



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Faculty of Education

ISSN 2043-8338

Journal of Trainee Teacher Education Research

Interpersonal relationships in the primary classroom: a comparative study of year 2, 4 and 6 children's perspectives on how relationships in the classroom influence learning

Jewel Yu Ka-Rei

(PGCE General Primary, 2022-2023)

email: jewelyu98@gmail.com

Abstract

Schools, as social ecosystems, are complex environments in which a plethora of emotional experiences are generated and negotiated through interpersonal exchanges. With the importance of interpersonal relationships in the primary classroom, this research proposal seeks to gain deeper insight in the domain, examining especially if differences exist in relation to age. The study will propose the use of graphical elicitation, coupled with focus groups and individual interviews, in order to capture the varied ways in which children express themselves. Ultimately, in proposing research in interpersonal relationships, this paper acknowledges the central position teachers hold in shaping the future of their students through an understanding of emotions in the classroom.

© Jewel Yu Ka-Rei, 2024

<https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.107445>

Interpersonal relationships in the primary classroom: a comparative study of year 2, 4 and 6 children's perspectives on how relationships in the classroom influence learning

Jewel Yu Ka-Rei

Introduction

In developmental literature, relationships are routinely defined as enduring connections between two individuals, fuelled by a shared history, interdependent interactions, and an effort to spur continuity (Collins & Repinski, 1994). Existing also as complex aggregates of trust, intimacy, positive affect and communication (Laible & Thompson, 2007), relationships are often considered in terms of their influence, evaluated either subconsciously or consciously. In their very essence, relationships are persuasive determiners of lived experience (Wentzel, 2012). Specifically, relationships are the bedrock of our social worlds, underlying the very fabric of what it means to be alive — interpersonal relationships drive society, influencing and simultaneously being influenced by how we think and act, ultimately impacting the deepest facets of human existence. Indeed, as relationships drive behaviour, they hold a fundamental position in education. This paper, through the examination of three key studies on emotions and interpersonal relationships in the classroom, will thus seek to mull over the importance of interpersonal relationships in education.

In particular, it will focus on considering the question:

What is the place of interpersonal relationships in influencing learning and academic achievement in the primary classroom?

To examine if a difference exists between year groups, it will work on the further question:

How does the influence of interpersonal relationships in the classroom differ between years 2, 4, and 6?

Stemming from the idea of learning as inherently emotionally charged, the paper will begin with an in-depth study of interpersonal relationships in the classroom. This will be followed by a section on

research design, which will be a critical analysis of the specific methods that might be employed in examining the area of interest. Finally, it will consider the importance of interpersonal relationships in my personal practice, before attempting to draw the different aspects of emotions and interpersonal relationships to a cohesive whole.

Literature Review

According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), human beings have an unswerving drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of stable, significant, and positive interpersonal relationships. Underlying this is the need for relatedness, the innate hunger for emotional connection (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.). In effect, humans are hardwired for connection, embedded with the desire to establish and maintain, in their lives, a version of the 'human connection' — the sense of belonging and emotional warmth experienced from engaging in meaningful interactions and supportive relationships (Stiles, 2021). We are, in essence, evolutionarily, biologically and socially-wired to live in connection with others, to both fit in, and to relate to those who surround us. Concretely, this means that behaviour is driven, at least in part, by the ineffable need to be connected — a crucial concept that governs academically-productive behaviour. Indeed, of centrality is the need to regard learning as relational, where classrooms as multi-dimensional ecologies exist as arenas in which the emotional, social, and cognitive aspects of learning intersect (Wentzel, 2012). This section, in centering on three key journals, will work to further academic productivity through an examination of the role interpersonal relationships hold in education.

Yet, before delving into specificities, it would be helpful to situate the research in its broader context. In Zandvliet et al. (2014), teacher-student connections are proposed to exist as tripartite amalgams, where teachers and students are connected trilaterally, through that of the interpersonal, substantive, and pedagogical. Dubbed 'connective instruction', the approach rests on the concept of education as relational, where emotions and connection hold central importance. Specifically, within connective instruction, interpersonal relationships can be understood to be the human, or emotional connection between teacher and student (Martin, 2014). This relates to who the teacher is as a person, how they relate with others, and the kind of interactions and emotions they thus engender (ibid.). In correspondence, substantive relationship refers to the connection students experience in association with the subject matter and nature of tasks — what teachers say and the type of activities and tasks administered (ibid.). Finally, pedagogical relationship refers to the connection between student and

instruction, that is, how teachers disseminate information (ibid.). Importantly, all three areas fundamentally involve the concept of relatedness, particularly that of emotional connection. That is, students, as posited by Andrew Martin (ibid.), are best engaged and optimally motivated when they succeed at establishing a connection with who the teacher is, the messages propagated, and the method employed in administering these messages. Learning, seen in this sense, is emotionally-charged. Specifically, what students feel about the teacher, the subject matter, and the style of teaching critically influences their engagement and motivation, thereby instigating a ripple effect in behaviour, attitude, and personality. Intricately intertwined with these factors, learning is thus impacted. Ultimately, connective instruction explicitly upholds relatedness as an instructional need, from which academic productivity is progressed (ibid.).

The Neurobiology of Emotion

As social ecosystems, schools are complex environments in which a plethora of emotional experiences are generated and negotiated through interpersonal relationships (Riley et al., 2012). That is, fundamentally relational in nature, working with children necessarily involves a continuous back-and-forth negotiation of interpersonal exchanges, where teachers make constant decisions on how to react to behaviour. In particular, since interactions happen frequently and rapidly, teachers have to rely on somewhat reflexive responses, which in many cases would be visceral actions naturalised through years of subjective experience. In association, whilst social interactions, feelings, and emotions are an unceasing reality for all, humanity's grasp of behavioural norms and that of their ability to make balanced judgements are necessarily flawed (Hoy, 2013). It is, for example, impossible to consider every single underlying factor when analysing social situations — aspects from recent occurrences, to one's childhood experiences, and indeed one's entire life trajectory, culminate in a way that shapes how we behave and understand the behaviour of others at any given moment (Yoka & Paschalidis, 2015). More than that, emotions cloud our interpretations in a manner that complicates our assessments of situations, thereby diminishing our ability to react in the most effective way (Hoy, 2013). Specifically, through a chain reaction involving an initial environmental stimuli, automatic emotions, thoughts, and actions are prompted, the reflex reaction being a product of established neural pathways fostered through repeated experience (ibid.). Further, the emotional nature of classrooms where affective dimensions including hope, fear, joy, anxiety and anger continually propel teachers and students on an emotional rollercoaster of sorts, compound in affecting and sometimes distorting interpretations of situations, and therefore, relationships within classrooms

and the entire social ecosystem in each school (Riley et al., 2012). Finally, interpretations to behaviour are made further subjective through the functioning of mirror neurons, a type of brain cell that responds the same way whether a situation is experienced personally or externally (Hoy, 2013). Specifically, research into mirror neurons shows that our bodies connect emotionally with others, especially when we are paying careful attention (ibid.). Essentially, when confronted by an angry person, we are primarily-attuned to feel angry ourselves (ibid.). What can be done then, in making the best possible interpretations, is perhaps to make judgments informed by research, backed by reflective teaching embedded with an acknowledgement of our persistent and inevitable tendency to make ill-interpretations.

Didactogeny, a term coined in Europe to express a “faulty education that harms children”, finds its foundation in the idea that education not only impacts children academically, but also in ways not immediately obvious, such as psychologically, and medically (Sava, 2002, p.1008). Aggression, for instance, is hostile behaviour performed in the classroom either intentionally or unintentionally, and just like other facets that fuel didactogeny, is driven by emotions (Sava, 2002). Indeed, if each social action is seen as a move on a chessboard, then how a game is played, or in the case of social interactions, how social systems exist and develop, depends on each move and countermove, both of which necessarily involve feelings. Specifically, teacher aggression, as a component of didactogeny, is a technique performed or employed in classrooms as a reaction to undesirable student behaviour (Riley et al., 2012). More than a direct reaction to misbehaviour, aggression is simply the tip of its behavioural iceberg. That is, perceivable actions are the product of a complex amalgamation of undercurrents, and in the case of aggressive behaviour, includes external factors such as situational contexts within schools, and internal factors, such as emotions, especially emotions filtered through personality (ibid.). Importantly, this means that understanding and altering behaviour thus requires a certain unravelling of factors resulting in it, and this can be done on the end of both the teacher, and the student, since both exist intersubjectively. Ultimately, since didactogeny, as expressed through poor interpersonal relationships, results in a host of ramifications, including a reduction in motivation, self-esteem, and academic achievement, as well as a causation or exacerbation of anxiety, and depression (ibid.), considering how emotions affect behaviour is of importance. Such would essentially promote a shift from the visceral, whereby actions are driven by strategic decisions rather than suppositions and feelings, facilitating therefore the catalyzation of emotionally-productive classroom environments.

Interpersonal Relationships in Education

A General Study of Interpersonal Relationships in the Classroom

Focusing steadfastly on work might seem, in the most straightforward manner, the best way in which tasks might be accomplished — we might, for instance, expect that working for eight hours a day would produce greater results, over time, than working for six hours. Yet, work is not simply a product of time, but of a myriad of factors, and to ignore the place of emotions in the completion of tasks would be detrimental. Essentially, relationships affect learning in a four-factor compound, that of the parent-teacher, staff-staff, student-student, and teacher-student (Martin, 2014). Relationships between staff affect learning in schools through the social-network theory, which rests on the notion that social resources such as information and expertise are exchanged through informal networks within a social system, and that such networks can therefore facilitate or constrain access to important resources (Lin, 2001). Relationships between students and between parents and teachers also work in shaping educational communities and outcomes, such as by heightening motivation and engagement, where interactions are positive (Martin, 2014).

In Andrew Martin's research into interpersonal relationships in the classroom (Martin, 2014), relationships were examined apropos to their impact on outcomes, both that with respect to academic achievement, and those relating to life more broadly. A metasynthesis in essence, the research found significant associations between interpersonal relationships and the key elements of effective learning. Specifically, the study found components relating to the emotional sphere indispensable in the classroom, with factors such as feeling accepted, supported, and appreciated affecting motivation and engagement. Instrumentally, positive interpersonal relationships were suggested to work as a buffer against stress, to be advantageous in the completion of tasks, to be helpful in providing emotional support, working also as a cornerstone for social and emotional development (ibid.). In correspondence, relatedness, the state of being connected as aforementioned, was an important concept from which the different aspects of interpersonal relationships were associated. More specifically, feeling connected to one's parents, teachers, and peers positively impacted achievement by virtue of its resultant influence on the related self-regulation processes (ibid.). That is, connecting with others was shown to increase aspects such as motivation, engagement, and satisfaction, thereby supporting self-regulation strategies, impacting also the amount of effort put into work, altering therefore academic achievement (ibid.). Further, it was suggested that mimetic learning increased in

efficiency in positive relationships established through emotional connection (Hoy, 2013; Martin, 2014). That is, riding on the steroidal function of interpersonal relationships, behaviour and attitude were suggested to be influenced more effectively through both explicit explanations and subliminal conditioning. Positive interpersonal relationships, essentially, strengthen the effects of modelling self-regulation strategies, of efforts at enhancing self-worth and self-esteem, and of inculcating in children helpful attitudes and mindsets. The runway for a better life both in school and beyond, interpersonal relationships were revealed, summatively, to extend learning through the cultivation of an environment of confidence, self-worth, and self-esteem, setting the stage simultaneously for healthy social, emotional and intellectual functioning through the system of emotional connection, promoting ultimately aspects crucial to effective learning (Martin, 2014).

Teacher-Student Relationships

In her metasyntesis titled ‘Teacher-Student Relationships and Adolescent Competence at School’, part of the greater work ‘Interpersonal Relationships in Education’, Wentzel (2012) weighs the importance of relationships in the classroom. Centrally, the paper examines the role of interpersonal relationships in furthering entities fundamental to education, considering aspects such as well-being, cohesion and connectedness, the provision of instrumental help, a secure base, and finally of building children up as individuals (ibid.). Examining also the idea that effective teachers are those who develop emotionally close, safe and trusting relationships with students, the paper goes on to emphasise the centrality of fostering an ethos of care and community amidst high expectations and an authoritative leadership style (ibid.). Conclusively, in drawing on several theoretical perspectives in conjunction with the examination of different sources on interpersonal relationships in the classroom, the study stands for the significant position interpersonal relationships hold in spurring the conditions vital for effective learning (ibid.).

Beginning with the developmental perspective that relationships are experienced through mental representations unique to each individual, inculcated over time and with respect to specific experiences (Bowlby, 1969; Laible & Thompson, 2007), the paper continues with an in-depth examination of the role interpersonal relationships play in enhancing motivation. Specifically, its introduction of mental representations serves as a caveat, establishing that interpersonal relationships can enhance factors important to learning, but that at the same time, a uniform relationship does not exist with each child. This is because interactions shape relationships, whereby it is impossible to

make uniform contact with all children, and because interpretations of behaviour and interactions are then made through subjective mental schemata. Caveat considered, the paper goes on to discuss motivation, elucidating the importance of social concerns, showing how such concerns, which emanate from social interactions and contextual cues, can enhance academically-productive behaviour, especially when set in a context of emotional warmth (Ford, 1992; Wentzel, 2004). In association, moral and social obligations were shown to hold power in increasing motivation and altering behaviour, especially to the extent that fulfilling such obligations would catalyse an establishment of emotional connection and a sense of belonging. Finally, the paper also accentuated the potential of teacher-student relationships in fostering a sense of security, furthering therefore curiosity, exploration, positive coping skills, and the creation or alteration of mental representations in which a child sees themselves as worthy of love, and others as trustworthy (Wentzel, 2012). All factors compounded, it can then be inferred that when interpersonal relationships are desirable, elements crucial to education can be normalised and furthered. Seen in such a light, interpersonal relationships, particularly that between teachers and students, are simply grounds on which important aspects of effective learning can take root. That is, more than the feel-good sensation interpersonal relationships bestow upon humanity, disparate purposes are served through their fruition.

Having discussed the main points of the paper, it is now of essence to consider the limitations of the research, as well as the opportunities highlighted for further study. To begin, the study by Wentzel focused on the influence of teacher-student relationships on adolescents; since this research concerns children in primary school, the impact of interpersonal relationships and the points of consideration might differ significantly. Besides that, one of the main drawbacks of the paper was that conclusions were made through correlational data; studies of changes in outcomes as a result of alterations in relationships were rare (Wentzel, 2012). Since it would be ethically questionable to alter positive relationships with students, further work could be done in studying instead changes in student outcomes as a function of changing perceptions of teachers from one year to another (*ibid.*), as this research study will propose, in an adapted form. An additional issue in terms of research design was that researchers typically neglected teacher or classroom effects in their study of interpersonal relationships (*ibid.*). For instance, research into class size has shown how bigger groups negatively influence provision of emotional support (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006; Pianta, Hamre & Stuhlman, 2003). Overlooking such a factor might therefore mean that data collected could be confounded by extraneous variables related to class size rather than that directly concerning teacher-student relationships. Further, particularities such as sex, race, socio-economic status and other background

characteristics might also have had a moderating influence on the research data, and this could be said of the students and the school-body as a whole (Wentzel, 2012). More research might need to be conducted, taking these factors into consideration, since they might have contributed to differences in results. In addition, research focused unilaterally on how teachers influenced students through the teacher-student relationship, and how this effected a change in academic outcomes (ibid.). Additional research could work on examining causal mechanisms and pathways of influence, addressing the potential impact children have on teachers, and how this then affects teacher-student relationships, since such a study might provide significant insight (ibid.). Finally, the dynamic quality of relationships such as its ability to shift over the years, as well as its importance to children of different ages, were not considered. Since such research might prove essential in furthering our understanding of teacher-student relationships, this research paper will establish variation in age and the dynamic quality of relationships as a core focus. All things considered, the metasynthesis conducted by Wentzel remains useful in strengthening our understanding of teacher-student relationships.

Proposed Research Design

The Voice of the Student

As those who spend the majority of their waking hours in classrooms, and indeed have spent most of their lives in schools, students have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling (Cook-Sather, 2009). For that matter, students, no matter their age, possess insights that can help improve teaching and learning, and it is such an understanding that drives this paper. Yet, educators have been, and continue to be, hesitant about including the voice of the student body in ways both apparent and those less so (Cook-Sather, 2009; Cox, 2010). That is, where students are included in the examining and reordering of educational plans, their consultation may be haphazard and cursory (Cullingford, 2002), in which hesitance on the part of those in charge results in the gathering of information in such manner that squanders the latent knowledge within children. Teachers for example, may consult students as the last port of call, and only perfunctorily (ibid.). Their inability to view children as repositories of crucial information and experience may drive them, possibly without being fully cognizant, to employ leading questions (ibid.) and to ultimately, operate with the mindset of children as objects of research rather than sentient subjects (Greene & Hill, 2005). This study, premised on the conviction that students are agents of their own lives, capable of acting with intention and

reflection, will seek to propose a research design that will uphold the position of children as persons. Specifically, the study will function from the primordial premise that what children hold within them is essential in producing spaces in which they want to be in and can therefore flourish (Cook-Sather, 2009). The nature of children's experiential life, as expressed through how children understand and interpret the everyday, will thus form the foundation of the research.

Qualitative Research and Interpretivism

Interpretivism, primarily concerned with developing insights into the beliefs and lived experiences of humanity, is a paradigm concretised through the use of qualitative research (Denscombe, 2017). Founded on the assumption of the social world's multiplicity, where reality is subjective, nuanced, and socially constructed (ibid.), the interpretivist paradigm stems from the idea that perspectives from both researcher and participant are necessarily constructed through each individual's unique social and historical experience (ibid.). That is, interpretivism holds that not one version of truth exists in the interpretation of social occurrences, since evaluations of new experiences are filtered through old ones, further complicated since conceptions of experiences morph over time, within an individual's mind (Cohen et al., 2018). Inevitably then, is the fundamentally problematic project of researching experience (Greene & Hill, 2005). Specifically, if experience is subjective and reality multiple, capturing the richness of individual lives becomes convoluted, if not entirely misleading (ibid.). Indeed, where qualitative research does not acknowledge its own inevitable subjectivity, attempts at understanding lived experience fail at procuring significant and dependable insight. Yet, conversely, to the extent that subjectivity is considered, furtherance of knowledge is possible, even if imperfect (ibid.). Qualitative research, at its optimum, not only accommodates the subjectivity of human experience, but taps into its richness through the employment of a multiplicity of methodological approaches. Specifically, in regarding individuals as meaning-making beings who actively construct their own understandings, qualitative research upholds the idea of reality being multiple and constructed (Cohen et al., 2018), and it is such an acknowledgement that facilitates the consideration of the complexity of experience. In examining the area of interest through the interpretivist paradigm, this paper will thus seek to achieve an increased level of understanding through the method of triangulation, which will serve as a multi-layered sieve, accounting therefore for the multilateral nature of experience. Individuals, as understood through qualitative research, will be taken as deliberate and intentional beings who make sense of the world and act in the way best known to them,

guided by interpretations produced as a function of culture, context, and experience (ibid.). This will account for, theoretically, the subjectivity of both researcher and participant.

The Mosaic Approach

Appropriateness of the Approach

The Mosaic Approach, designed particularly for young children with naturally-diminished means of expressing themselves articulately with words, is a method proposed by Alison Clark and Peter Moss, professors of early childhood education at the Institute of Education (IoE). A multi-modal research method in essence, the Mosaic Approach stems from the belief that ideas are transmitted not only through the spoken word, but that communication operates instead through multifarious means. Specifically, the approach rests on the idea that the voice of mankind begins at birth (Alderson et al., 2005), and that children ‘speak’ through actions and reactions, such as through play, the activity engaged in by all children (Jackson & Forbes, 2014). Importantly, the Mosaic Approach employs triangulation with the intention of capturing the varied ways that children express their views and experiences (Clark & Moss, 2017). Supporting therefore interpretivism, particularly the notion in which reality is complex, multiple, and socially-constructed, the approach not only aims to deepen the information collected by utilising several strategically-planned sources of derivation, but also addresses the inadequacy of basing judgements off a single source (ibid.). That is, since perceptions of experience are filtered through interpretations of culture, context, and past experiences (Cohen et al., 2018), applying a multi-modal approach spurs the collection of information occurring below the surface, facilitating therefore an understanding of why perceptions are what they are. This, working seamlessly with the gathering of data from various sources, increases the validity of findings whilst enriching the depth of knowledge acquired. The following section, in going into precise detail of how the Mosaic Approach can be enacted, will be supported by detailed analysis.

Method of Employment

A mosaic is an assemblage of disparate pieces, brought together to form a cohesive whole. Independently, each piece of a mosaic hints at a fuller image, yet acting alone, the bigger picture is amiss. In qualitative research, reality can be likened to mosaic art, and each piece of information a potential fragment of reality. This research, in employing the Mosaic Approach as proposed by Alison

Clark and Peter Moss (2017), thus aims to elicit the perspectives of children in three distinct ways: (1) graphical elicitation, (2) focus groups and; (3) individual interviews. The following section will delve into specific detail.

Graphical Elicitation

The draw-and-write technique, an empirical visual research method, is an approach in which informants are asked to produce images in relation to a concept or a question (Hartel, 2019). Serving as a creative tool in which participants are afforded the space to think, the research method generates a dual corpus of visual and verbal data that can then be analysed systematically (ibid.). In applying the draw-and-write technique, this research proposes the utilisation of three drawing prompts, expressed in the following questions: (1) What are some important relationships you have with others in school? (2) Who are the people in school who teach you, and what do they do? and (3) What does an ideal relationship with teachers look like? As a comparative study, this research will randomly select two students from each of the three year groups. Specifically, the seventh and the fourteenth students on the register will be selected from the year twos, fours, and sixes. Such an indiscriminate and arbitrary selection will enhance the generalisability of the study (Maruyama & Ryan, 2014), although the research in itself will be insufficient as a source of applicable knowledge, finding relevancy only in association with other research studies. Once the selection of students is made, permission will be gotten from both children and their adults. Other ethical procedures will be performed, the details of which will be elaborated in section four of this paper.

Ethical requirements fulfilled, the selected students would be taken out of class for a total of two and a half hours over two days. Procedurally, engagement with the children will commence with three participants entering a room with the researcher on the first day, and another three the next day. In order to increase the richness of data, the comfort of the children will be of utmost importance, and this will be achieved through an explanation of confidentiality, the supply of snacks, and possibly, the provision of a familiar or pleasant environment. A room, for instance, with two gateways, such as windows, to an external environment, will be a potentially ideal space to hold the research since such qualities have been shown to increase the willingness of being in a space (Ne'Eman & Hopkinson, 1970). Once situated within the room, and formalities in terms of introductions of purpose, task, and participants conducted, the drawing will commence, and will roll for a total of forty minutes. Importantly, a range of drawing materials will be supplied, and attention will be given

to an emphasis of the task as an enjoyable and creative one, in efforts to encourage children to express themselves. Music will also be played, if the children so desire. In terms of the drawing prompts, the questions have been designed to elicit reflection on relationships, functioning as a springboard for the interview section of the study. Specifically, the prompts will ideally generate information on the relationships important to children, including how such relationships play out in the everyday, and will also catalyse reflection on what children want in relationships. Centrally, and in regards to the second prompt, children will be made to understand that they can draw pictures of any person who has taught them through the years, since such will provide crucial information for comparison, as will be further explicated. In regards to the decision of having three children in one room drawing at the same time, such a compromise was made because having children sit with the researcher individually might potentially prove intimidating, especially since the subjects are young, and the researcher a stranger. If however, the researcher has had the opportunity to establish subjectively friendly ties with the children over a considerable amount of time, working with the children individually might be an opportunity, for such an endeavour might increase confidentiality, thereby encouraging those more hesitant of sharing information to do so. That being said, an environment in which the children are drawing together and made to feel comfortable, especially with the explanation of confidentiality, could nonetheless override any hesitance of drawing with openness.

To end this section, it would be important to mention the advantages and disadvantages of graphical elicitation. Clearly, a drawing activity can reduce hesitance to participate through the subtle communication of informality. That is, employing drawing as a starter activity can get the children comfortable with participating in a research activity, which might otherwise prove intimidating. Further, such a procedure can stimulate thought, priming the children for conversation. Finally, graphical elicitation can also make otherwise intangible phenomena visible, through the expression of ineffable and elusive perceptions not easily put into words, offering therefore a glimpse into human sense-making (Hartel, 2019). One disadvantage, conversely, is that children may depict what they are able to, rather than what they want to (ibid.), although this might be made up for in discussion.

Discussing the Data: Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

At the termination of the drawing session, the children will be asked to return to their lessons. Following in the tradition of art history, the researcher will then conduct compositional interpretation (Rose, 2016) and visual grounded theory (Konecki, 2011), keeping in mind concepts from auteur

theory (Mannay, 2015). Specifically, the researcher would familiarise themselves with concepts from visual analysis, employing these quickly as a preliminary analysis of the drawings. In regards to auteur theory, the researcher will keep in mind the discrepancies between what the child might have meant, and what the researcher might interpret because of their ingrained way of seeing the world (Hartel, 2019). Analysis conducted, the researcher will then interview the children individually, in which interviews will be conducted with the children on the same day that they made their drawings. The focus group session will then occur on the second day, lasting for an hour, after all interviews have been conducted. Crucially, the individual interviews will last for half an hour, starting off with the discussion of the drawings. This will then be extended into a conversation of more sensitive questions, which the child might not wish to discuss in front of the others. The point of the focus group will then be to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of relationships, whereby contributions from one child should feed off contributions of the next (Acocella, 2012). In analysing the data, the researcher will make explicit comparisons between year groups, so as to identify any differences in the importance of relationships between years, making also situated comparisons within each child. That is, where academic results are available, the researcher could analyse academic grades with respect to the relationships a particular child had with their teachers over time. The researcher could, for example, identify if academic results differed at all in relation to the shifting relationships the children had, especially with different teachers. Of course, correlation is not causation and especially in such a small study, extraneous factors necessarily affect the data collected. Nonetheless, the research can prove useful; the researcher need only keep in mind its limitations.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations, as a cornerstone of social science research, can be approached in two distinct ways — firstly, directly in regards to the data collection process, and secondly, in the analysis of information, and construction of the research study (BERA, 2018). This paper, in applying the ethical guidelines recommended by the British Educational Research Association (BERA), will thus adhere to the following five-pronged procedure. To begin, the research will respect the privacy and autonomy of all individuals through the derivation of informed consent. Prior to the commencement of the study, a message will be disseminated to the parents in the relevant classes, informing them of the research and the forthcoming random selection of two students. The message will be clearly worded and brief, to increase its likelihood of consumption. Following this, the two chosen students will be spoken to,

with the intention that the children develop a certain understanding of what the research entails. A more in-depth explanation of the research along with the ethical pillars by which the research stands will then be provided to the parents of the children at this time, and a week will be provided for the parents and children to make the decision together. In the event that a child chooses not to participate, the next randomly-assigned individual will be called upon, which will be the eighth student, followed by the sixteenth, ninth, and eighteenth. Further, once the research has commenced, the researcher will remain sensitive and open to the possibility of withdrawal, ensuring that participants understand that no explanation will be required of them.

Attention will also be paid in ensuring that students participate because they want to, and not because they feel coerced to. Secondly, and in close association with the first point, the research will uphold its responsibilities to all participants by ensuring that all potential subjects understand, as well as possible, what is involved in the study. Subjects should be cognizant of, for example, why their participation is necessary, what they will be required to do, and what would happen to the data collected (BERA, 2018). Following this, as the third point, the research will recognise the entitlement of both schools and individual participants to privacy, according them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity. This would be expressed through the confidentiality between subjects, where sensitive questions will only be discussed individually, as well as through the production of the research paper, where fictionalising approaches to reporting such as the use of pseudonyms can be employed. Simultaneously, individual participants may wish to be recognised, and researchers should accord such a right to be identified. Correspondingly, as a fourth point, drawings belong to their creators (*ibid.*), and particular attention needs to be paid to the solicitation of consent should the researcher wish to include the drawings in the paper. Finally, ethical rights of all participants and of society more broadly will be upheld through a research process that rests on integrity, democracy, and validity. Specifically, by acknowledging the fact of reality being multiple, and by recognising the voice of each participant as important, the research will seek to use the most appropriate methods, expressing also the data in the most accurate way, keeping in mind the pitfalls of subjectivity and bias. All five points, working together and properly executed, will not only enhance the research's ethicality, but also its validity.

Personal Implications of the Research

In this paper, the theory of relatedness as expressed through emotional connection has been of centrality. Specifically, underlying interpersonal relationships, emotional connection has been shown to be primordial to learning, with education being the intersection of the emotional, social and cognitive (Wentzel, 2012). In applying the theory of relatedness to my practice, I will begin by acknowledging the relational sphere of education, paying particular attention to the fact that information is not transmitted hypodermically, in such a manner where messages communicated are directly assimilated, but that various aspects act instead as vehicles of information processing. Building off from this, I will actively consider connective instruction in my everyday interactions with the children, reflecting in particular how I might facilitate emotional connection interpersonally, substantively, and pedagogically. More explicitly, I will consider how I might connect with children relationally, how interest can be stimulated through the content I select, and how knowledge might be transmitted, in such manner that heightens the relevance and desirability of the information. Further, I will seek to develop and apply my knowledge of emotions, especially since a more nuanced understanding of how emotions work would facilitate an enhanced comprehension of the social-emotional world, affording the anatomizing of each participants' "emotional geography" — the emotions that play out in an individuals' life (Hargreaves, 2001). Specifically, in processing behaviour, I will act with compassion and intention, employing my knowledge of emotions to understand why my students behave the way they do. Rather than allowing the effects of mirror neurons or visceral actions to drive my behaviour, I will attempt to tune in to both the emotional geographies of myself and my students, seeking to understand the underlying factors that contribute to the tangible. Theoretically, this will catalyse a shift in my practice from one relying on the visceral to one where actions are spurred by strategic decisions and nuanced understanding. Additionally, I will strive to harness the potential power of interpersonal relationships, putting in place concrete rituals and carrying myself in such a way that would promote an environment in which children feel accepted, supported, and appreciated. This would potentially facilitate the effective influencing of behaviour, by enhancing the effects of both explicit explanations of academically-productive behaviour, and the more subtle modelling of actions and mindsets. Ultimately, I will seek to establish an ethos of care and community in my classrooms, where learning is a joy and not a chore, whilst always remembering the importance of high expectations and an authoritative demeanour.

Conclusion

This paper, in centering on interpersonal relationships, has expounded on the importance of the emotional sphere in learning. It has, in particular, shown how learning is not simply cognitive, but existing as an inherently interpersonal domain, operates in emotionally-charged systems in which behaviour is guided by socially-negotiated feelings. In proposing research in interpersonal relationships, this paper thus acknowledges the central position teachers hold in shaping the future of their students through the spurring of academically-productive and socially-desirable behaviour, as well as engagement, by means of an understanding of how emotions and relationships operate in the classroom, and the corresponding application of such knowledge. Summatively, it would do to conclude that the acquisition of knowledge, a process more complex than might be immediately perceivable, is underpinned by convoluted social and cultural processes (Light & Littleton, 2000), and will thus be prospered to the extent that those tasked with its propagation are cognizant of such a reality, even if such cognizance is incomplete or imperfect, as is necessarily the case. More specifically, learning will potentially be adequate even without such understanding; it is such cognizance, however, that spurs a transcendence of the regular, so that learning moves beyond the acceptable.

References

- Acocella, I. (2012). Focus groups in Social Research: Advantages and Disadvantages. *Quality & Quantity*, 46, 1125-1136.
- Alderson, P., Killen, M., & Hawthorne, J. (2005). The Participation Rights of Premature Babies. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 13(2), 31-50.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 497-529.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and Loss*. New York: Basic Books.
- British Educational Research Association (BERA). (2018). *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*.
- Clark, A., & Moss, P. (2017). *Listening to Young Children: A Guide to Understanding and using the Mosaic approach*. National Children's Bureau.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education*. Routledge.

- Cook-Sather, A. (2009). *Learning from the Student's Perspective: A Sourcebook for Effective Teaching*. Paradigm Publishers.
- Collins, W. A., & Repinski, D. J. (1994). Relationships during adolescence: Continuity and change in interpersonal perspective. In R. Montemayor, G. R. Adams & T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Personal relationships during adolescence* (pp.7-36). Sage Publications.
- Cox, S. (2010). *Children as Decision Makers in Education: Sharing Experiences Across Cultures*. Continuum.
- Cullingford, C. (2002). *The Best Years of Their Lives?: Pupils' Experiences of School*. Kogan Page.
- Denscombe, M. (2017). *The Good Research Guide: For Small-Scale Social Research Projects*. Open University Press.
- Ford, M. E. (1992). *Motivating humans: Goals, Emotions, and Personal Agency Beliefs*. Sage.
- Greene, S. & Hill, M. (2005). *Researching Children's Experience: Methods and Methodological Issues*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Hargreaves, A. (2001). The Emotional Geographies of Teachers' Relations with Colleagues. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 35(5), 503-527.
- Hartel, J. (2019). *Draw-and-Write Techniques*. SAGE Publications Limited.
- Jackson, S., & Forbes, R. (2014). *People Under Three: Play, Work and Learning in a Childcare Setting*. Routledge.
- Konecki, K. (2011). Visual Grounded Theory: A Methodological Outline and Examples from Empirical Work. *Revija za Sociologiju*, 41, 131–160.
- Laible, D., & Thompson, R. A. (2007). Early Socialization: A Relationship Perspective. In J. E. Grusec & P. D. Hastings (Eds.), *Handbook of Socialization: Theory and Research* (pp.181–207). The Guilford Press.
- Light, P., & Littleton, K. (2000). *Social Processes in Children's Learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lin, N. (2001). *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action*. Cambridge University Press.

- Mannay, D. (2015). Making the Visual Invisible: Exploring Creative Forms of Dissemination that Respect Anonymity but Retain Impact. *Visual Methodologies*, 3, 68–76.
- Maruyama, G., & Ryan, C. S. (2014). *Research Methods in Social Relations*. John Wiley & Sons Incorporated.
- Mashburn, A. J., & Pianta, R. C. (2006). Social Relationships and School Readiness. *Early Education and Development*, 17(1), 151-176.
- Martin, A. J. (2014). Interpersonal Relationships and Students' Academic and Non-Academic Development: What Outcomes Peers, Parents, and Teachers Do and Do Not Impact. In D. Zandvliet, P. Brok, T. Mainhard & J. Tartwijk (Eds.), *Interpersonal Relationships in Education: From Theory to Practice* (pp.9-24). Brill.
- Ne'Eman, E., & Hopkinson, R. G. (1970). Critical Minimum Acceptable Window Size: A Study of Window Design and Provision of a View. *Lighting Research & Technology*, 2(1), 17-27.
- Oxford Learner's Dictionaries (n.d.). *Relatedness*. In *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries.com* Retrieved February 16, 2023, from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/relatedness>
- Pianta, R. C., Hamre, B., & Stuhlman, M. (2003). Relationships Between Teachers and Children. *Handbook of Psychology: Educational Psychology*, 7(1), 199-234. John Wiley & Sons.
- Riley, P., Watt, H. M., Richardson, P. W., & De Alwis, N. (2012). Relations Among Beginning Teachers' Self-reported Aggression, Unconscious Motives, Personality, Role Stress, Self-efficacy and Burnout. In D. Zandvliet, P. Brok, T. Mainhard & J. Tartwijk (Eds.), *Interpersonal Relationships in Education: From Theory to Practice* (pp.151-166). Brill.
- Rose, G. (2016). *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Interpreting Visual Materials*. SAGE.
- Sava, F. A. (2002). Causes and Effects of Teacher Conflict-inducing Attitudes Towards Pupils: A Path Analysis Model. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(8), 1007-1021.
- Stiles, K. (2021, November 15). The Importance of Connection. *Psych Central*. <https://psychcentral.com/lib/the-importance-of-connection>
- Wentzel, K. R. (2004). Understanding Classroom Competence: The Role of Social-motivational and Self Processes. *Advances in Child Development and Behaviour*, 32(1), 213-241.

- Wentzel, K. R. (2012). Teacher-Student Relationships and Adolescent Competence at School. In D. Zandvliet, P. Brok, T. Mainhard, & J. Tartwijk (Eds.), *Interpersonal Relationships in Education: From Theory to Practice* (pp.19-36). Brill.
- Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2013). A Reflection on the Place of Emotion in Teaching and Teacher Education. In M. Newberry, A. Gallant, & P. Riley (Ed.), *Emotion and School: Understanding how the Hidden Curriculum Influences Relationships, Leadership, Teaching, and Learning* (pp.255-270). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Yoka, L., & Paschalidis, G. (2015). *Semiotics and Hermeneutics of the Everyday*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Zandvliet, D. B., Brok, P., Mainhard, T., & Tartwijk, J. (2014). *Interpersonal Relationships in Education: From Theory to Practise*. Brill