Then he realised. His shoulders and head dropped. He stalled in this position before trudging to his desk and onto his chair. He sat there stiffly - his fists clenched towards the ground and his eyes staring a hole somewhere beneath the classroom floor. I came down next to him, trying to offer some encouragement. But whatever words I used lacked any power to soften the impassive but bitter expression on his face. The optimistic and enthusiastic Jordan from last term had gone.

Interview schedule

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Te Whare Wananga o Tamaki Makaurau
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EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

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New Zealand

OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Indicative questions for interview:

1. I interpreted your anecdote to mean… How do you agree or disagree with my interpretation?
2. In your anecdote you said... Can you tell me some more about this?
3. Here is another teacher's anecdote. How do you relate to what this teacher experienced?

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