

**THE IMPACT OF DIALOGUE GROUP PARTICIPATION
ON TEACHERS' RELATIONAL PEDAGOGY
AND CLIMATE IN THEIR CLASSROOMS**

by

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ABSTRACT

In this research I explored how practising teachers' participation in a discussion group emphasizing attachment theory and care theory was manifested in their reflections on and understandings of their own practises and their students' perceptions of classroom climate. Three elementary school teachers participated in a bi-weekly discussion group over the period of one school year. Their understandings of the aims of education were assessed at the beginning and end of the study using Selman's (2003) teacher interview protocol. Written journals kept by the teachers throughout the study were analyzed for themes reflecting the impact of the dialogue sessions on their classroom practises. Students' perceptions of classroom climate were also measured at the beginning and end of the study. Results suggested the teachers' understandings of the aims of education reflected a more relational perspective at the end of the study than the beginning. Students' perceptions of classroom climate changed in the predicted direction, but rarely was the change statistically detectable. Seven key themes emerged from the teachers' journals. The teachers displayed a *commitment* to consider, create, and foster positive social-emotional development and caring relationships in their classrooms; they experienced *frustration* and at times were *hesitant* to fully implement relational pedagogy; and they expressed feelings of *isolation* as they realized that relational pedagogy required a supportive and collaborative school environment. While the teachers sometimes *missed opportunities* to implement relational pedagogy, at times they displayed an *awareness of their "mistakes"*. At still other times, they displayed *success* in their attempts to implement a relational pedagogy. Results are discussed in terms of their implications for pre- and in-service teacher education.

Keywords: social-emotional development; relational pedagogy; schools

DEDICATION

To Douglas, Rowdy, and Genessie. Your support, encouragement and care made this growth possible. To Jazzy. Your constant companionship and many walks and runs in the park kept me calm. To my parents, Kenneth and Evelyn Hill. Your sensitive, gentle, yet unrelenting, strength and guidance throughout the years is so deeply appreciated. To my parents-in-law, Douglas and Margaret Reeves. Your quiet and steadfast commitment to providing a positive context is invaluable. Thank you all. I know what it means to be loved and nurtured.

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INTRODUCTION

I have had the privilege of being a teacher for more than two decades. In both private and public schools and mainstream and alternate settings, I have worked in regular classrooms, special education facilities, resource rooms, and counselling rooms. Along with so-called “typical” children, my students have included those with learning disabilities, and behavioural and emotional challenges. Despite their diversity, I have observed something in common to all these children: they have all been responsive to my caring. It has been my observation that when children experience an empathic, warm, respectful, accepting, and authentic environment they tend to reciprocate with cooperation, prosocial and socially responsible behaviour, and academic engagement. I believe that the social and emotional dimensions of my interactions with children have had a powerful influence on their learning and development. That is, the more sensitive and responsive I was with the children the more I saw their positive social-emotional qualities coming to the fore. In short, throughout my years of teaching I have noticed that the caring relationships between myself and the children in my care have provided not only potent learning contexts, but produced happy, cooperative, caring children as well.

This experience has taught me that knowledge of how to build and enhance teacher-child relationships is essential for those of us who teach. Yet, my observations suggest to me that teachers’ understandings of the influential role of relationships in the learning process, and how to enhance relationships between teachers and students, are incidental at best.

Many of us in the business of education consider our primary roles to be exposing students to a curriculum mandated by a political body, assessing their academic performance against the prescribed learning outcomes of that curriculum, and reporting back to parents. This is what we are trained to do. Although we recognize that social-emotional competence and relationships influence learning, this tends to be where our understanding ends. Indeed,

our education system has done little to help us understand *how* to influence social-emotional development and *how* to enhance relationships in schools.

In some ways it is not surprising that the social and relational aspects of teaching and learning have not received more attention given that public schools were developed using economic models. Essentially, schools have developed into large, highly organized institutions as a bureaucratic response to the masses seeking schooling as a result of compulsory education (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). As a system, schools have tended to separate emotion and relationship from logic and reason for the sake of managing and evaluating students (Elias, Zins, Weissberg, Frey, Greenberg, Haynes, Kessler, Schwab-Stone, & Shriver, 1997): an approach to schooling that has been linked to historical trends that include the transformation of western society from agrarian to industrial (Glover & Ronning, 1987) and the widespread acceptance of the view of childhood and learning found in Behavioural psychology (Karier, 1986; Watson, 2003).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A significant emphasis within education in the 21st century is on raising educational standards and holding schools accountable (Kohn, 2000). The number one expectation from curriculum reform and enhanced technology initiatives has been to produce literate and academically adequate students who will one day contribute to our democratic society (Noddings, 1995, 2003). However, the numbers of children suffering from social and emotional problems such as aggression, violence, and depression (Noddings, 1992; Waddell, 2007), suggest that a different kind of reform is required. While schools have responded to these issues with increased supervision and initiatives such as social responsibility and restorative justice programs, the fundamental need for children to experience on-going supportive relationships with adults has largely been ignored (Pianta, 1999).

Teaching is complex and demands a variety of traits and abilities. Both intellectual and relationship abilities contribute significantly to teacher competence and effectiveness (Ryans, 1960). Although teachers are supported in their acquisition of content knowledge and are provided with excellent resources such as technology, equipment, buildings, books,

and curricular adaptations, the development of their relationship abilities has received little more than lip service.

Teacher training programs continue to focus almost exclusively on intellectual abilities and the academic curriculum (Noddings, 1996). Despite a growing body of research that points to the importance of relationships and the social and emotional aspects of intelligence, teacher-student relationships and the social-emotional development of children is not given priority in teacher training programs or in schools (Hymel, Schonert-Reichl & Miller, 2006). By continuing to privilege management and evaluation over affect and relationships something very important to learning is being lost. We seem to have ignored that education is, first and foremost, about human beings meeting together to learn; human beings who are in relation with one another (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004).

RESEARCH AIMS

Both attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) and care theory (Noddings, 1992, 2003) offer views regarding the value of nurturing, caring relationships for the healthy development of children. In my view, knowledge of attachment theory has the potential to help teachers understand the importance of their interactions and relationships with children. Further, understanding elements of care theory may contribute significantly to helping teachers *create* contexts in which healthy relationships between adults and children can grow. The relational underpinnings of development emphasized in both theories may provide teachers with valuable information about and insights into supporting the healthy development of children.

In my research I sought to explore how practising teachers' participation in a discussion group emphasizing attachment theory and care theory would be manifested in their reflections on and understandings of their own practise, and their students' perceptions of classroom climate. Unlike the behavioural models commonly implemented to guide and enhance classroom learning and management, attachment and care theories focus on the quality of interpersonal relationships to promote social-emotional and cognitive development. Attachment theory's focus on sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of children and care theory's focus on explicitly creating a caring context have implications for teacher-

student relationships. Both indirectly and directly, attachment and care theories propose that through the building of caring, trusting relationships with all students, teachers can more fully bring out the healthy inherent potentialities of children.

In the following sections I provide overviews of attachment theory and care theory. These sections are followed by a review of empirical literature that utilizes concepts consistent with these theories and addresses the impact of student-teacher relationships and a caring school context on student outcomes.

OVERVIEW OF ATTACHMENT THEORY

Attachment theory as developed by Bowlby (1969, 1988), and elaborated on by Ainsworth (1978) and others (e.g., see Cassidy & Shaver, 1999), focuses on caregivers as protectors of and providers of safety to children and the psychological concomitant of security (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bretherton, 1992). It has evolved as a “multifaceted theory of personality structure, functioning, and development, as well as a theory of interpersonal behaviour, emotional bonds, and close relationships” (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 116) that proposes that the psychological effects of early relationships, and the individual differences in attachment patterns that they produce, strongly influence and shape the human personality emotionally, cognitively, and socially (Bowlby, 1988; Bretherton, 1992). The overview of the theory provided here is not comprehensive (see Cassidy & Shaver, 1999 for a thorough review), but rather focuses on those aspects of the theory that are most relevant for the functioning of school-aged children.

Attachment is an affectional bond between child and primary caregiver (Ainsworth et al., 1978). This affectional bond is believed to be biologically based whereby both the child and the primary caregiver are “pre-wired” to behave in ways that increase proximity of the child to the adult (Bowlby, 1969). Fundamental to attachment theory is the notion that because human infants cannot survive without adult care, it is necessary that both infants and adults behave in ways that increase the likelihood of the infant’s survival. For example, conditions that threaten health and survival such as when the infant is tired, ill, or faced with external dangers in the environment, serve as triggers to evoke attachment

behaviours (i.e., crying). Adults are biased to engage in protective behaviour in response to these signals. Other attachment behaviours alert adults to the child's interest in interaction (i.e., smiling). All early attachment behaviours are meant to have the predictable outcome of increasing proximity of the child to the adult (Cassidy, 1999). The degree of sensitivity and responsiveness of the caregiver to the child's bids for proximity lay the foundation for the child's "internal working model" of self and other; that is, their set of expectations regarding the degree of safety and support to be found in their social environment and their worthiness to receive it.

Bowlby used the term "working model" to indicate that individuals' representations or expectations of available security are influenced by experience and subject to change as new experiences accumulated. However, the manner in which new information is added to or integrated into the model is shaped by its existing nature. This prototype perspective implies that the effects of early experiences are carried forward in these models, even as they undergo change (Fraley, 2002; Siegel, 1999). Furthermore, Bowlby believed that some aspects of these internal working models, particularly those that are not accessible to consciousness, are especially resistant to change (Bowlby, 1969).

Therefore, attachment theory proposes that personality development that occurs as children's social worlds begin to broaden and become more complex may be likened to a railway system that begins with a single main route. The main route, developed through thousands of repeated interactions between the infant and caregiver, forks into a number of distinct lines. Although these lines initially continue in the same direction as the main route, at each junction (as the infant grows into a child and into an adolescent) there is a chance for divergence. Attachment theory proposes that personality development is an ever-branching process in which critical junctures afford a chance for maintaining or reorganizing the personality through interactions or transactions in the context of the social world. Despite the junctures afforded by life and its vicissitudes, attachment theory contends that there is an enduring tendency for people to remain relatively close to their original routes. The internal working models and emotional and cognitive structures which arise out of social experiences, beginning with the initial infant-caregiver social experience, once present,

tend to filter later experiences in a way that minimizes the likelihood of spontaneous change (Belsky & Fearon, 2002; Fraley, 2002; Grossmann, 1995; Siegel, 1999; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005; Sroufe & Waters, 1977). The organization of these attachment structures is thought to be associated with characteristic processes of emotional regulation, self-management, social relatedness, and differing interpersonal relationship patterns and ways of seeing the world (Main, 1995; Siegel, 1999; Sroufe et al., 2005). They are thought to exert a strong influence on the development of emotional well-being and social and cognitive competence in children.

Each individual's working model includes concepts of the self and the other, as well as expectations of relationships. With development and experience, a general working model of relationships evolves which reflects an aggregation of experiences in different relationships. It is presumed that some relationships are more influential than others in shaping this model (Fraley, 2002; Miklincer & Shaver, 2007; Seigel, 1999; Sroufe et al., 2005). Although the patterns established early in life have a major impact on development across all domains, internal working models are dynamic, interactional processes whereby the individual's experiences continue to be influential. This suggests that new relationship experiences have the potential to move the internal working model toward a more or less secure state of mind (Claussen, Mundy, Mallik, & Willoughby, 2002; Moretti, Odgers, & Jackson, 2004; Siegel, 1999). This, to me, is a critical point for teachers to understand in regard to their relationships with children. It implies that interactions within teacher-student relationships that are sensitive, responsive, and nurturing can influence the internal working models of children and either support a secure state or potentially alter an insecure state of mind.

OVERVIEW OF CARE THEORY

Care theory, like attachment theory, also considers the influence of relationships on human beings (Noddings, 1995). However, its historical roots are in character and moral education as opposed to child development. Care theory asserts that caring relationships can provide a powerful catalyst for positive emotional, social, and academic development (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Noddings, 1992, 2002).

The development of care theory has been significantly influenced by the work of several scholars including John Dewey (1916) and Carol Gilligan (1982, 1993). Dewey's influence is seen in his views of children as socially oriented, his view of learning as an active, social process in which children construct rather than simply receive knowledge, and his emphasis on education's role in establishing the conditions and relations that support moral ways of life.

Gilligan's influence is seen in her careful rethinking of Kohlberg's cognitive developmental model of moral development based on a caring perspective. Gilligan presented a view of morality that is dominated by duty and obligation for concerns of care in interpersonal relationships (Gilligan, 1982, 1993). For her, it is important to consider relationships and connectedness when trying to understand the actions and choices people make in moral reasoning rather than exclusively focus on justice based on facts and societal rules, as Kohlberg's theory purports. Accordingly, Gilligan (1993) suggested three elements, which when present, convey an ethic of care. First, care involves and revolves around responsibility and relationships. Second, morality is real and tangible, partial to concrete persons, and not abstract such as is justice. Finally, care is guided by action to respond to these persons as particular individuals; that is, to care is to act with the interests of the "other" in mind. Gilligan conceptualized an ethic of care to be characterized by "involvement and the maintenance of harmonious relationships from a need-centred, holistic and contextual point of view" (Botes, 2000, p. 1074).

Nel Noddings, one of the most influential and significant present day care theorists, has taken Carol Gilligan's ideas, as well as concepts and recommendations from a variety of disciplines and has further elaborated an ethic of care, particularly as an educational concept (Noddings, 2002). Noddings (2002, 2007) articulated the ethic of care as an educational concept that offers an alternative to character education, which typically focuses on the inculcation of virtues in individuals. An ethic of care does not perceive the development of virtues as arising through direct teaching and instruction. Rather, children who are properly cared for by people who genuinely model social and ethical virtues are likely to develop these virtues themselves. Children are considered to be much more likely to listen to adults with

whom they have established a relation of care and trust. Noddings (2002) notes that character educators may recognize this, but character education's attention to caring relations seems secondary to the promotion of a list of virtues. Care theory inverts these priorities; caring relations come first, and the virtues develop almost naturally out of these relations. This is a fundamental characteristic of care theory. It is relation-centered rather than agent-centered, and is more concerned with the caring relation and maintaining an environment in which moral life can flourish than with caring as a virtue.

Care theory promotes the provision of a social environment in which it is possible for children to be good and in which they will learn to exercise sound judgment through four major components: modeling, dialogue, practise and confirmation (Noddings, 1992, 2005). There is an openness to great variety in what is modeled, talked about, practised, and approved of through confirmation.

Caring requires address and response; it requires different behaviours from situation to situation and person to person. It sometimes calls for toughness, sometimes tenderness. With cool, formal people, we respond caringly with deference and respect; with warm, informal people we respond caringly with hugs and overt affection. Some situations require only a few minutes of attentive care; others require continuous effort over long periods of time (Noddings, 1992, p. xii).

It may appear that care ethics require much of the teacher, particularly with regard to emotional responsiveness, but both parties play an active role in the process. Emotional responsiveness is conceptualized as having a direct and conscious intention, that of bringing out the good in the other individual. It is here that the component of dialogue plays a fundamental role. True dialogue is open-ended. The participants both speak and listen. There is a commitment to reciprocity. A carer must attend, or be engrossed (even momentarily), in the cared-for and the cared-for must receive the carer's efforts. Within care theory, emotional responsiveness of each to the other must occur in order for the relation to be properly called caring; both parties must contribute to the interaction in very specific ways.

In her book, *The Challenge to Care in Schools* (1992, 2005), Noddings describes caring as the state of consciousness of the carer as characterized by engrossment and

motivational displacement. She describes engrossment as an open, nonselective receptivity to the cared-for. It is the notion of full receptivity to the other that is important. When in this state of engrossment or attention, the carer really hears, sees, or feels what the other is trying to convey. Motivational displacement is described as the sense that one's motive energy is flowing toward others and their projects. It is a time when the carer is thinking about what can be done to help or support the other and nothing else.

The cared-for must also respond in a characteristic way. Reception, recognition, and response are the primary characteristics of the one cared-for. The cared-for receives the caring and shows that it has been received. This recognition then becomes part of what the carer receives in his or her engrossment, thus the caring is completed (Noddings, 1992, 2005). This duet is important, for a failure on the part of either carer or cared-for blocks completion of caring. There may still be a connection or encounter where each party feels something toward the other, but it is not a caring relation.

So then, through engrossment the caring teacher is able to demonstrate acceptance by acknowledging and accepting the child's feelings and the relevance of his or her lived experience, thus reinforcing the caring actions on the part of the teacher. Through motivational displacement the caring teacher is able to shift focus from self to other to give him or herself the ability to see the world as the child sees it. This helps the teacher to determine the motivators for the child, allowing the teacher to create the conditions for receptivity and responsiveness in the child-teacher relationship (Waterhouse, 2007). In turn, it is anticipated that the cared-for child will respond positively to the efforts of the caring teacher. The caring cycle is complete and care can flourish when this condition is continually nurtured. The preferred state is for this caring to occur naturally. However, ethical caring must be invoked when natural caring does not come to the fore (Noddings, 2002). This relational interpretation of caring is necessary for teachers to understand in order to participate in a caring relationship. It is important to note that the caring teacher must be willing to risk rejection from the child with regard to his or her caring overtures. Indeed, not all children will be responsive and receptive to a teacher's care. However, a critical element of care is that rejection must not be seen as failure and must be respected as, "each of us at times

needs space or even solitude...that should be sensed and honoured by the one-caring” (Altenbaugh, Engel, & Martin, 1995, p. 160). The caring teacher will nonetheless maintain engrossment and the elemental perspective of confirmation so as to continue to draw the cared-for toward his or her best self.

Another care theorist, Diane Rauner, characterizes care as being “an interactive process involving attentiveness, responsiveness, and competence” (Rauner, 2000, p. 7). Again we see the emphasis care theory places on both the “perceptive and receptive interaction that takes place between the givers and receivers of care” (Cassidy & Bates, 2005, p. 69). Rauner argues that caring is not a mechanism, similar to Noddings’ (1992) argument that caring cannot be achieved technically by a formula. Rauner contends that by focusing on creating a context for healthy development to occur and by promoting social connections, teachers can create possibilities for students that lead to positive outcomes. Again, Rauner’s contention presses us to extend our focus in education beyond that of academic achievement to that of creating caring relationships. Indeed, Rauner suggests that programs need to be based on principles of caring and evaluated as such, that is, according to whether they have succeeded in creating caring relationships between young people and positive role models in the educational environment rather than on the prescribed learning outcomes. She argues that such relationships have a “facilitating influence in learning, academic achievement and the development of other skills” (Rauner, p. 73).

Summary

From the above overviews we can see that while attachment theory and care theory have different roots both theories emphasize the dyadic processes that influence development and give us insights into the creation and maintenance of healthy relationships. Both theories focus on the quality of the interpersonal relationships themselves to promote social-emotional and cognitive development, proposing that nurturing, caring, and trusting relationships can more fully bring out the healthy inherent potentialities of children.

There is a significant body of work that addresses the implications of attachment and care theories for the school context. Although not all of this work stems directly from these

theoretical perspectives, the constructs examined (e.g., belongingness, caring communities, pedagogical caring, and positive teacher-child relationships) are very similar to those found in attachment and care theories. A review of this work follows.

IMPLICATIONS OF ATTACHMENT AND CARE THEORIES FOR SCHOOLS

Several researchers have explored the qualitative aspects of teacher-child relationships utilizing key constructs from the literature on parent-child attachment. Lynch and Cicchetti (1992) described five teacher-child relationship patterns which included optimal or adequate (secure), and deprived, disengaged, or confused (insecure) patterns. These patterns vary in emotional quality and psychological proximity-seeking and are theorized to affect the relatedness experienced between the child and the teacher.

These same authors, using a self-report questionnaire, assessed these patterns in a large sample of low-risk, middle-class children and found that only one third of the 1226 children, ranging in age from 7 to 15, reported having an optimal or adequate relationship with their teacher, while over half reported having a disengaged pattern of relationship (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997). Further, as the children moved through elementary school into middle school, patterns of secure relatedness with teachers decreased, with middle-school children increasingly reporting more disengaging patterns and less optimal or adequate patterns of relating with their teachers than those in elementary school. These results are consistent with the view that ecological conditions influence teacher-child relationships. That is, as children move from elementary school to middle school not only are they typically exposed to more than one teacher for their instruction, but the size of the institution also typically increases, perhaps leaving fewer opportunities for meaningful teacher-child relationships to develop.

Another approach to teacher-child relationships that draws on attachment-related constructs is that proposed by Pianta and colleagues (e.g., Pianta & Steinberg, 1992) who conceptualized the teacher-child relationship along the dimensions of warmth/security, anger/dependence, and anxiety/insecurity. This was operationalized with the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS), which revealed three distinct factors involved in the

quality of the teacher-child relationship, those being closeness, dependency, and conflict/anger (Pianta & Steinberg, 1992; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995).

Several studies have investigated this perspective empirically and found associations between the teacher-child relationships, as measured by the STRS, and children's adjustments in school. For example, Birch and Ladd (1997, 1998) found that Kindergarten teachers reported more negative attitudes in children with whom they had conflictual relationships. Further, children who were perceived as dependent by their teachers were also reported to have more negative school attitudes, to like school less, and to participate less in social interactions and other opportunities to explore the environment. Finally, the degree of closeness present in the child-teacher relationship was found to significantly influence school attitude, academic performance, and school engagement of Kindergarten children so much so that closeness correlated significantly with regard to whether an at-risk child would be retained or not. The teachers reported more positive school attitudes, school liking, and self-directedness for those children with whom they had a close relationship (Birch & Ladd, 1997, 1998). These results suggest that children who share a close relationship with their teachers may be better able to use the teacher as a source of support and a resource for learning.

Baker (2006) found that teacher-child relationship quality predicted academic and behavioural outcomes during the elementary school-age years. In a sample of 1301 children in Kindergarten through Grade 5, children who were reported by teachers to have close teacher-child relationships had better reading grades, positive work habits, and better social skills than children with whom teachers reported having conflictual teacher-child relationships. Interestingly, it was also found that children with behaviour problems or other developmental difficulties that make it difficult for them to negotiate social relationships, performed at or above the levels of their peers. The protective effect of a close teacher-child relationship was seen to alter the risk trajectory of children experiencing both externalizing and internalizing difficulties, especially with regard to social and behavioural outcomes (Baker, 2006).

A recent study by Buyse, Verschueren, Doumen, Damme and Maes (2008) also suggests that the emotional support of teachers has a protective effect on at-risk children with both externalizing and internalizing problems. These authors acknowledged that the teacher-child relationship is strongly related to child behaviours, but point out that, some children who exhibit aggressive or other non-favourable behaviour in the classroom do form close, positive relationships with their teachers. Hypothesizing a moderating effect of teaching style on the relationship between child behaviour problems and the teacher-student relationship, these researchers examined teacher-student relationships in Kindergarten classrooms that varied in terms of the emotional support provided by teachers. The results indicated that both externalizing and internalizing behaviours in kindergarten-aged children were attenuated when emotional support was high. Further, among the low emotional support group teachers teacher-child relationships were strongly correlated with child behaviour (i.e., greater child externalizing behaviour corresponded to a more conflictual relationship). However, within the group of high emotional support teachers these statistical associations disappeared. As well, the results indicated that the impact of teacher emotional support on teacher-child relationship quality was larger for children with behaviour problems than for children without behaviour problems, suggesting that behaviourally challenged children may be more susceptible to classroom climate influences than children without such challenges (Buyse et al., 2008).

Teacher characteristics of warmth and support were also found to significantly influence teacher-child relationships and academic achievement in a sample of 910 first grade children, some of who had been identified at the end of Kindergarten as at-risk based on demographic characteristics such as low maternal education and functional indicators such as attention, externalizing behaviour, social skills and academic competence (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Findings from this study revealed that by the end of the school year those children identified as demographically at-risk who were placed in classrooms offering moderate to high instructional support displayed similar levels of achievement to their low-risk peers whereas those children with less educated mothers who were placed in classrooms offering low instructional support displayed significantly lower academic

achievement at the end of the year than their low-risk peers. Further, children identified as high-risk on the basis of functional indicators who were in classrooms with high emotional support had similar achievement scores to their low-risk peers. Interestingly, the researchers found that academic performance for at-risk children with behavioural problems was more strongly influenced by emotional support than instructional support.

Belongingness is another construct that has been explored in relation to child outcomes within the school context. The belongingness hypothesis as articulated by Baumeister and Leary (1995) is that human beings have a “pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships” (p. 497). They suggest the criteria necessary to satisfy this drive include frequent, pleasant interactions with a few people in a stable, predictable context with an enduring affective concern for each other’s well-being.

Ma (2003) surveyed 13,751 Grade 6 and Grade 8 Canadian students, assessing their sense of belonging in relation to student characteristics, including self-esteem and general health, and school characteristics, including academic press, disciplinary climate, and parent involvement. The most significant finding was the strong relationship between self-esteem and sense of belonging. Those students with high levels of self-esteem reported feeling more comfortable and confident in their schools. Another important finding was that school climate as measured by academic press, disciplinary climate, and parent involvement significantly influenced students’ sense of belonging, more-so than school size or socioeconomic status. That is, student and teacher expectations and teacher encouragement regarding schoolwork, the way school rules were administered and managed, and level of parent involvement and interest in schoolwork, all showed significant effects. It is important to note that many school climate characteristics are under the control of school personnel, thus highlighting the fact that teachers can play a critical role in shaping students’ sense of belonging at school. A school climate that makes students feel that they are cared for, safe, and treated fairly all contribute to the development of a sense of belonging at school (Ma, 2003).

Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, in a sample of 12,118 adolescents in Grades 7 through 12, Resnick and colleagues (1997) found that perceived school connectedness created a sense of belonging at school for the youth, and along with parent-family connectedness, was protective against adolescent health risks including emotional health, violence, substance use, and sexuality.

Another study by McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum (2002), also using the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health data, explored ways in which schools can enhance school connectedness. Using the “stage-environment fit” perspective, that is, the fit between the developmental stage of the adolescent and the characteristics of the social environment, the authors explored how a goodness of fit across schools influenced behaviour, motivation, and mental health. Their analysis revealed that school level characteristics, including discipline policies, rates of participation in extracurricular activities, and classroom management climates, that were deliberately sensitive and responsive to the developmental stage of adolescence, significantly influenced school connectedness and a sense of belonging for the youth.

Children’s perceptions of feeling cared for by teachers have also been shown to motivate students to engage in school activities more efficaciously and to behave in prosocial and socially responsible ways (Wentzel, 1997). Research exploring caring pedagogy further supports the premise that social and emotional factors in the school environment are important to school outcomes for children.

Wentzel (1997, 2002, 2003) has done extensive research on the relationship between classroom teachers’ teaching styles and adolescents’ social and academic adjustment in school. She hypothesized that effective teachers share characteristics of effective parents and describes these characteristics as pedagogical caring. Further, she hypothesized that teacher caring and nurturance would be a significant predictor of adolescents’ motivation and academic achievement. In her 1997 longitudinal study, Wentzel administered questionnaires to 375 Grade 8 students. Her focus was on students’ perceptions of teacher caring, their academic effort, and pursuit of social and prosocial goals. As well, students were asked to list three characteristics of caring and uncaring teachers. Results revealed that

perceived caring from teachers was positively and significantly related to academic effort and prosocial and socially responsible goals. Further, in their descriptions of teachers who care, students' responses corresponded closely with dimensions of effective parenting as suggested by Baumrind (1991) including such characteristics as modeling a caring attitude, democratic communication style, expectations for behaviour and rule setting, and nurturance.

Cassidy and Bates (2005), in their investigation of an alternate school for at-risk youth with severe externalizing disorders, found that the caring pedagogy practised by the teachers and administrators had a positive impact on the youth, in terms of their perceptions of both self and others. Through interviews with staff and students and on-site observations the researchers observed caring enacted through modeling, dialogue, confirmation and practise, and the building of respectful, responsive, and supportive relationships through which the needs of the youth were being met in flexible and insightful ways. Attendance rates and course completion rates were reported to be high for the youth, many of whom had been expelled from their neighbourhood schools. During interviews the youth described the school as a place where they felt comfortable, welcome, and safe, psychologically, emotionally, and physically. They also spoke about feeling understood, happy, and respected, and knowing that there would be help for them when they needed it (Cassidy & Bates, 2005).

Clearly care was embedded in the culture of the school in an effort to more closely fit with the needs of the students versus the tendency found in typical schools to maintain the existing structure despite the recognition that it does not provide promising outcomes for disadvantaged groups such as these youth. Indeed, the program directors of the school Cassidy and Bates (2005) investigated described the environment they wished to create as "being rich in the nutrients that allows each youth to flourish. [Their program] does not focus on 'pruning the plant,' that is, on fixing what is wrong with the student. We really look at the quality of the soil that we've created. Is it a caring environment? Is it a respectful environment?" (Cassidy & Bates, 2005, p. 77). Again we see the notion of a child's competence being distributed across the child and the context within which he or she is in as being critical in social and emotional development and school and life success.

The Developmental Studies Centre and the Child Development Project (CDP) provides further empirical support for the influence of caring adults in promoting children's social, emotional, and intellectual development. The CDP was initiated over two decades ago as an educational intervention designed to enhance social and ethical development in children (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1994).

Data were collected from 24 elementary schools across the United States chosen for their diversity. Half of the schools received training and support in implementing the constructs of creating "caring communities of learners" whereas the other half were selected because of their similarity to the program schools. Baseline assessments in the form of teacher and student questionnaires, and classroom observations from trained researchers (4 per year) were collected in both the program and comparison schools, and again annually over a period of 3 years, during which the program was being implemented.

Results of the CDP revealed that teacher and classroom activities significantly contributed to children's and teacher's sense of community. Specifically, teacher practises of warmth and supportiveness, encouragement and cooperation, emphasis on prosocial values, elicitation of student thinking and expression of ideas, and extrinsic control all influenced student behaviour including engagement, positive behaviour, and sense of influence, thus creating a sense of community (Battistich et al., 1997; Solomon, Battistich, Kim, & Watson, 1997). Further, in a follow-up study of a sub-sample of former CDP students, those students who had attended "high implementation" elementary schools (program was implemented widely throughout the school) displayed a large number of positive outcomes during middle school. Through student questionnaires, teacher ratings, and school records "high implementation" CDP students were found to be more engaged in and committed to school; more prosocial and less involved in problem behaviours; had higher academic performance; and associated with peers who were more prosocial and less antisocial than their matched comparison students (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004). Interestingly, those CDP students who had attended "low implementation" elementary schools (program was not endorsed by all teachers in the school) also showed a clear

pattern of positive effects during middle school compared to their comparison group, although effects were smaller in magnitude.

The CDP research findings are consistent with the other studies reviewed here demonstrating that teachers' attention to positive interpersonal interactions influences the social and emotional development of children and their concomitant academic gains.

Also worth mentioning is that the CDP may be considered a primary prevention because of its emphasis on promoting positive development for all youth rather than on the prevention of disorder among those considered at-risk. Pianta (1999) describes three forms of intervention actions used in relation to risk status and school outcomes. Primary prevention actions are aimed at the entire population, and are implemented before the problem occurs. Secondary prevention actions are those delivered to a particular group, an at-risk group, who are more likely to experience the problem outcome. Finally, tertiary prevention actions are those interventions delivered after the problem has occurred (Pianta). Sadly, the "health promotion" primary prevention model has received far less attention than the risk-reduction (secondary and tertiary prevention) model across all levels of education including the school level, the teacher-college level, and policy-making level (Battistich et al., 2004; Hymel et al., 2006; Pianta, 1999).

To my mind, schools and classrooms qualify as primary prevention sites and must operate as such. Considering it is estimated that between 14 to 20% of children and youth experience mental health problems significant enough to warrant social services, many of which begin as emotional and social problems that interfere with learning (Hymel et al., 2006; Waddell, 2007), and considering that recent research in the area of intelligence suggests that analytical intelligence (IQ) only accounts for 20-25% of the difference in people's performance, leaving 75-80% likely explained by emotional and social qualities (Goleman, 1995), a focus on primary prevention directed at relationships may never be so timely.

Summary

The preceding review indicates that there is both theoretical and empirical justification for paying attention to relational processes within the school context. Emotionally supportive classrooms; schools that are sensitive and responsive to children's fundamental need for belonging and connectedness; classrooms that promote caring communities and feelings of security; and schools that recognize, emphasize, and infuse positive interpersonal skills through modelling, dialogue, confirmation, and practise provide experiences that can positively influence developmental outcomes for children.

IMPLEMENTATION OF A RELATIONAL PEDAGOGY WITHIN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

Evidence that the quality of teacher-student relationships and caring classrooms are positively linked to school success suggests that teachers need to know *how* to develop these relationships and contexts. One person who has addressed this issue is Robert Selman (2003), who for more than a decade has been exploring teacher professional development with an aim to help teachers promote students' social competencies. Based on this research, Selman has developed a theoretical framework that characterizes teachers in terms of their level of awareness of and attention to students' interpersonal growth and social development. His framework describes three orientations or levels along the awareness dimension that include external, internal, and relational orientations. An external orientation is indicated when, in describing the aims of education, teachers' comments and narratives indicate a focus on social behaviour in relation to external outcomes for students (i.e., good social behaviour is important so that students are able to learn academic subjects). Teacher comments that include an awareness that learning in school must also involve and promote the understanding of social relationships are considered to reflect an internal orientation. Educating and training students in how to "get along" and resolve conflicts with one another and with authority figures is emphasized at this level. Teacher commentary displaying an awareness that both strong academic and social competencies are necessary for societal and life success reflect a relational orientation. At this third level teachers focus on fostering relational competencies and

skills in a collaborative or transactional way where they employ a capacity to both listen to and express perspectives on social issues with their students so as to support the development of autonomy and caring, as well as trusting relationships (Selman, 2003). Further, in his research, Selman has been able to characterize five distinct themes reflecting teachers' personal motivations for engagement in teaching. The five themes include a good fit or match between one's perceived attributes and activities involved in teaching; convenience or practical reasons such as scheduling; default in that there appeared to have been no other choices; a desire to change society and to make a difference in children's lives; and a calling whereby teaching is something that one had always wanted to do. By interfacing each kind of analysis, that is, teacher orientation and themes of engagement, Selman has been able to develop profiles and describe differences in teachers' professional awareness with regard to promoting students' social competencies.

The "Voices of Love and Freedom" (VLF), a literacy based approach to social competence, developed out of the Carnegie Research Study project in Boston, has been instrumental in providing Selman (2003) with the conceptual and methodological framework described above to analyze teacher's professional awareness in terms of understanding students' interpersonal growth and social skills. His model hypothesizes that a high level of teacher awareness, that is, a pedagogical vision that includes the creation of a two-way connection between the teacher and students in a "reflective coordination of a teacher's perspective on learning with that of his or her students" (Selman, p. 189), leads to better teaching practises. It is assumed that such a pedagogical vision, put into practise, creates a "relationship that is energizing and transformative for both teacher and student [and] it is the presence of this relationship that allows the students to grow, change, and develop in their learning of both the academic and social skills they will need throughout their lives" (Selman, p. 189).

As stated, Selman's (2003) research focuses on increasing understanding of the professional development of teachers with regard to promoting social competence in their classrooms, and the connection between thought and action of teachers, more-so than on actual student behaviours. Through case study analyses using extensive ethnographic and

interview data, he has been able to show that the tools he has developed to construct awareness profiles of teachers correspond closely with teachers' actual classroom practise when using the VLF program as the professional development curriculum. However, no formal testing of the model has been undertaken to determine its robustness. Selman, himself, is quick to point out that the basic question of what determines whether a teacher will view his or her professional obligation to include fostering students' interpersonal development and social awareness remains unanswered. Although he has found in his research that those teachers who were open to change were also willing to explore both their intellectual and relationship abilities, he concedes that it is difficult to teach social awareness in schools. "First, the content is challenging and does not fit into most educators' notions of what constitutes the core disciplines of instruction in schools. Second, it requires teachers to have sophisticated interpersonal skills, including both communication and listening abilities. And third, the teacher must be motivated and find the enterprise personally meaningful" (Selman, p. 275).

Selman's (2003) concerns about the difficulties of teaching social awareness in schools resonate with my own. As an educational practitioner and graduate student I have become increasingly aware that teachers' relationship abilities are pedagogically at least as important as their intellectual abilities in influencing children's learning but that these skills are not appropriately valued and supported in our profession. In the present study I sought to engage teachers in a professional development opportunity that I hoped would address my own and Selman's concerns. Specifically, in bi-weekly dialogue sessions, I aimed to introduce teachers to aspects of attachment and care theories that would allow them to see the importance of relationships in supporting the success of their students. In facilitating their learning of this content I also hoped to support the teachers' own communication and listening skills and to motivate them to find the development of caring relationships with their students to be personally meaningful. My aim was to help teachers more deeply understand the important role of interpersonal interactions in the development of children with the hope that their deepened understandings would translate into changes in their pedagogy.

METHODS

In the present study, I utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods to address three research questions:

1. How do teachers reflect on and process the content of bi-weekly dialogue sessions on attachment and care theories in relation to their day-to-day classroom practise?
2. Does teachers' participation in bi-weekly dialogue sessions on attachment and care theories relate to change in their orientations to students' interpersonal growth and social development as defined in Selman's (2003) developmental model?
3. Does teachers' participation in bi-weekly dialogue sessions on attachment and care theories relate to change in their students' perceptions of classroom climate?

Qualitative data in the form of teacher reflection journals and teacher interviews were collected in an effort to address research questions 1 and 2, respectively. Student surveys yielding quantitative data were used to address research question 3.

SETTING

The study took place in three suburban public elementary schools situated in a community in Western Canada. Each school had a population of approximately 350. Overall, the community was predominantly white and middle class. One school reflected these characteristics of the larger community. The population was predominantly white; parents were generally employed full-time; and families lived in single-family dwellings. The other two schools were located in neighbourhoods representing ethnic diversity and a variety of levels of socioeconomic status. One was a community school with a subsidized hot lunch program and the other was located in a high-density neighbourhood with known drug

houses where many of the residents lived in rental accommodations. The research activities covered a 10-month period from September 2005 to June 2006.

PARTICIPANTS

Teacher Participants

Eight elementary school teachers participated in this study. I recruited four of the eight teachers during the summer months prior to the commencement of the study. These teachers became the Focus Group (FG) teachers. The four Comparison Group (CG) teachers were recruited in mid September 2005 once the school year began and class configurations had been determined. Initially teachers and students from a total of 8 classrooms participated in this research; two grade 3 classrooms, two grade 4/5 classrooms, two grade 5/6 classrooms, and two grade 7 classrooms, with six female teachers and two male teachers. However, one grade 5/6 FG teacher voluntarily withdrew from the study several months after its commencement due to time constraints. Data collected from that FG teacher, as well as the matching CG teacher, have not been included in the results of this study. All subsequent teacher and student participant descriptions refer to the six remaining teachers and their students. These participants were from the two schools in the less advantaged neighbourhoods.

All six remaining teachers were Caucasian, five female and one male, and taught full-time in a regular classroom position. I did not know any of the participants prior to the study. The three FG teachers held Bachelor of Arts degrees and teaching certificates. Their pseudonyms will be Maud, Vick, and Anna. Their ages were 55, 34, and 35, with 9, 9, and 10 years teaching experience, respectively. Two CG teachers held Bachelor of Arts degrees and the third held a Master of Arts degree, and all three had teaching certificates. Their pseudonyms will be Tara, Jane, and Lynn, and their ages were 35, 47, and 29, with 10, 19, and 6 years teaching experience, respectively.

Student Participants

One hundred and twenty-four children in grades 3, 4, 5 and 7 from the classrooms of the teacher participants also took part in this study. The students' assignment into the Focus or Comparison group corresponded with their classroom teacher's assignment.

In the FG, 15 children were in a grade 3 classroom (6 girls/9 boys; mean age = 8.07 years); 21 children were in a split grade 4/5 classroom (12 girls/9 boys; mean age = 9.52 years); and 26 children were in a grade 7 classroom (15 girls/11 boys; mean age = 12.35 years).

In the CG, 14 children were in a grade 3 classroom (6 girls/8 boys; mean age = 8.10 years); 24 children were in a split grade 4/5 classroom (11 girls/13 boys; mean age = 9.51 years); and 24 children were in a grade 7 classroom (13 girls/11 boys; mean age = 12.12 years).

All students were taught in self-contained classrooms with one teacher for all academic subjects. No student in either the FG or CG was receiving ESL instruction at school. All students enrolled in the participating classrooms participated in the study unless they were absent on the day the questionnaires were administered or parental permission was denied.

DATA SOURCES

Data sources included teacher interviews, teacher reflection journals, and student surveys.

Teacher Interviews

At Time 1 (September/October 2005) I conducted audio-recorded interviews with both FG and CG teachers using Selman's (2003) Teacher Interview Protocol. The interview includes 13 questions that tap three categories of teacher professional awareness including engagement, aims, and teaching strategies, together comprising what Selman refers to as a "pedagogical vision" that influences how individuals relate to one another. The interview enabled me to assess, at the outset of the study, the degree to which each teacher perceived teaching to be relationship-oriented. The Selman Teacher Interview Protocol was modified

for this study to include questions that focused on only two aspects of teaching, teacher engagement and teacher aims, as Selman predicts that these two characteristics influence the promotion of social-emotional development and social understanding in the classroom. Teaching strategies questions were omitted from the adapted protocol. Instead, teacher reflection journals were used to capture strategies and techniques, and what teachers were actually doing in their classrooms on a day-to-day basis, to promote social-emotional development.

The FG teachers also participated in a second interview at Time 2 (June 2006). The teacher engagement questions regarding why teachers had entered the profession and remained committed to it were not readdressed during the second interview. The second interview focused only on those questions that addressed the aims of education, as my primary interest was whether there had been changes in teachers' professional orientation and views about the aims of education (see Appendix A for the adapted Teacher Interview Protocols at Time 1 and Time 2).

Teacher Reflection Journals

The FG teachers were given a journal and a journal outline I developed (see Appendix B) for the purpose of helping them focus and reflect on their teaching experiences throughout each week during the period of the study. Teachers were encouraged to reflect and write in their journals freely at least once a week, and were asked to include observations and feelings about themselves, their students, as well as any thoughts, concerns, and highlights they experienced during the week.

Student Measures

Background information. Students were asked to fill out a general information sheet (see Appendix C) at the beginning of each session indicating their gender, birthday, age, grade, and languages spoken at home. They were not expected to put their names on the information sheet and were told that their questionnaires would remain anonymous. Questionnaires were matched at Time 1 and Time 2 through gender and birthdates. Only

data for those students who completed questionnaires at both Time 1 and Time 2 were included in the data analyses.

Perceived caring from teachers. Perceived caring from teachers was assessed at Time 1 and Time 2 with the Teacher Social and Academic Support subscales of the Classroom Life Measure (Johnson, Johnson, & Anderson, 1983). A sample item from the 4-item Teacher Social Support subscale is “My teacher really cares about me” (1 = never, 5 = always). The 4-item Teacher Academic Support subscale asks about perceived support for learning, including items such as “My teacher cares about how much I learn”. Both subscales are reliable, with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the 4 social support items and the 4 academic support items being .80 and .78, respectively (Johnson et al., 1983).

Prosocial/social responsibility. Students’ social goals were assessed at Time 1 and Time 2 with the Prosocial and Social Responsibility subscales of the Social Goals Scale (Wentzel, 1994). An example from the 7-item Prosocial subscale asks, “How often do you try to help your classmates learn new things?” (1 = never, 5 = always). An example from the 7-item Social Responsibility subscale asks, “How often do you try to do what your teacher asks you to?” The prosocial items and social responsibility items, as reported in previous research by Wentzel (1994), have alphas of .84 and .74, respectively.

Classroom climate. Classroom climate, defined as the degree to which students felt their class was a supportive community was measured at Time 1 and Time 2 with the Classroom Supportiveness and Student Autonomy and Influence in the Classroom subscales of the Sense of Classroom as a Community Scale (Battistich et al., 1997). A sample item from the 13-item Classroom Supportiveness subscale is “Students in my class help each other even if they are not friends” (1 = disagree a lot, 5 = agree a lot). A sample item from the 10-item Student Autonomy and Influence in the Classroom subscale is “In my class students have a say in deciding what goes on” (1 = never, 5 = always). Battistich and colleagues (1997) report reliability coefficients of .85 and .81 for the Classroom Supportiveness and Student Autonomy scales, respectively.

Academic goals. Academic goals were assessed at Time 1 and Time 2 with the Academic Self-Efficacy and Academic Engagement subscales of the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (PALS: Midgley, Maehr, Hruda, Anderman, Anderman, Freeman et al., 2000). A sample item from the 5-item Self-Efficacy subscale is “Even if the work in school is hard, I can learn it” (1 = not at all true of me, 5 = very true of me). A sample item from the 5-item Academic Engagement subscale is “The main reason I do my work in school is because I like to learn” (1 = not at all true of me, 5 = very true of me). These subscales have been shown to have adequate internal consistency (alpha of .86 for efficacy and .81 for engagement: Midgley et al., 2000).

PROCEDURE

Ethics Approval

Consent to carry out this study was obtained from the University Ethics Committee and the school district’s Ethics Review Committee prior to teacher recruitment.

Recruitment of Focus Group Teachers

During the summer of 2005 I contacted and met individually with nine teachers who had either responded to the flyer (see Appendix D) I had distributed to all schools in the district that Spring, or had heard about my study through word of mouth, and indicated an interest in participating.

During each meeting I explained that my research involved gathering together a group of teachers who were interested in professional development that focused on the social and emotional development of children in their classrooms and how this may influence social responsibility. I described that a commitment to meeting as a group every other week during the upcoming school year for 2-hour dialogue meetings would be required and that during these dialogue meetings we would be focusing on the theoretical constructs of attachment and care and exploring ways of applying them in the classroom. I also mentioned that I was hoping each teacher would be willing to keep a journal recording his or her teaching experiences for the duration of the study.

Additionally, I explained that I would be conducting two interviews with each participant and, upon school administration and parental consent, visiting their classrooms at two times during the school year to administer a questionnaire to their students. I made the student questionnaire available for each teacher to look at. I also made it clear that participation in the study was voluntary and that they had the choice to withdraw at any time.

Four teachers agreed to participate in the study. We arranged to meet again during the first week of school after the summer break at each teacher's school site to confirm participation. During the same week I also arranged to meet with each school's administrator to explain my study and present a package containing a copy of the ethics approval from the university and the school district, the parental consent form, and the student questionnaire booklet. I arranged to return in one week to secure written permission from the principal to carry out the study at their school site.

Recruitment of Comparison Group Teachers

With the FG teachers established and school administration approval granted, I determined which colleagues matched the FG teachers in terms of full-time classroom assignments and grades taught at each school site. I had each FG teacher introduce me to the potential CG teacher while I was visiting the school and recruited each by explaining that I was doing my PhD research and I needed a CG teacher who matched my FG teacher to complete my study. I asked if they would be willing to meet with me to discuss participating as a member in the comparison group. Over a period of 5 days I met with each teacher at his or her school. I explained the purpose of my research and that as CG teachers they would be asked to participate in one audio-recorded, semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30 minutes, and to allow me to come into their classrooms at two times to administer a student questionnaire to their students. I made the student questionnaire available for each teacher to look at. I also made it clear that participation in the study was voluntary and that they had the choice to withdraw at any time. Four teachers agreed to participate as a CG in the study.

Teacher Data Collection

Teacher consent was obtained during the recruitment meetings for both the FG and CG teachers (see Appendix E).

At Time 1 (Sept-Oct 2005) FG and CG teachers participated in an audio-recorded interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. Interview dates were scheduled via email or telephone and occurred either during the lunch hour or after school. Each teacher was asked to provide a quiet spot within their school for the interview (i.e., counselling office, resource classroom).

At the end of the interview, I gave each teacher the parental consent forms for students (see Appendix F). Each teacher was asked to keep track of the students who received parental consent to participate. We also determined a convenient time for me to visit their classrooms to administer the first student questionnaire.

Reflection journals and journal outlines were handed out to each FG teacher at the end of the Time 1 interview. I told each teacher that I would appreciate any effort they could make to write weekly reflections using the outline provided to guide them and to simply do the best they could to be conscientious about this. I told each teacher that I would be collecting the journals at the end of the study.

At Time 2 (June 2006), the FG teachers participated in a second audio-recorded interview, also lasting approximately 30 minutes. Again each teacher was contacted via email or telephone to determine a convenient time for the interview. Again we found a quiet spot in each FG teacher's school for the interview. Reflection journals were also collected during the Time 2 interview visit.

Dialogue Meetings

From September through May FG teachers participated in bi-weekly, 2-hour, open-ended dialogue meetings that I facilitated. Using email, we determined a convenient starting date and place. Through group consensus at the first meeting we decided that dialogue meetings would not be held during report card writing and school holiday times. In October 2005,

during the 2-week teacher strike, our meeting went ahead as planned, and one meeting was cancelled in January 2006 due to snow conditions. We met a total of 14 times. All meetings were held after school. The first three meetings were held, by invitation, in the home of one of the FG teachers. Thereafter, at the request of the group, each teacher hosted the group in his or her classroom after school on a rotational basis.

The content of each dialogue meeting was difficult to predict, beyond focusing on the constructs of attachment and care as they related to the teachers' classroom experiences. This was purposeful, as I wanted the dialogue sessions to more closely resemble a conversation about theory and practice and to approximate the meaning of dialogue as understood in the care model rather than to create carefully scripted discussions. Within the care model, true dialogue is perceived as open-ended where the participants do not know at the outset what the conclusions will be. There is a topic, but it may shift as the parties involved in the dialogue both speak and listen (Noddings, 2002).

Using case studies and experiences from their classrooms, I conveyed to the FG teachers that the aims of the dialogue meetings were to provide a confidential, collaborative, and supportive venue for sharing professional concerns and reflections; discussing experiences in their classrooms; and working together to improve their understanding of the elements of attachment theory and care theory as they relate to promoting students' social emotional growth within the classroom. Additionally, the dialogue meetings were meant to provide an opportunity for the FG teachers to experience first-hand the development of a caring, trusting environment for learning.

At the commencement of the dialogue meetings I presented the option of providing short theoretical readings on attachment and care to guide discussions at the subsequent meeting. Although the group was not opposed to receiving handouts, there was resistance to making them required readings. I therefore decided to abstain from utilizing handouts as a point of reference during dialogue meetings.

Student Data Collection

Student data were gathered by me during regular 45-minute class sessions, once in September/October and then again in May/June. I introduced myself to the students, handed out the student questionnaire booklets, and guided them in completing the background information page. Next, I reviewed the remaining contents of the booklets with the class by reading aloud all instructions, explaining the students' task for each page, and clarifying any questions. For the younger students, I had the classroom teacher identify those children who would potentially have difficulty reading the questionnaire items independently and either myself or the classroom's educational assistant sat at a table with those students and read the items aloud together. Students were told that their answers would be confidential and that they did not have to answer any of the questions if they did not want to. I circulated throughout the classroom while students completed the questionnaires to answer and clarify any further individual questions. Those students who completed their questionnaires before others were asked not to wander the classroom, and were given the choice to draw on paper provided, or to read. Teachers remained in their classrooms while students filled out the questionnaires.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of Teacher Data

Semi-structured interviews. I transcribed each teacher interview at Time 1 and 2 and coded them for the five themes of engagement and three levels of understanding the aims of education, as described by Selman (2003). Briefly, the themes of engagement include: 1) A good fit; 2) Convenience; 3) Desire to change society; 4) Default; and 5) Calling. A good fit is indicated when teachers comment on there being a good match between their own inclinations and the primary activities involved in teaching such as patience and caring, or their enjoyment in working with children in general. Convenience is indicated when teachers comment on choosing teaching for practical reasons such as fitting in with a schedule or other life commitments. A desire to change society is indicated when teachers express a commitment to wanting to change things for the better, to make a difference in

children's lives. Default is represented when teachers' comments indicate they could not or did not entertain other career options. Finally, a calling is indicated when teachers express that teaching is what they had always imagined doing.

In classifying teacher orientation in terms of aims of education, Selman's (2003) model includes three levels: 1) External; 2) Internal; and 3) Relational. These levels capture how teachers conceptualize and approach children's social-emotional development and teach social competence. An external orientation is evident when teachers focus on external outcomes alone such as good student behaviour being required for academic learning. An internal orientation is represented by teachers' expressions of an awareness for the need to proactively promote social understanding and societal relationships and to provide students with the necessary life skills to learn how to resolve interpersonal conflicts equally with academic learning. At the most sophisticated level, a relational orientation, there is an emphasis on teachers' own effectiveness and capacity to utilize the social context naturally present in teaching to promote and foster students' perspectives on social issues as they express their own in a collaborative way. There is a focus on fostering autonomy, caring, and trust in the classroom. Teachers view these capacities as necessary to participate actively in society in the long term. See Appendix G for the classification rubric, adapted from Selman (2003), used to define and describe teacher themes and orientations used in this study.

Teacher reflection journals. I used a hypothesis testing approach to analyze the content of the teacher reflection journals. From the outset, because the dialogue meetings focused on the theoretical constructs of attachment and care, I was looking for themes of care and relationship building in the teacher journals. I hypothesized and, indeed, hoped that the dialogue meetings would influence teachers to promote caring contexts, relationship building, and attention to the social-emotional development of their students.

Prior to a careful reading of the teacher journals I expected that they would reflect emphasis on building meaningful relationships with students, an equal commitment to students' social-emotional development as to their academic development and persisting in projecting hope for, and worthiness in, children despite set-backs and feelings of frustration and despair. With this in mind, each teacher reflection journal was carefully examined for

evidence of teachers' focusing on and fostering relationships with students, attending to their social-emotional development and maintaining a hopeful stance despite the inevitable challenges in teaching work.

Analysis of Student Data

Student questionnaires yielded quantitative data that were subjected to analyses of variance using SPSS 14.

RESULTS

TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR ENGAGEMENT IN AND THE AIMS OF EDUCATION

To assess whether teachers' participation in the dialogue sessions had an impact on their understanding of their engagement in and the aims of education, teachers' responses to the semi-structured interviews were examined. Interviews with FG and CG teachers were conducted prior to the dialogue sessions and with the FG teachers only following the dialogue sessions. If teacher participation in the dialogue group had an impact on their understanding of engagement in and the aims of education, I expected to see positive growth in the FG teachers' understanding from Time 1 to Time 2.

The individual teacher interviews were coded according to Selman's (2003) criteria as described in the Methods chapter. The results are summarized in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Awareness Profiles of Teachers in Terms of Engagement and Teaching Aims as coded using Selman's (2003) Teacher Interview Protocol

	Themes of Engagement				
Orientation	Good Fit	Convenient	Desire to Change Society	Default	Calling
External	Vick – time 1 Anna – time 1			Anna – time 1	
Internal	Tara – time 1 Jane – time 1 Lynn – time 1 Maud – time 1 Anna – time 2		Maud – time 1	Anna – time 2	Tara – time 1 Jane – time 1 Lynn – time 1
Relational	Maud – time 2 Vick – time 2		Maud – time 2		

Tara, Jane, Lynn = Comparison Group Teachers
Maud, Vick, Anna = Focus Group Teachers

Comparison Group Teachers: Time 1

Engagement in Teaching

When asked, “What made you decide to become a teacher?” all CG teachers stated that teaching was what they had always wanted to do.

I can't remember ever thinking about being anything else. My grandmother was a teacher, my aunt was. I was good at school and always loved it. It was natural for me. (Tara)

I've always wanted to become a teacher. It goes back to my Grade 3 teacher. She was a real inspiration, an outstanding teacher. (Lynn)

I had always wanted to become a teacher. In my late 20's I realized it would be possible because I got some financial support. (Jane)

Following Selman's (2003) model, these responses represent engagement in teaching as a Calling.

When asked, “What keeps you teaching?” all CG teachers focused on “*the kids*”.

They [the kids] keep you on your toes. The staff is great too. The challenging kids make me really think and constantly reflect on what I'm doing. (Tara)

The satisfaction I get on the job. I like to help, I like to coach. I like to see what happens with enthusiasm and energy in a class. It's never boring, but always a learning experience. (Lynn)

The kids keep me teaching, their energy and enthusiasm to learn. The hard part is reporting out and the meetings and the increased pressure of administration. But seeing the light in their eyes when they learn something...that keeps me going. (Jane)

Further to a Calling, these responses represent engagement in teaching as a Good Fit because of the enjoyment the teachers got from working with children.

Aims in Education

All CG teachers demonstrated an understanding that relationships were an important part of the teaching process. When asked, “What is the most important part of teaching to you?” their responses included:

The relation I have with my kids as a group and with the individual. I think needing to know who they are as well as what they need to learn in the curriculum is important. (Jane)

Making connections and making sure they have a relationship with me. Making sure they are learning skills that they're going to carry on into older grades, but also making sure there is a connection. (Lynn)

The relationship with the kids is key. When I realize that I started strictly with the outcomes of the curriculum and we evolve to this place where what you were hoping they'd learn isn't happening, rather another whole, bigger aspect of learning is happening and you can let that happen. There's an important trust. (Tara)

These responses indicated that the CG teachers appreciated the influence of relationships on the learning process, had an understanding that creating a context that supported both academic goals and relationship development was important in their teaching, and demonstrate what Selman (2003) refers to as an internal pedagogical focus.

Further evidence of the CG teachers' internal orientation can be seen in their responses to, "How would you define success for a student in your classroom?" Every CG teacher made a reference to the children needing to feel a sense of happiness. In their responses, they connected this with their commitment to focus on developing children's intrinsic motivation to learn. One teacher responded with:

I want them to come in in the morning really happy to be here. I want them to feel comfortable asking me questions. That's the first sign of success because without that who cares about the other stuff. I like them to be able to see what they are good at and what they need to work on and what interests them. (Tara)

Another said:

It's much broader than looking at their report card. The fact that they are there, the fact that they enjoy coming to school. There is a willingness and motivation on their part, they have to feel that this is a place they want to be before they will take a risk in their academics. (Jane)

Finally, the third CG teacher responded with:

Basically, giving it their best and having fun with what they're doing. I want them to think, "I did that, I'm proud of it." Obviously not everybody is going to achieve

the same, but it's important what they feel, whether they are satisfied with themselves. (Lynn)

It is important to note that none of the CG teachers made any mention of a long-term vision for their students or how they might prepare them to succeed in society. Nor was there any emphasis on the importance of collaboration between teacher and students. Such awareness distinguishes an internal pedagogical orientation from a relational orientation. It indicates an appreciation that the development of relational competencies have a transactional nature, that is, the teacher's capacity to listen to students' perspectives while also expressing his or her own, and that this influences the development of trusting relationships which are critical in maintaining and improving society.

In summary, the CG teachers were a fairly homogeneous group in terms of their engagement, personal meaning, and professional awareness about their work as teachers. All engaged in teaching as a calling and because it was a good fit, and all displayed an internal orientation.

Focus Group Teachers

Engagement in Teaching: Time 1

The FG teachers' reasons for choosing to go into teaching were quite diverse. One FG teacher chose to become a teacher based on a desire to change society, according to Selman's (2003) classification. This teacher's negative experience motivated her to try to change things for the better for other families.

We hadn't had a good experience as a family with the school system. As a parent I didn't think there was a lot of care or sympathetic understanding so I decided to put my money where my mouth is and I went into teaching. (Maud)

Another felt that teaching would be a "good fit" with his personality and inclinations.

In my previous profession I was in retail management. I got tired of the push to make money for a big conglomeration so I took a look at what was important to me...people...and my other interests. I had an interest in working with people, in staff development, and working with the public. I married these together. (Vick)

Finally, the third FG teacher's initial decision to become a teacher was by default. She chose teaching because it was something she was familiar with.

Both my parents were teachers... that's an interesting one. About 2 years into my P.E. degree I thought hmmm... "What am I going to do with this?" So I decided to go into teaching. (Anna)

When asked, "What keeps you teaching?" two FG teachers emphasized "the kids".

The kids. The day-to-day smiles in the morning. The hard part is how mechanical it is sometimes, the constraints of the curriculum, splitting the kids and using two textbooks at the same time. (Vick)

The kids. Not the money and not the hours. So much freedom to do what you want with the kids. Challenge too, you're never done. But it's hard too. So many needy families. The way life is now where parents are really busy. The lack of money and supports in schools is frustrating though. (Anna)

Following Selman's (2003) model, FG2 teacher's response continued to represent engagement in teaching as a Good Fit and FG3 teacher was also coded as such (along with default) because of the enjoyment she expressed about working with children.

The final FG teacher's response was as follows:

A good part is the parents. I often have one or two kids where the parents feel alienated and I want to help them. I'm somebody who struggled in the system so I don't see the building of relationships with kids as the most important part, but rather parents and families. (Maud)

This disclosure indicates a good fit because of this teacher's intimate personal experience. She felt that she could be empathetic with parents who had children struggling in school. It also indicates a desire to change things for the better for other families (desire to change society) thus broadening the reason for staying engaged in teaching compared to the others.

Aims in Education: Time 1

When asked, “What is the most important part of teaching to you?” like the CG teachers, every FG teacher indicated that an important part of the teaching process had to do with relationships.

The critical part is relationship. I don't think you can teach somebody until you have a positive relationship. Academics are secondary, but I'm not sure we can do that without having a solid relationship to build on. (Maud)

Getting to know the kids. It's way more important getting to know the kids and making connections. Teach the kids what they need to know, what they want to know and also the day-to-day things. It is not getting up in front of the class and reading curriculum. (Vick)

Trying to get the kids to learn and think for themselves, to be able to direct themselves rather than me telling them what is most important. Making sure the kids know that I am on their side, so I think actually trying to have relationships with the kids is the important part. (Anna)

These responses indicate that each FG teacher appreciated the influence of relationships on the learning process and although not deeply articulated, there is some indication of an internal pedagogical focus in these responses. However, in response to the final question, “How would you define success for a student in your classroom”, the orientation of each FG teacher became more evident. The first teacher's response was:

The kids are all working on what they need to improve on and it's not all the same stuff. Some kids need to develop social skills and they need to be able to use them in the classroom and on the playground – not in a counsellor's office. This is just as valid as needing to learn place value. (Maud)

The second teacher responded with the definition of a successful student:

Having them take a risk. True success is when you grow and I believe to truly grow you have to take a risk. I have to provide the environment for the kids to be able to take a risk. (Vick)

The final FG teacher said:

When you can almost step out of the picture and the kids can take it [their learning] and run with it. (Anna)

The response of FG1 reflects an internal orientation, as it demonstrates an awareness that social relationships are equally as important as academic skills. It is important to this teacher that her students learn to manage social issues, but there is no indication in her responses that she has considered the importance of this in any long-term way.

FG2 teacher indicated an awareness of his influence in the classroom and obligation to provide a context for promoting risk taking and growth, but there is no explicit reflection of whether this includes both academic and social growth. Further, there is no evidence in his responses of consideration of any long-term vision for his students. Therefore, his responses predominantly represent an external orientation.

Although the final FG teacher mentioned the importance of relationship in teaching, her responses predominantly represent an external orientation as well. There is a definite focus on academic achievement in her responses and little reflection on promoting relationships and social competence of students.

In summary, at Time 1 the FG teachers were a more diverse group in terms of their engagement, personal meaning, and professional awareness about their work as teachers. Reasons for engagement in teaching ranged from a good fit, expressed by all, to a desire to change society, and default, and pedagogical orientations ranged from one teacher displaying an internal orientation, to the other two representing professional awareness more reflective of an external orientation.

A second interview was conducted at the end of the study with the FG teachers only that addressed those questions regarding teachers' awareness of the aims of education. It was of interest to determine whether there had been a shift in pedagogical orientation from the beginning of the study to the end for the FG teachers as they had participated in the discussion group that emphasized attachment theory and care theory as it related to their own classroom practise. A second interview was not done with the CG teachers, as they had not participated in a discussion group. These results are presented below.

Aims in Education: Time 2

When asked at Time 2, “What is the most important part of teaching to you?” FG1 responded:

The most important part about teaching and learning is building relationships.

You are not going to make any progress academically, socially, or emotionally or any of the ways we are trying to work with kids without them feeling apart of a caring relationship. A caring relationship involves more than one person. And the question this leaves me with is, are some people born teachers and this may not be a job you can teach everybody to do. Anybody could teach the academics I think, bottom line, but to retain things and grow as a person depends on the relationship. And it's kind of funny because we don't actually talk a whole lot about relationships in teacher training. (Maud)

In this response we see the teacher's recognition of the dyadic processes involved in nurturing children. She considers the development of the whole child as being part of the educational enterprise and focuses on building relational competencies and caring skills. It is interesting that she ponders why such a significant element of teaching is not included in teacher training programs.

In the next response the teacher focuses on fostering relational skills in a transactional way, demonstrating an awareness of the need to listen to and consider students' perspectives as well as his own. His willingness to promote collaboration and self-expression is indicative of a relational orientation.

Some of the things I've been learning around care and attachment have sort of totally changed the way that I look at some of these things now – things that I thought were good teaching in the past I have changed. My core concern now would be care and attachment, flexibility and inclusion, and respect and sensitivity and a willingness to listen to everybody and accommodate everybody. (Vick)

FG3 responded by saying:

Wow – what a question! It's so many things... being the mom, the nurse, the counsellor... wearing so many hats... sometimes the police officer. But I think the most important thing is getting them to think about who they want to be as people and who they want to be as a class to support each other. Getting the kids to know what is important to them is so important because at the end of the day if they don't

know how to multiply and divide...if they don't know how to be a good person and how to make choices for themselves that they are going to be happy with and are going to be positive...I think good teaching does this. (Anna)

She indicates how important it is to provide students with skills and the inner strength to manage themselves both in and outside of school and focuses on fostering their autonomy and caring. She also defines teaching as being more than just delivering information. However, there is no mention of the importance of collaboration or two-way expression, so this teacher's response was coded as depicting an internal orientation according to Selman's (2003) classification.

One theme that emerged during the second set of interviews with the FG teachers that was not present in any of the initial interviews was that of the teachers having a long-term vision for their students, indicating a broadening of vision in the teachers' aims of education. When asked to, "Define success for a student in your classroom" during the second set of interviews, FG1 teacher answered:

My goal would be for everyone to be happy, and well adjusted, and to be able to get along with others. That's what they need to be able to do in the world out there. Knowing that I am here to help them and having them trust me is important to success too. (Maud)

FG2 said:

I want all of us to be happy to be there, have positive self-regard and feel cared for. Straight A's on a report card to me is not a success for a student because not everybody can get straight A's. I would say that is one of the biggest challenges education faces and that's the whole government thing going on. If you can produce higher test results, more A's equals better teachers, and that has nothing to do with it. Feeling cared for and respected makes good people. And good people beget good people. (Vick)

Finally, FG3 commented:

As I said, I want the kids to be thinking about who they want to be as people. Knowing how to be a good person, knowing how to make good choices, being thoughtful...this is the stuff that's so important and makes a successful student. (Anna)

These excerpts have considerably more depth to them than the initial ones and indicate that the FG teachers were now clearly considering the affective domain of the students as they expressed what student success meant to them. We can see that the teachers were imagining their students beyond the classroom and were considering what they wished for them to become.

Table 3.1 summarizes the results from the individual teacher interviews. Because Selman's (2003) model is a developmental one, growth and change can occur, and indeed did for the FG teachers.

TEACHER REFLECTION JOURNALS

Results from the teacher interviews indicate growth in the teachers' understanding of their engagement in and the aims of education; however they indicate nothing about whether there was a connection between this growing understanding and the teachers' day-to-day practise in their classrooms. The teacher journals were used to capture how the FG teachers were consolidating and making meaning out of the dialogue sessions and enacting the content in their classrooms. I hypothesized prior to reading the journals that I would find in them evidence of teachers building meaningful relationships with students, addressing the social-emotional development of students equally as often as addressing their cognitive development, and persisting in projecting hope and worthiness despite set-backs and feelings of frustration and despair.

Upon reading the journals seven key themes emerged from the data. The story told by the journal themes captured and illuminated much more than what I had hypothesized. The FG teachers' actions, as depicted through their journal writing, displayed a conscious effort and **commitment** to consider, create, and foster positive social-emotional development and caring relationships with the students in their classrooms. Despite their commitment, they experienced **frustration** and at times were **hesitant** to fully implement relational pedagogy. Feelings of **isolation** arose as they realized that relational pedagogy requires a supportive and collaborative school environment. **Missed opportunities** to implement relational pedagogy were apparent. Although some relational opportunities were missed

entirely, at other times teachers displayed an **awareness of “mistakes”**, that is, they conveyed regret at responding to students in ways that were at odds with relational pedagogy. At still other times, teachers displayed **success** in their attempts to implement a relational pedagogy.

Theme of Commitment

The theme of commitment to be aware of and try to address relationship building and the social-emotional development of children was evident throughout the teacher reflection journals. That is, the FG teachers' actions, as depicted through their journal writing, displayed a conscious effort and commitment to consider, create, and foster positive social-emotional development and caring relationships with the students in their classrooms.

The following excerpt speaks to the commitment on the part of one teacher to create a trusting, respectful classroom through consistently having class meetings that focused on a sense of belonging and worthiness.

We got together again today in a class meeting format. As we began the class meeting I reiterated to the kids what I had said the other day “I want everyone in the class to feel welcome and cared for and one way we will do that is by getting to know more about each other.” It is just rolling off my tongue... “I want to do everything I can to make everyone in this class feel welcome and cared for each and every day.” They don’t even roll their eyes anymore... I think they are actually starting to believe me. (Vick, September 23rd)

We can see from the above excerpt a commitment to the social-emotional development of the students in this classroom and a desire to promote the development of meaningful relationships. Class meetings offer opportunities for teachers and students to collaborate with one another in a non-instructional way where they can share interests and ideas, and provide support and guidance to each other. This teacher's willingness to provide class time for meetings such as this clearly suggests a commitment to supporting the social and emotional well-being of his students.

The next excerpt illustrates this teacher's commitment to creating caring relationships with students so as to support their growth and development as well as his awareness that the school context can promote or undermine this.

The things I hear in the staff room make me...I am starting to remove myself from some conversations that are going on in the staff room...or speak up at the risk of being asked to remove myself from the conversation. I am always amazed at how some people discuss children. I feel very attached to my class and I feel like I care deeply for my class. I believe that care is not only shown through actions, but also through words. Words need to be considered with care in mind when they are spoken. Some people, actually only a couple, come into the staff room to "air" all of their complaints in a very uncaring manner. I am the first one to admit that I will come into the staff room and discuss a situation with a child because I care and I am struggling with what to do. But when a teacher walks into a room and all they have to say is negative with no real questions or obvious attempts to work through whatever happened or ask for advice, I see it as uncaring complaining. If the child ever caught wind of the words that were being said about them then their attachment to that teacher would be severely affected, not to mention their sense of being cared for in an environment that they spend 6 hours a day. (Vick, December 5th)

The previous excerpt indicates a consciousness on the part of the teacher that every interaction, whether a statement or an action, expresses who we are and can influence the social-emotional development of the children in our classrooms. Teaching work can be extremely challenging. Nonetheless, school personnel must create a caring context and appreciate that struggling children need support, not criticism. This teacher's comments indicate a willingness to advocate for children and to stand up to colleagues who participate in a practise that is all too common in staffrooms – degrading children. It is difficult to go against the flow in a workplace. This teacher's comments indicated that his commitment to creating caring relationships with students was over-riding that challenge.

The next series of excerpts give an example of a teacher persisting across time in her desire for and efforts to gain help in supporting the social and emotional well-being of her students. Such persistence can be taken as evidence of commitment. We can see in the first excerpt of the series that the teacher was considering how she might be able to support her students utilizing the available services in the school.

What I'd like, is for the counsellor to come in during our Language Arts Centres when everyone is working on different projects. Damien is not the only one in need of social skills and friends and it would be an ideal time to have him play board games or work cooperatively with other children with adult guidance. (Maud, October 6th)

It would appear from the next excerpt that she shared this plan with the school counsellor and was hopeful that it would actualize.

Eventually, I hope that the counsellor will come into the class to work on social skills with peers inside the classroom. (Maud, November 17th)

Across several months, the teacher continued to hold on to her idea of how best to support the development of her students' social skills.

I really wish that I could get someone to come into the classroom and just play with some of these children so that they could practise some of these social skills. Taking them out of the context is not very helpful when we are practising social interaction, but surely there is a way of doing these things within the room. (Maud, January 24th)

The final entry indicates that help was eventually forthcoming but not in the manner in which the teacher had hoped.

The counsellor's sessions with my class are going okay, but they seem to be based on Second Step, which is not quite what I had in mind. (Maud, February 8th)

Second Step, a kit often used in public schools to promote the development of social competence in children, emphasizes teaching discrete social skills rather than developing caring relationships.

Collectively, these entries demonstrate this teacher's commitment to her students' social and emotional well-being through her persistence over time, her willingness to seek help from others, and her focus on all her students and not just those with identifiable difficulties.

In the next excerpt we see a teacher who extended her commitment to the social-emotional development of her students beyond the classroom context.

I went to the movie portion of a student's B-day party. The whole class was invited. The kids were really happy to see me. I'm glad I went because I could drive the 4 biggest trouble-makers home (and spare the B-day girl's mom having to escort them on the bus) and the boys were happy to come with me and we got to bond a little more. (Anna, December 9th)

Here we see an example of a willingness to develop meaningful relationships with students. By attending the whole-class birthday party the teacher gave her students the message that they were worthy of her time even beyond the confines of the classroom. Her willingness to drive home the potentially disruptive students demonstrates the extent of her commitment, that it was not limited only to those children who are easy to get along with.

In the excerpt below the teacher indicates a commitment to caring. Interestingly, although she expresses that caring is of fundamental importance, she does not indicate that caring is a dyadic process that involves specific elements for it to occur. It is not uncommon for teachers to express how much they care, just as this teacher has, and yet, students express that they do not feel cared for in schools. For the caring cycle to occur this teacher will need to be more than calm and wilful. She will also need to listen sensitively, respond contingently, and believe in the students unconditionally. We talked about the elements of care theory in our dialogue meetings. At this point the teacher indicates recognition of care's importance to healthy development, and that in order to learn to care one has had to experience being cared for. But there is no indication that this teacher has gained a deep understanding about implementing the constructs of care in the classroom.

I'm going to stay calm and remember what's really important. The most important thing I can do in my class is to care. If the students know I care about them and can learn to care for themselves and each other, it will all be O.K. (Anna, February 14th)

All of the above excerpts from the reflection journals offer examples of the commitment the FG teachers had to promoting social understanding and emotional well-being of children.

Theme of Frustration

Another theme that emerged from the teacher reflection journals was that of frustration. This was particularly evident with the more challenging students. Sometimes the frustration was expressed as exhaustion and stress, and at other times in the teacher defaulting to a reactionary or controlling disciplinary stance.

In the following excerpt we see that a teacher has defaulted to ignoring one of the more challenging students as a way of controlling the classroom environment even though he recognized the ineffectiveness of this strategy. He seemed aware that this strategy was also inconsistent with his aim of creating a caring classroom environment. Not only was he frustrated by this disconnect between his aims and his practise, he was also frustrated that he did not have more tools to help deal with some of the challenges he experienced in the classroom.

One of the things that I struggle with is how to give children feedback that their behaviour is disrespectful or disruptive when we are discussing together as a whole class. One of my behaviour kids is constantly talking over me or calling out and he has an extremely loud voice. Well, actually it's quite normal when he wants to tell me something privately, but generally he uses his attention seeking voice. Ignoring him is not working because he simply gets louder and more dramatic. I can see why his last year's teacher had a signal that she gave the class to ignore him. While this strategy might not be the best, it is frustrating to deal with his antics every day. It seems like we are both competing for the same air waves and I'm losing... (Vick, November 1st)

In another excerpt we see a teacher who, feeling frustrated and exhausted, decided to give the children a writing assignment as a way to intervene and have them reflect on their deteriorating behaviour. This strategy has a distinctly academic focus. Although it could be argued that the writing task was an effective way for the teacher to resume some control over what appeared to be a chaotic situation, the opportunity for collaborative reflection within the group so as to focus on developing a positive classroom community and social and self-understanding, also presented itself, but was not considered.

It has been an exhausting week so far. The children are loud, unruly, and disrespectful to each other. Winter Break was just too long for many of them I think. I decided to have them write on the topic of whether the break was too short,

too long or just right. I am exhausted at the thought of starting in further back than where I was in September. (Maud, January 5th)

One teacher's frustration led to anger with a group of children in her class and thoughts about leaving the profession.

This was the first week back after Spring Break. It was the longest week of my life and the first time in a long time that I felt like quitting teaching. After the break, I was looking forward to coming back and I was determined to be positive and just really try to focus on enjoying the kids. The day started OK, but then I had recess duty, 2 different school orders to distribute, a noon hour club etc. I came back from lunch and the noon hour supervisor told me the kids had taken my squirt bottle outside and they were spraying each other with it. We'd talked about how that was mine previously, so I got really upset at them. The next day, I was determined to have a better day and did all I could to make jokes when problems arose and things were going along OK until lunch time when I popped back into the class and found a gang of students standing around a boy from the other class and he was squirting people with my squirt bottle. I lost it. (Anna, March 26th)

This teacher was obviously overwhelmed and exhausted with all the commitments and expectations that had been placed on her. She resorted to a pedagogical approach that did not support the development of relationships with children. She appears to have recognized the importance of remaining positive as she attempted to re-establish a more pleasant classroom atmosphere after the events of the previous day. She was unsuccessful. Her response was unlikely to promote a positive classroom atmosphere in which feelings of safety and security could flourish. Further, rather than trying to reflect on what had gone on the day before, that all the demands that had been placed on her were not the doing of the children, the teacher simply tried to "be positive" and made "jokes" about interactions that might better been addressed more thoughtfully. The underlying issues were not considered. During our dialogue meetings we discussed how frightening it is for children when adults "lose their cool" and how unsettling it is when adults are inconsistent and unpredictable. It does not promote prosocial behaviour and a desire to make good choices. The above excerpt is an example of this.

It is also interesting to note from the last two excerpts that when continuity of care was broken, that is, a holiday break, reuniting, as a class, appeared to be a vulnerable time.

When there has been a break in the teacher-student relationship, teachers may need to enhance their focus on community building so as to re-establish a sense of belonging, security, and trust that the classroom is a safe place.

The sentiment conveyed in the following excerpt suggests that this teacher felt frustrated, helpless, and overwhelmed.

A friend at school said that it sounded like I had my finger in the dyke. This described exactly how I was feeling on Friday. No sooner had I dealt with one problem, but another one popped up. My friend said that one solution was to simply take my finger out of the dyke and let a crisis happen because that was one way of getting the help it appears I need. (Maud, February 13th)

In the following excerpt we see an example of a teacher resorting to a controlling, authoritarian, and disciplinary stance as a result of frustration.

I returned to the classroom to find Ricky sitting at the back of the room making loud BLAH, BLAH noises (sort of like a beginning to vomit noise) and no one was doing anything about it – well I lost it and sent Ricky to the office and explained to the principal why he was there. (Anna, April 5th)

This teacher defaulted to punitive measures because of her frustration with one of her more challenging students. Further, there was a sense that she inappropriately expected the other students in the class to have corrected the behaviour of the student in question, potentially indicating some confusion in roles. Although she clearly set a limit by her reaction to the student's behaviour, the support and guidance he needed to be successful was not forthcoming, and the message to the whole class was one that their teacher was not in control.

The above excerpts demonstrate that at times the FG teachers reached a level of frustration with students' behaviour at which they were unable to activate the relationship skills necessary to promote the growth and development of the children in their classrooms and instead responded in punitive ways.

Theme of Hesitancy

A hesitancy in the teachers' willingness to sustain engagement in emotionally supportive interactions with their students was another theme that emerged from the teacher reflection journals.

In the following three excerpts we see that although the teachers noticed a positive relational outcome as a result of their responsiveness toward a student or group of students, they also indicated an ambivalence to commit to enacting this emotional support on an ongoing basis.

He made a tentative move toward connecting with me. During the Terry Fox Run, he left his friends to walk with me and initiated a conversation about some of the problems that he is facing in the neighbourhood and at school. Now that he has taken the first tentative step at building a relationship, I took the risk of moving him and his learning partner closer to me. This is partly a practical move because his swearing and insulting comments about others is upsetting a lot of other children, but he does not seem upset by the move, perhaps because he has more access to my attention.

...My desk is now surrounded by four boys in need of support and relationship building. I need some time to think about how to handle such a needy group of children though, because I simply cannot have half the class clustered around my desk. (Maud, September 21st)

Here we see that the teacher has responded to one of her student's needs for proximity in a supportive way by bringing him physically closer to her in the classroom. A strategy we talked about during our dialogue meetings was to bring children who were struggling or experiencing stress closer, not to push them away. Although the teacher recognized that the physical proximity she created for this student and a few others had influenced them appropriately, she indicated hesitancy about continuing or extending this practise. It is difficult to say whether this had to do with her emotional comfort level, her fear of not being in control of her own personal space, or something else altogether.

In the following excerpt the emotional interactions a teacher was experiencing with students were having a positive impact on teacher-student relationships and social

competence. However, we see the same hesitation to infuse this type of interaction into daily practise in the classroom.

I've donated 30 minutes of my lunch break to sit with groups of them. We talk about everything from what we did on the weekend to why they shouldn't call each other "gay" or "losers". I'm quite inspired by these lunch meetings. I still believe that the best relationship building happens when the children know that you're with them when you don't have to be. You're there just because you want to be with them. Of course, these lunches can't always happen because sometimes I have another meeting or something. (Vick, October 5th)

The following entry is a lovely example of a class enjoying each other's company. One thing we talked about during our dialogue meetings was Nel Noddings' notion that happiness and education belonged together. However, we can see that it was also stressful for this teacher to justify taking the time for such a positive, happy, and fun-filled interaction as a class. It is a good example of how teachers may feel with the demands and realities of coping with the academic curriculum while at the same time attending to relationship building.

We took the time to have a snowball fight before recess (just us) and had so much fun. The kids loved it! They really love to splat snowballs on the teacher, but I enjoyed smoking them just as much. I'm feeling a little frazzled because I feel behind in teaching curriculum, so we can't do this all the time, but it was fun. (Anna, December 2nd)

We can see from the theme of hesitancy that although the teachers appeared to have understood and appreciated the value of relational pedagogy, there was hesitation to fully commit to such a pedagogy: a hesitation that seemed to stem from concern over fulfilling other professional commitments.

Theme of Isolation

Another theme that surfaced within the pages of the teacher reflection journals was that of isolation. The following excerpts depict this theme.

The trouble with working with challenging kids is that because of their challenges, they may be unable to understand where other people are coming

from. And who is out there to give me advice and guidance as to the best approach when trying to teach empathy, compassion, care, and belonging to a child. (Maud, September 30th)

I feel quite isolated and unappreciated. This job is too hard to go at it alone. I think principals should get training in this stuff [attachment and care] and on how to build a cohesive staff. (Vick, April 28th)

So many lessons this year. I feel like I need to work on this so much more. This year has been so challenging for me. I really need a sounding board and someone to help share the load of these precious little lives that come to school with so much baggage. I guess we all do. (Anna, June 13th)

The above entries indicate that the teachers were realizing the complexities of nurturing and the necessity of a supportive, collaborative culture to realize a relational pedagogy. The following excerpts illustrate these teachers' desire for such a collaborative workplace.

Imagine a whole school where the teachers are all working together to make schools a fun, safe place where kids feel important and respected above all else, where we work together to support the kids emotionally, not just with their school work. (Anna, March 14th)

This type of dialogue is so important for so many reasons...I will miss the dialogue about subjects, topics and people that we care about and are passionate about. It is SOOOOOOOO important, actually essential to teaching. (Vick, May 17th)

The above two excerpts have a sense of energy in them as the teachers imagined what was needed and what it would be like for teachers and whole schools to take the time to focus on the social-emotional and relationship domains of the children. This suggests that the teachers had come to appreciate the implications of staff cohesiveness with regard to supporting the social-emotional development of children and that they require a collective effort to produce the greatest effect.

Theme of Missed Opportunities

The theme of missed opportunities for enacting relational pedagogy during interactions with children and instead responding in less supportive ways also became evident in the reflection

journals. The following series of excerpts indicate missed opportunities on the part of the FG teachers to respond to children's social-emotional needs and the development of trusting relationships. These factors were not given consideration as fundamental supports for children experiencing stress or limited success at school.

She continues to be totally disconnected from me. She has no affect when I try to talk to her. The principal has been finding the same thing when she finds her inside the school on outside days. We decided to bring her brother and her to a Team Meeting to see if we could unpack what is happening.

Both kids had a terrible holiday and their behaviour problems have escalated. Other than sharing our concerns, there is little we can do though. I've been asked to set up a meeting with Mom and Dad to inform them of the children's problems at school. (Vick, January 15th)

In the above excerpt it appears that a student was reaching a state of emotional crisis. The school was aware that the children's holiday conditions may have been the catalyst for this downward spiral in behaviour, but felt there was "little they could do". However, rather than feeling impotent, the teacher and the rest of the "Team" missed their opportunity to prioritize their focus on helping the children experience a secure and nurturing environment at school. It is unfortunate that this was not mentioned in the excerpt. Further, although the school had an obligation to inform the parents about their concerns, because of the parent's contribution to the problem, their effectiveness in participating in a school intervention plan would likely be minimal. Indeed, subsequent journal entries regarding this issue indicated that several unsuccessful attempts to meet with the parents were made, indicating that support from home could not be assured. This is a good example of why educators must gain a deeper understanding of the social-emotional developmental processes of children and the saliency of relationships. The above scenario is not uncommon in public schools today and offers significant opportunities for teachers to focus on and enhance student-teacher relationships.

The tone of the following excerpt implies that the teacher may have assumed the child was purposefully behaving in a passive-aggressive way without considering that something may have been amiss for the child, very likely within the social-emotional

domain. The excerpt also mentions that “help” was offered, but we do not know what that looked like. We do know, however, that the child was left behind with the expectation that the work she was not attempting to complete be done, thus showing evidence that the teacher had missed the opportunity to respond to the child in an emotionally supportive way. Further entries did not share whether the child was successful in completing her work.

Everyone was busy helping everyone else and the class was buzzing with productivity – except for Monica, who did not accept any help and simply sat there playing with her pencil. Now we’re waiting to go to the gym and she is still sitting there and I’m starting to feel like we’re being held hostage. Or were we? I’m still not sure why she wouldn’t accept any help, but I finally left her behind in another class to get her work done. (Maud, October 7th)

In the final excerpt below a missed opportunity was expressed by the way the teacher, and staff, approached the challenges of one of the students in their school community. Although it was commendable that the staff was discussing how to help this at-risk girl, the entry did not indicate any consideration for the social-emotional well-being of this student beyond some visits to the counsellor. The opportunity to focus on how they might provide an emotionally safe and nurturing school environment so as to enhance the student’s sense of self and self in relationship, especially the student-teacher relationship, as well as the scaffolding of skills being suggested was missed. Further evidence of a missed opportunity was suggested by offering gift cards as a remedy. Although well intentioned and likely greatly appreciated, the gift cards will unlikely give this student the skills needed to make friends and ultimately lead a successful life.

I have a concern about Sherry. I’ve noticed that she tries to stay in at recess and lunch because she doesn’t have any friends. Also, she is from a poor family and she doesn’t have much nutritious food and often wears the same clothes. She’s a nice enough girl, but she doesn’t seem to have the social skills she needs to make friends. We had a team meeting and we’re going to try to get her to be a phone monitor so that she’ll boost her skills. We’ll have the counsellor see her individually for at least a few sessions. Also, our principal said we’ve got some gift certificates for stores like Old Navy and Payless Shoes. People (staff) keep saying that in Gr. 8 she’ll find others like herself and she’ll make friends then. (Anna, November 12th)

The above excerpts all capture missed opportunities on the part of the FG teachers to enact a relational pedagogy so as to foster student-teacher relationships and social-emotional development of the children in their classrooms.

Theme of Awareness of Mistakes

Another theme that emerged from reading the journals was an awareness on the part of the FG teachers of not responding to students in accordance with relational pedagogy. The journals captured the teachers using strategies and methodology to attain immediate student compliance and/or results rather than maintaining a collaborative, relational approach and appearing to regret it. That is, at times the teachers appeared to lose sight of their focus on social-emotional and relationship development, recognized this, and appeared to regret or feel discomfort with decisions made.

In a preceding entry to the following excerpt the teacher mentioned moving the student in question close to her desk with the aim that proximity to the teacher would provide additional support for this struggling child.

Mary's not coming to the carpet, hiding in the cloakroom during lessons, coming in late after recess and lunch, stealing, bugging the other kids etc. are all cries for help. I'm thinking about using a group point system as another way to promote prosocial behaviour and attachment.

I tried the group point thing today. It was a bit less than successful to say the least... At Mary's table things were even more unsuccessful. She came to me crying because no one would listen to her. (Maud, February 17th)

It appears that the teacher had decided to take a different tack to address this student's on-going challenging behaviour ("cry for help"). We may assume that having the student sit close to the teacher's desk was not producing any observable change as suggested by the list of problematic behaviours noted in the entry. As depicted above, the teacher moved the student to sit in a peer group with the idea of implementing a behavioural approach in an attempt to promote a sense of security and belonging for the student. The teacher observed that this strategy was not producing the results she had hoped for either.

However, as indicated in the next excerpt, the teacher appears to have attempted to attain the desired result by changing the configuration of the groups while maintaining the behaviour management strategy.

One week later...I wonder about the competition I have introduced into my classroom with these group points because no matter how evenly I divide the pods, Mary's team is seriously handicapped. I've talked to some of my colleagues, but they have not run into some of these problems when they use behaviour mod. (Maud, February 26th)

The excerpt indicates that this teacher's methodology for promoting prosocial behaviour and a sense of belonging for a student had yet to have a positive influence and the teacher was aware of this ineffectiveness. It appeared that rather than creating a more secure classroom context, the teacher observed that the children were competing with each other, assumed responsibility for the situation and questioned herself. It is interesting to note that it is not uncommon for teachers to use competition, indeed utilizing the above mentioned group strategy, to motivate students to behave. But, as this entry suggests, it is problematic (a mistake) when trying to create a caring community in the classroom because competition creates a hierarchy whereby children are more inclined to be confrontational than cooperative with each other, and focuses on controlling behaviour with external reinforcers rather than on the quality of relationships.

The competition that often accompanies behaviour management techniques was discussed during dialogue meetings. Although no one in the group felt that all competition was harmful to children, we did agree that the classroom was not a place to promote it. It can limit student's access to learning, create an unfriendly atmosphere, and interfere with the development of a positive sense of self (Watson, 2003) as appeared to be the case in the entry above. It was commendable that the teacher observed her mistake and was grappling with the competition she had introduced into her class. It is a start. But she has yet to respond to the classroom challenge in accordance with a relational pedagogical orientation.

In the next excerpt, the teacher was able to reflect on over-reacting to a transgression on the part of one of her students and felt badly for it. But there was no indication that she

considered using the situation to foster the student's capacity for autonomy through a relational orientation.

I re-acted too strongly when a student broke a "no buying" rule at the aquarium. When my student teacher caught the student buying a pop from the vending machine he told me and I said that I'd handle it. I was burning up inside because I felt like this student had blatantly disregarded the rules and had been sneaky about it. I went over to him, asked if he had bought a pop and when he admitted it instead of asking why I said something like, "Guess where you won't be tomorrow?" and proceeded to tell him I didn't think I could trust him enough to take him to camp either. Then I walked away. I felt horrible, but he had broken the rules.

Back at school we talked about what the rules were. He knew, but didn't think he'd get caught. We talked about whether it was worth it and he agreed it wasn't. We also talked about how it will take time to re-build the trust that had been lost and I asked him how he wanted me to view him – as the kind of kid only who does what is right if he has adults around or if he wants to be counted on to do the right thing even if he knows he won't be caught. I felt a lot better after our talk and so did the student. He seemed to have learned his lesson. (Anna, November 6th)

Often consequences are designed to teach children that cooperative, good behaviour will bring rewards and uncooperative behaviour will bring unpleasant results. Invoking consequences may produce immediate results, but, as Watson (2003) argues, this is a mistrustful stance at the outset because the message is that we assume we have to encourage children to behave in desirable ways by offering rewards or taking away privileges rather than relying on collaboration, with consistent and sensitive support and guidance to help children develop a basic trust in themselves and in relationships in general. As we see in the above excerpt, it was entirely possible that this student played his "good behaviour" card upon returning to school after the field trip by agreeing with everything the teacher was saying, therefore managing to avoid further outrage and withdrawal of privileges. It was possible the teacher took this cooperative stance to mean that the student had "learned his lesson". Although we do not know from the excerpt what actually might have been going through the student's mind, we do know that the teacher felt badly and then better after their "talk", likely as a result of his compliance. The excerpt provides evidence that the

teacher was aware of her mistake in over-reacting to a student and felt “horrible” about it, most likely because of her inability to maintain a relational approach.

In the next two excerpts we see the teachers indicating feelings of discomfort with their actions. Not acting on these feelings can be taken as evidence of an awareness of mistakes. It appears as though the teachers’ intuition was telling them that they reacted or interacted in a way that did not foster social-emotional development and relationship building, and although they were aware of their mistakes, they were unsure of what other “local” (Pianta, 1999) decision to make.

I dread seeing his hand go up because I know that if I call on him, he’ll hijack the lesson with his facial expressions, body language, and “funny” answers. Not calling on him is not an option either, because then he simply calls out. Today, before letting him speak, I asked him if his contribution was going to be helpful or meant to entertain the class. He seemed surprised, but said that he wasn’t sure. I suggested that he think about it. I wasn’t particularly thrilled with my response, it seemed judgmental, but it worked, he was quiet. (Vick, October 5th)

Although the teacher recognized that the interaction he had with a student had brought about a favourable result, his experience had not been pleasant. It was unlikely that the student experienced any pleasure in the interaction either.

Finally, we see a teacher acknowledging a mistake that resulted in a student’s feelings being hurt. Although the teacher may have learned a valuable lesson through this experience, damage has been done to the teacher-student relationship. Had the teacher responded in a relational way she may not have had any second thoughts about ensuring that everyone who had taken the initiative to participate in an exercise she had offered was somehow included.

My class (whoever wanted to) drew a picture to photocopy onto the front of the concert programs. Some didn’t quite fit the theme, so I looked through them with another teacher to get a second opinion. She was more critical than I was and I let her persuade me to take out more than I would have. After the concert, one of my students wanted to see her work on the front of the program and I had to tell her that it didn’t make the cut. I felt horrible because she got a little teary. I should have listened to my own instincts and included her art work, but I didn’t and I made her feel bad. (Anna, December 16th)

The above journal entries offer examples of the FG teachers recognizing and regretting times when they responded to students in ways that did not support the development of relationships with children. These mistakes did not convey a relational approach and resulted in student-teacher interactions becoming less enjoyable instead of more-so.

Theme of Successes

A theme of successes was the final theme that emerged from the teachers' reflection journals displaying what was going on in the FG classrooms. That is, there was evidence in the journals of teachers establishing a caring context through sensitivity and responsiveness, which promoted positive social-emotional and cognitive development, and enhanced relational competencies in students.

The following entries show teachers' successes at being responsive and sensitive to student's needs and perspectives. However, entries like these were intermittent, indicating that a coherent approach to addressing relationship building and social-emotional development in the classroom had not taken hold. I had expected to read many more examples in the reflection journals of teachers' approaching and supporting student social-emotional development such as the following excerpts indicate, rather than the apparent "hit and miss" approach.

In the following entry we see that the teacher has discovered a way to meet the needs of one of her more challenging students as well as those of herself. This "teacher helper" approach, which clearly appears to have influenced the student's sense of belonging, autonomy and competence, offered an opportunity for her student to behave in a cooperative and self-regulating way.

*On Friday, I was trying to go over the homework and get the kids ready to head off to the gym. Ricky wasn't paying attention and instead of getting upset, I decided to have him go over the homework board for the class. He did a great job and we all had a good chuckle as he explained when stuff was due and why. I have to remember to try that again. He got his need for attention met in a positive way and I didn't have to fight with him and get stressed out because he wasn't listening.
(Anna, November 26th)*

The following excerpt epitomizes a relational pedagogy where the teacher was being responsive and sensitive to the student's needs and perspective. The student was feeling cared for and was accepting the care. The teacher appeared to be in control and completely aware of what she was doing and why, and had the very best interests of her student in mind. It is a lovely example of a child feeling supported, valued, and guided even as he struggles.

I told him to go into the hall and calm down until I could come out to talk to him because in this class everyone had a right to feel safe and he looked pretty mad. When I go there he was sitting sullenly on the floor. I sat down fairly close to him because I wanted our conversation to be private. He immediately said, "I don't see how Jimmy wasn't safe, I didn't even threaten him." Typically, he was on the attack before I could even say anything, so I sat for a moment to think about what I should say that would diffuse the situation without getting defensive.

I finally said, "I wasn't talking about Jimmy's physical safety. I know that you weren't going to hit him or anything like that. I was more concerned with his emotional or psychological safety. That he was feeling safe inside. That his feelings weren't hurt and that he felt like he belonged in our class." To my amazement, Damien looked more down than angry when he said, "Oh."

We sat for a moment and I said to him, "Do you think I'm angry right now?"

"No."

"Well, you're right. I'm not angry. I just want both you and Jimmy to feel like you belong. And I also want you to know how much I like you, even when I'm feeling frustrated. Everyday I look forward to coming to school to see you and no matter what you do, I'm still going to feel that way."

Damien was beaming now. I invited him back into the class. It felt like one of those moments when you're connected for a few moments and you're not sure which stars had to be aligned to get you there. (Maud, December 8th)

The following entry reflects that the teacher had been sensitive and responsive to the anxiety of a student. Through giving him instructional support in such an emotionally supportive way, that is, caring and friendly, his sense of worth and trust in the teacher's ability to meet his needs may influence his self-concept and cooperation. The additional experiences being created because of this relationship will likely be remembered fondly by this student.

I've set up an extra-writing program for a struggling student. Every night he works at home to do a few pages, then the next morning, he comes to school early and we spend time marking his work together. We also write together and have fun making interesting sentences. This student is always so worried about failing, so this is boosting his confidence. Also, I've taught him how to make coffee in the morning and how to check the oil in my car. He's so proud of his new skills. (Vick, November 27th)

The following entry shows us that the scaffolding and support the teacher offered to a student who appeared to be friendless had influenced their relationship enough that the student was taking risks to interact with her school environment. This is a good example of how the development of a trusting relationship can have a transforming influence on a student.

I got Ann to join basketball, she is going out at recess now, and I spent some time helping her on a project after school. She is so thankful for any attention, but I'm glad I took the time to be with her. I'm also really pleased about her playing b-ball. It gives me a chance to raise her status in the group (I'm the coach) without being too obvious. (Anna, January 13th)

Finally, the following excerpt indicates a strong sense of care and commitment for the emotional well-being of students and it underscores the importance of focusing on the social-emotional development of children in our classrooms. The use of collaboration, respectful communication and self-expression, all facilitated by the teacher, have been very constructive in helping this class to begin to solve a serious problem. Further, the teacher focused on creating a context that would foster the positive qualities of the students as an intervention to help bring a stronger sense of belonging and community to the class. It is worth noting that when the teacher shared this incident with one of her colleagues, she was offered an anti-bullying kit. It is commendable that the teacher chose to broaden the lens and focus on building meaningful relationships through enjoying each other's company and fostering their ability to care and love as a way of bringing healing to her class rather than utilizing the lessons offered in the anti-bullying program.

As the investigation continued it came out that quite a few students had been bullied. So...I wanted a meeting to bring closure and then move on. We had a good meeting. The kids were serious and we talked about how many kids had

either been bullied or seen the bullying. ALL hands went up. We talked about why kids bully, why victims don't speak up. All the usual stuff. After, I handed each student a paper to write for 10 min. about the topic.

I felt really good about this whole process. The kids took it seriously, I was calm and respectful and was feeling optimistic that we were well on our way to being the class we want to be. Well, needless to say, once I got home and read what the students wrote, I broke down and cried. I had no idea how bad the problem was, how many students were being affected.

The next day, I planned another class meeting. First I shared with the kids a big thank you for their honesty. I apologized for how bad it's been – I didn't know. By the end of the meeting I felt like the kids understood that as a class we have to support one another and that we could fix this.

The next day...I brought Sammy to school. That little, blind puppy dog is quite special and I'd been meaning all year to bring him to school. We all really needed some kindness and caring. The kids just loved Sammy and took such good care of him. He helped bring care and healing back to our class.

After the weekend...I decided to take the kids to the park for a picnic lunch. Just us, and we'll leave around 11:30. The deal is that we need to use this time to mend relationships and get to know one another better. I'm looking forward to it and am hopeful that this will be just what we need to get closer as a class. (Anna, May12th)

We can see within the theme of successes that when the teachers displayed the capacity to listen and respond in a sensitive and caring way to their students and to consider students' perspectives as well as express their own, everyone's relational competencies came to the fore, thus influencing the development of trusting relationships.

Students' Perceptions of Class Climate

To assess whether teachers' participation in the dialogue group had an impact on their students, students' perceptions of teacher caring and classroom climate were examined. FG students' perceptions were assessed prior to and following the dialogue sessions. If teacher participation in the dialogue group had an impact on their practise I predicted that I would see positive change in their students' perceptions of teacher caring and classroom climate over time. To clarify that any observed changes in student perceptions were indeed a result

of the dialogue sessions and not simply a consequence of the passage of time, students' perceptions in the FG were compared to those in the CG. Given that CG teachers did not participate in the dialogue sessions, I did not anticipate change in CG students' perceptions of teacher caring and classroom climate over time.

For each of the student perception variables, a 2 between group (CG or FG) x 2 within group (time 1, time 2) General Linear Model (GLM) analysis was computed to test change over time in the perceptions of FG and CG students (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2

Means and (Standard Deviations) for Measures of Student Perceptions of Classroom Climate at Times 1 and 2 in the Focus and Comparison Groups

Classroom Life		
	<i>Comparison Group</i>	<i>Focus Group</i>
Time 1	1.85* (.10)	1.50* (.48)
Time 2	1.76 (.68)	1.58 (.60)
Classroom Support		
	<i>Comparison Group</i>	<i>Focus Group</i>
Time 1	3.22 (.55)	2.96 (.46)
Time 2	3.02* (.54)	3.03* (.54)
Social Responsibility		
	<i>Comparison Group</i>	<i>Focus Group</i>
Time 1	3.9 (.70)	3.8 (.53)
Time 2	3.8 (.60)	3.8 (.64)
Student Autonomy		
	<i>Comparison Group</i>	<i>Focus Group</i>
Time 1	2.9 (.75)	3.0 (.67)
Time 2	2.8 (.69)	3.0 (.59)
Academic Goals		
	<i>Comparison Group</i>	<i>Focus Group</i>
Time 1	3.6 (.85)	3.5 (.73)
Time 2	3.5 (.81)	3.5 (.76)

* = $p < .05$

For the classroom life measure there was a statistically detectable main effect for group at Time 1 ($F(1,121) = 6.46, p = .012$) with the Comparison group having a higher overall mean classroom life score than the Focus group. The main effect for time was not statistically detectable and nor was the group x time interaction. Despite obtaining a non-significant interaction term, it is of interest to note that between group differences in change over time were in the predicted direction. That is, although classroom life scores went down over time in the Comparison group they increased over time in the Focus group.

For classroom support the main effects for group and time were not statistically detectable but the group x time interaction was ($F(1, 109) = 7.62, p = .007$). An examination of means indicated that classroom support scores decreased over time in the Comparison group and increased in the Focus group.

For social responsibility main effects for group and time were not statistically detectable. Nor was there a significant interaction between group and time for this measure.

For student autonomy, neither main effects for group or time or the interaction of group and time were statistically detectable.

Similar results were obtained for academic goals, with neither main effects for group or time or the interaction between them being statistically detectable.

DISCUSSION

Social interactions that foster security are understood to act as regulators that help children stay in a state that is calm and alert, enabling exploration and new learning (Siegel, 1999). Indeed, a considerable body of theory and research indicates that nurturing emotional and caring relationships provide a crucial foundation for both intellectual and social-emotional growth in children (Bowlby, 1988; Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000; Goldberg, 2000; Goleman, 1995; Greenspan, 1997, Siegel, 1999; Zins, Weissberg, Wang & Walberg, 2004). Given the importance of social-emotional development to cognitive outcomes and over-all well-being in children, and given the importance of the quality of the teacher-student relationship for a positive school experience for children (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004) in this study I sought to explore the impact of participating in a discussion group that emphasized attachment and care theories on teachers' reflections of their day-to-day practise and their understanding of the aims of education and on the perceptions of class climate and social-emotional competence of the students in their classrooms.

A discussion of my findings and their implications for both pre-service and in-service teacher training and practise are presented in this chapter. Following this, limitations of my study, recommendations for future research, and closing remarks are presented.

TEACHER INTERVIEWS

The results of the Time 1 semi-structured teacher interviews indicated that at the outset of the study all the teachers recognized that social relationships play an influential role in the learning process. All the teachers believed that the relationships they formed with their students were fundamental to their engagement in teaching and to the learning process. This finding was no surprise and was consistent with the impetus for this research. For the last decade or so I have personally observed auditoriums full of teachers on professional

development days listening to a variety of keynote speakers (e.g., Gordon Neufeld, Gabor Mate, Alfie Kohn) passionately share messages about the importance of relationships for child development and the teaching/learning process. The teacher interviews provided evidence confirming that relationships with children are, indeed, on the minds of teachers and that teachers recognize the importance of relationship to learning. However, knowing that relationships play an important role in the teaching/learning process and knowing how to create and maintain healthy teacher-student relationships are two different things.

The teacher interviews were coded, using Selman's (2003) criteria, for the pedagogical orientation each represented. All CG teachers were found to express an internal orientation. They all indicated awareness that promoting social competencies was as important as academic outcomes for the students in their classrooms. However, none of them looked into the future or explicitly expressed considering any long-term objectives for their students as they grew into adulthood and took their place in society.

An internal orientation was also conveyed in the first interview of one FG teacher. The Time 1 interview responses of the other two FG teachers more closely depicted an external orientation. However, during the interviews at Time 2, every FG teacher indicated a shift in pedagogical orientation. The interviews clearly showed that all of the FG teachers were thinking about the students beyond their year together and were considering the emotional growth and social relationship skills necessary to successfully manage and interact with peers and adults as they went out into the world. This finding suggests that the dialogue meetings had influenced the FG teachers enough for them to begin to ponder and articulate more deeply the aims of education, the long-range implications of focusing on social-emotional development, and how they saw their role as teachers. In their Time 2 interviews, each of the FG teachers had moved toward a relational pedagogy.

A comparison between the Time 1 and Time 2 interviews indicated that at Time 2 all FG teachers expressed a deeper appreciation of their role in the over-all development of children and that the need to be cared for was fundamental to a sense of well-being. Moreover, they expressed greater confidence in themselves to attend to caring and the social-emotional development of children in their classrooms. It could be seen in the

interviews that these aspects of development were being given serious consideration when contemplating the overall aims of education. Further, recognition of the connection between positive teacher-student interactions and healthy development was surfacing. In the Time 2 interviews the FG teachers expressed a clear understanding of what they needed to attend to in order to enhance the social-emotional development of children in their classrooms. This suggests that the dialogue sessions had influenced their pedagogical vision. Despite this shift in pedagogical orientation, an examination of the teachers' journals revealed that enacting this understanding on a day-to-day basis was a challenge for the teachers in the study.

TEACHER REFLECTION JOURNALS

Teacher journals were used to capture and reflect on how the FG teachers were consolidating and making meaning out of the dialogue sessions and enacting the content in their classrooms. Seven key themes emerged from the journals. The FG teachers' actions, as depicted through their journal writing, displayed a conscious effort and commitment (theme 1) to consider, create, and foster positive social-emotional development and caring relationships with the students in their classrooms. Despite their commitment, they experienced frustration (theme 2) and at times were hesitant (theme 3) to fully implement relational pedagogy. Feelings of isolation (theme 4) arose as they realized relational pedagogy requires a supportive and collaborative school environment. Missed opportunities (theme 5) to implement relational pedagogy were apparent. Although some relational opportunities were missed entirely, at other times teachers displayed an awareness of "mistakes" (theme 6), that is, they conveyed regret at responding to students in ways that were at-odds with relational pedagogy. At still other times, teachers displayed success (theme 7) in their attempts to implement a relational pedagogy.

The theme of commitment was pervasive throughout the teacher reflection journals. One very clear indication of this commitment was the FG teachers' willingness to engage and participate in the on-going dialogue meetings every other week throughout the school year, to write at length in their journals producing 252 pages collectively, to respond to and

initiate emails, to participate in the interview processes, and to allow me to visit their classrooms to administer the student questionnaires.

Within the pages of the journals themselves there was a tremendous sense of commitment, persistence, and determination on the part of the teachers to be aware of addressing social-emotional issues of students and to try to understand what was going on in their classrooms. Classroom meetings, thoughtful and reflective interactions with staff and students, and attempts to utilize school support staff in non-traditional ways were all reflected upon in the journals and indicated that teachers were committed and clearly accepting the challenge to see care, social-emotional development, and relationship building as a worthy endeavour in their classrooms. The data revealing the theme of commitment aligned nicely with the results of the Time 2 teacher interviews as the interviews also indicated a commitment on the part of the teachers to accept the challenge to care and nurture the development of their students.

The reflection journals also revealed that at times the FG teachers felt frustrated in their efforts to deal with students' behaviour. This was particularly evident with the more challenging students. Sometimes the frustration was expressed as exhaustion and stress, and at other times in the teacher defaulting to a reactionary or controlling disciplinary stance, that is, shouting or orienting toward expecting compliance without considering the context or other possible variables, instead of trying to maintain a proactive relational orientation through communication, collaboration and self-expression. Although the dialogue meetings underscored the need to maintain a respectful, empathic, warm, and accepting stance in order for children to feel valued, worthy of care, and trusting of relationships, the entries indicated that doing this was difficult at times. It appeared that at times the teachers were unable to activate the relationship skills necessary to promote the growth and development of the children in their classrooms despite the on-going conversations about its fundamental importance during our dialogue meetings. The teachers' own intense feelings at times caused them to react to students' behaviour with condemnation rather than take a proactive stance and consider what tools they might teach in order for their students to function more successfully. Classroom management is one of the more challenging aspects of teaching

(Pianta, 1999; Watson, 2003; Zins et al., 2004). Defaulting to behavioural methodologies such as punishment and isolation, common management strategies practised in classrooms, rather than maintaining a relational stance through dialogue and active listening, was apparent for the FG teachers when they were feeling frustrated.

Another theme that emerged from the teacher reflection journals was that of hesitancy. Despite acknowledging the positive impact of emotionally supportive interactions with their students, the teachers often expressed a hesitancy to sustain that approach. For example, the journals revealed that during moments of social understanding, relationship building, or caring it was not unusual for the teacher to either immediately connect it to some instructional assignment (i.e., after an excellent class discussion the teacher decided to attach a writing assignment to it which typically has a high cognitive load, can induce stress, and reduce synthesis), or to acknowledge it with a qualification that there may not always be the time or opportunity to engage in such an emotionally supportive way within the context of the classroom. This hesitancy to be consistent in maintaining supportive interactions and strategies may speak to the teachers' first and foremost sense of responsibility and comfort in providing instructional support to students. The emotional and social support and growth of children in schools has historically been viewed as a secondary or incidental outcome which may be reflected in these teachers' hesitancy to consistently maintain awareness and focus on social competence and relationship building along side academic competence.

The journal data clearly showed that the FG teachers were committed to creating a caring and healthy psychological context for their students. This was important to them. It is heartening that they expressed such an attitude and one can appreciate their frustration when this commitment did not have an immediate impact on some students. Ultimately, it seemed that this frustration, coupled with a hesitation to sustain supportive interactions, resulted in inconsistency in the teachers' efforts to focus on and promote social-emotional well-being and development in their classrooms. It appeared that the teachers' goals were indeed changing, but their practise was lagging behind. The incongruity between the teachers' aims and their actions may be illuminated, in part, by the theme of isolation.

Every one of the FG teachers expressed feelings of isolation, aloneness, or lack of support at the school level as their quest to understand children's social-emotional development and to create caring classroom communities deepened. As the study unfolded I believe the FG teachers began to appreciate the implications of the knowledge they were acquiring with regard to the social-emotional domain. They could imagine the value of a whole school understanding child development the way they were beginning to and wanted to collaborate with others. But such conditions did not present themselves in the school contexts of these teachers.

It is interesting to note that although the bi-weekly dialogue meetings were meant to provide collaboration and support for the FG teachers as they grappled with infusing a relational pedagogy into their daily practise, they were not enough to mitigate the teachers' feelings of isolation at work. As was evident from their journals, the teachers wondered what it would be like to have another like-minded teacher, or whole staff, with whom they could share and discuss the social-emotional issues of the children in their schools against the backdrop of the theoretical constructs they were learning about during the dialogue meetings. Had there been more in-school support, it is possible that some of the feelings of isolation may have been reduced.

Although the dialogue meetings were a good starting point for the FG teachers, they were not enough. The meetings met a need that is typically missing in schools, that is, like-minded colleagues discussing the well-being of children. However, because the FG teachers splintered off to their own schools, spending two weeks between dialogue meetings without colleagues with whom to discuss their new-found knowledge, significant feelings of isolation grew. The FG teachers essentially returned to their school environments and the typical teacher practise of going into one's own classroom, closing the door, and doing one's own thing without sharing with a colleague ensued. This isolated, uncoordinated approach, not at all uncommon in schools at both the elementary and secondary level, does not foster caring, engaging, interactive processes for either teachers or students.

Another theme that illustrated the lack of congruency between what the FG teachers were doing and what they wanted to do was that of missed opportunities. That is, the

journals depicted scenarios in which enacting relational pedagogy would have been extremely appropriate, but was not considered. This was especially evident during “team meeting” problem solving situations. Team meetings are very common in public schools and are meant to provide a venue for classroom teachers to share concerns about students with the school’s administrative and support staff and to generate potential solutions. Typically, it is children who are experiencing stress or limited success at school, often in the social-emotional domain, who are brought to a team meeting by the teacher. It is not at all uncommon for the team to develop management plans for such students that include reinforcers and consequences, visits to the school counsellor, parent involvement, alternate daily schedules and the like. Speaking from my own experience of participating in team meetings over the years a lot of dialogue and well-intentioned energy goes into discussing ways to support struggling students. But often the dialogue does not include consideration of the social-emotional and nurturance needs of children. As a consequence, and consistent with the findings of this study, opportunities to help children develop basic trust in themselves and others are often missed.

Beyond the theme of missed opportunities, the journals also revealed that there were times when teachers were aware of their mistakes, that is, times when the teachers did not respond to students in accordance with relational pedagogy, recognized it, and felt badly. This was particularly evident when addressing student conduct, which may speak to the pressure and responsibility teachers feel to produce compliant, cooperative students. Historically, North American schools have emphasized regulating students’ behaviour through rules and consequences, rather than through relationships (Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, 2006), an approach that may produce desired results in the short term but is unlikely to effect positive change in the long term (Elias et al., 1997; Watson, 2003). It is encouraging that even though at times the FG teachers seemed focused on attaining immediate results, in several such instances they expressed regret at not maintaining a relational pedagogy. The FG teachers realized at times that they had abandoned a relational approach, which underscores their growing awareness of ways to foster social-emotional well-being in children.

A final theme of successes also emerged from the FG teachers' reflection journals. Although they were intermittent, indicating that a coherent approach to addressing relationship building and social-emotional development had not taken hold, there were some lovely examples in the journals of teachers establishing a caring context through sensitivity and responsiveness. That is, there were interactions that clearly represented collaborative teacher-student encounters, where the teacher was focusing on and fostering relational skills in a transactional way by being aware of the need to listen to and consider students' perspectives while also considering his or her own.

The above discussion regarding the findings of the teacher reflection journals give us insight into the conditions and education that may be necessary for teachers to successfully and effectively foster and promote social-emotional development and relationship skills in the classroom.

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES

Given the difficulties that the FG teachers experienced in consistently implementing a relational pedagogy in their classrooms, it is probably not surprising that the student questionnaire results did not indicate any remarkable changes in the FG students' perceptions of their teachers from the beginning to the end of the study. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that there was a trend in the predicted direction. That is, FG students' perceptions of their teachers as being caring and emotionally supportive tended to increase over time whereas CG students' perceptions of their teachers as being caring and emotionally supportive tended to decrease over time. In interpreting these results, it is important to consider the teacher interview data that revealed that while all the CG teachers, at the outset of the study, displayed an internal relational orientation, that was true of only one FG teacher; the other two displayed an external orientation. These differences may partly explain why the CG students had higher scores on the classroom life and classroom support measures than the FG students at Time 1. It would appear that at the beginning of the study the CG teachers were qualitatively different than the FG teachers as concerns pedagogical vision, and their students picked up on this.

However, over the course of the school year, the students in the FG classrooms appeared to perceive their teachers as more caring and nurturing. Although the shift did not attain a level of statistical significance, it does suggest that the FG teachers' daily classroom practise may have changed as a result of their participation in the discussion group.

With this in mind, it is important to consider the characteristics of the student population in this study when discussing the results of the student questionnaires. The students in this study all came from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Many of them experienced socioeconomic disadvantages, family disruption, interparental conflict, and other life stresses, as was indicated through the teacher interviews and journals, and during the discussion sessions. It is conceivable that many of the children in this study may have had a history of inconsistent, unresponsive, or inadequate early caregiving, resulting in insecure attachment profiles and less than favourable developmental trajectories. Consequently, many of the children in this study may have had difficulties feeling positive about themselves and relating in a positive way with adults. Many, many repeated experiences with an adult who is consistent and sensitive to the needs of such a child may be required for observable change to be realized. One school year may not have been enough time even if the FG teachers had been consistent in their ability to be emotionally supportive.

The above possibilities may also help explain why there was no significant change in the levels of students' socially responsible behaviour, sense of autonomy, and academic engagement. Evidence from the research (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000; Zins et al., 2004) indicates that being nurtured and cared for precedes the growth and development of autonomy, socially responsible and prosocial behaviour, and academic engagement. Development tends to be coherent and lawful (Sroufe et al., 2005). In order to experience positive growth in the social and cognitive domains one must first experience on-going emotional nurturing and care.

In summary, between Time 1 and Time 2, the FG teachers in this study expressed a change in professional orientation and awareness about the aims of education and in their goals for themselves and their students with regard to social-emotional competence and relational pedagogy as characterized by Selman (2003). However, improving their classroom

skills so as to promote students' social growth and enhance teacher-student relationships did not become consistent in their day-to-day practise as was evident from the content in the teacher reflection journals. Further, likely as a result of this inconsistency, students' perceptions of their teachers as being caring, nurturing, and emotionally supportive did not increase in any remarkable way over the course of the school year. This pattern of findings is noteworthy and suggests a number of implications for pre- and in-service teacher education to support the more widespread adoption of relational pedagogy.

IMPLICATIONS

Findings of the present study are consistent with research suggesting that teacher-training programs need to include curriculum on children's social-emotional development and relationship building skills (Hymel et al., 2006; Pianta, 1999; Zins et al., 2004). Many pre-service teachers entering teacher training have had no exposure to the theoretical underpinnings of human behaviour or personality development, let alone any child development research or theory. Teacher training tends to focus predominantly on curriculum and enhancing children's academic skills through instructional support. The results of this study suggest that a stronger knowledge base that encompasses theory and research on the processes of child development, including the social and emotional processes, in addition to cognitive processes, may be necessary for pre-service teachers to become proficient in providing appropriate emotional support to children.

Further, an exploration and deeper understanding of the components of relationships needs to be included in the pre-service teacher curriculum. Consistent with the theorizing of Pianta (1999) this study's results showed that at times the student-teacher relationship itself became a resource the teacher could use to promote calm, responsible, and engaged students. This suggests that coursework explicitly focused on why positive relationships are so important and how to build them is an essential requirement in pre-service teacher training.

One practical implication of the above suggestion is the need for instructors in teacher-training programs who are well versed in the processes of human and relationship

development, not just academic curriculum. Also implied is a need for candidates who are competent with social-emotional and relational content, methodology, caring community building and the like to fill both faculty- and school-associate positions so as to be able to offer authentic and comprehensive practicum experiences for pre-service teachers.

As concerns in-service teacher education, another implication of this study is that teachers and administrators need to explicitly commit to educating themselves on the social-emotional development of children and on *how* to build meaningful relationships within schools as a whole. This study revealed that frequent on-going dialogue about such topics was effective to a certain extent in deepening awareness and creating change, and that teachers require education, collaboration, and mentorship to successfully shift their pedagogical orientation to a more relational view. Key to this shift is a commitment of time on the part of educators to gain the knowledge base required through reading, reflection, collaboration, and observation. Given the degree of change in the present study, which involved bi-weekly sessions for the duration of a school year, it is very unlikely that attempting to create change through a single workshop or seminar will be fruitful.

The above suggests that teachers, schools, and districts must rethink the way they structure teacher professional development or utilize teacher non-instructional time. For example, all schools in British Columbia are required to have monthly staff meetings so that district and administrative information can be passed to the teaching staff. In my experience, the primary purpose of these meetings is to communicate expectations regarding policies and procedures intended to ensure that schools run smoothly. Substantive matters, such as the aims of education, which include creating knowledgeable, caring, and responsible citizens, are typically not discussed collectively. If such dialogue were to take precedence over what is now the common practise, social-emotional and relationship skills would most certainly be a topic of conversation. Nel Noddings (2003) reminds us that great educators in the past devoted time and thought to the aims of education. Collectively considering the aims of education may support ongoing discussions about child development and relational pedagogy, discussions of the sort that the teachers in this study seemed to find helpful. This

would, in turn, likely influence behaviour management, a topic typically given tremendous attention in school districts due to its challenging qualities.

A further implication of this study is that teachers need to be encouraged to visit each other's classrooms as part of their on-going professional practise. Co-planning and/or co-teaching may be explored as ways of bringing teachers together. Such collaborations may help reduce the feelings of isolation and loneliness as reported by the teachers in this study. Although many teachers "would welcome the opportunity to engage in professional development experiences designed to enhance the quality of their classrooms, their relationships with students, and the school success that comes from those experiences" (Pasi as cited in Zins et al., 2004, p. 106), it is important to remember that additional demands on teacher time may negatively influence this interest. Therefore, districts need to build these kinds of opportunities into their models of professional development.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

There are several limitations of the current study. First, in this study I explored and reported on the experiences of a small group of teachers engaged in professional development meant to promote social-emotional development and relationship skills in the classroom context. This small group was not representative of all teachers, hence the results may not be generalizable. Nevertheless, the themes that emerged as the teachers in this study accepted the challenge to infuse a relational pedagogy into their daily interactions with children were revealing and are useful when considering the larger world of school and teacher education.

In the future, whole school involvement in such research, including administrators, teachers, support personnel, etcetera, would not only increase the sample size, but would be beneficial in providing the collaborative culture necessary for transformation to take hold. Such collaboration would likely lead to teachers experiencing cohesiveness and satisfaction rather than isolation and frustration.

A second potential limitation of this study is that the design did not include Time 2 interviews with the Comparison group teachers. As no systematic intervention or program was taking place in the CG teachers' classrooms regarding social and emotional development

no change in their pedagogical visions, as assessed by the Selman (2003) interview, were anticipated. Indeed, I assumed that they would remain the same. Nevertheless, it is possible (though unlikely) that the understandings of the CG teachers may have changed in similar ways as the understandings of the FG teachers, which would negate my conclusion that changes in the pedagogical visions of the FG teachers came about as a result of the dialogue sessions. The inclusion of CG Time 2 interviews would have enabled me to rule out this possibility with greater confidence.

Another potential limitation is that I conducted the Time 2 interview with the FG teachers. The FG teachers may have wanted to please me in their responses to the interview questions as we had spent a significant amount of time together over the course of the school year. This potential concern could have been avoided by having a third party conduct the Time 2 interviews.

Another limitation of the current research is that I did not include observational data to corroborate the information contained in the teachers' reflection journals. Although the teachers did write in their journals frequently, the events of the day were still subject to the selective recall and perceptions of the teachers. Third party observations would likely have provided additional rich information. Had time permitted, arranging to visit classrooms with the expressed purpose of observing teacher-student and student-student interactions may have provided valuable information that teachers could have built upon to foster positive emotional interactions and corroborate teacher journal findings. Videotaping classroom interactions may also have provided a useful tool, offering a neutral feedback system for the teachers to observe their interactions with the students. The videotapes could have been viewed during the dialogue sessions with the expressed interest of looking at children's behaviour, (especially the more challenging children), teacher behaviour, and the feelings that the interaction created for the teacher.

The open-ended structure of the on-going dialogue meetings, although encouraged in the care theory model, might also be considered a limitation of this study. A more structured agenda, including a discussion period for assigned short bi-weekly theoretical or research related readings to help guide and deepen the inquiry when presenting classroom

case histories may have contributed to further influencing the process of change for the participating teachers. It must be noted, however, that the teachers in this study explicitly indicated that such a structure was not their preference. The implications of proceeding in a manner that the participants were opposed to would also need to be considered.

A final limitation of this study relates to the questionnaire that was administered to the children to assess their perception of their teachers as being caring and nurturing. While this quantitative questionnaire yielded some useful information about how students' perceptions changed over time, it provided a relatively superficial index of children's feeling about the classroom climate and relationships within it. Perhaps measures designed to more closely capture the relational quality or the attachment between the student and the teacher, that is, measures more sensitive to the constructs of attachment theory and care theory, would have produced more revealing results. It is important to note, however, that such relationship measures for children's assessments of the student-teacher relationship are only beginning to be developed (Pianta, 1999).

All of the above limitations offer directions for future research on social-emotional development and relational pedagogy for both pre-service and in-service teachers.

CLOSING REMARKS

In teacher education and in the work of teaching, pre-service and in-service teachers are exposed to many processes that are meant to improve student learning including revisions of curriculum, instructional methodologies, advanced technology, assessment, etcetera. While all these processes have their place, in my view none is as important as promoting thoughtful engagement between students and teachers through caring relations so that the climate of the learning environment is secure, nurturing, and trusting. "The extent to which a child will perform at an optimal level depends on the extent to which his or her immediate context affords" (Pianta, 1999, p. 123). The teacher-child relationship is central to this context. Moreover, by virtue of the asymmetry inherent in the teacher-child relationship a disproportionate responsibility is placed on the teacher for the quality of this relationship.

Therefore, it is necessary for us to examine and establish teaching pedagogy that includes enhancing relationship abilities of both pre-service and in-service teachers.

Fundamental to enhancing the student-teacher relationship abilities of educators is a need to inform and educate teachers about child developmental principles across all domains. It is critical for teachers and teachers-in-training to attend to the social and emotional processes inherent in instruction and learning in order for children to grow and thrive, and actualize their potential. This is not a question of intellectual abilities; it is a question of relationship abilities. We must learn how to enhance them and be able to bring them to the fore when working with children in our classrooms.

According to Selman (2003), teaching in the 21st century is highly complex, frontline work. Teachers face conflicting demands from parents, administrators, and politicians about what should be taught to students with diverse needs. This occurs under conditions of limited resources in classes that are too large. In Selman's (2003) words, "Being a good teacher demands the nerves of a highly skilled surgeon, a knowledge base equivalent to rocket science, and the round-the-clock dedication of an investment banker" (p. 169). With this in mind, we must ensure that pre- and in-service teachers are properly prepared to meet these challenges.

"Teaching is a precious work. It is one human endeavour completely positive and constructive in outcome when rightly done" (Bogue, 1991, p. x). As I have argued here, to be rightly done, teaching entails attention to caring and nurturing relationships.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Teacher Interview Protocol – Time 1

Time 1 – September 2005

Both focus and comparison group teachers will participate in this audio-recorded interview.

1. What made you decide to become a teacher?
2. What keeps you teaching?
3. What is the most important part of teaching to you?
4. How would you define success for a student in your classroom?

Teacher Interview Protocol – Time 2

Time 2 – May/June 2006

Focus group teachers will participate in this audio-recorded interview.

1. What is the most important part of teaching to you?
2. How would you define success for a student in your classroom?

APPENDIX B: TEACHER JOURNAL OUTLINE

Teacher Journal Outline

At the end of each week please write a reflection about your teaching week.

Please include:

- Most significant event for you (if there was one)
- What is your biggest concern regarding your teaching experience this week? (any aspect of it, i.e., class as a whole, student, administration)
- What teaching moment do you feel proud about this week?
(if you have more than one feel free to write about them)
- What teaching moment do you wish you could rewind and do over?
(if you have more than one feel free to write about them)

APPENDIX C: STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE BOOKLET

RESEARCH MEASURES STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Please tell us a little about yourself...

GENDER **Male** **Female**

BIRTHDATE: _____

AGE: _____ GRADE: _____

Language(s) spoken at home? _____

For each sentence, please circle the number that describes **HOW TRUE** the sentence is for you.

	ALWAYS TRUE	OFTEN TRUE	SOME- TIMES	USUALLY FALSE	ALWAYS FALSE
My teacher really cares about me.	1	2	3	4	5
My teacher thinks it is important to be my friend.	1	2	3	4	5
My teacher likes me as much as he/she likes other students.	1	2	3	4	5
My teacher cares about my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
My teacher cares about how much I learn.	1	2	3	4	5
My teacher likes to see my work.	1	2	3	4	5
My teacher likes to help me learn.	1	2	3	4	5
My teacher wants me to do my best in schoolwork.	1	2	3	4	5

	NEVER	HARDLY EVER	SOME-TIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
How often do you try to share what you've learned with your classmates?	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you try to help your classmates solve a problem once you have figured it out?	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you try to do what your teacher asks you to?	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you try to be quiet when others are trying to study?	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you try to keep working even when you're tired?	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you try to keep working even when other kids are goofing off?	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you try to be nice to kids when something bad has happened to them?	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you try to help other kids when they have a problem?	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you try to cheer someone up when something has gone wrong?	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you try to think about how your behaviour will affect other kids?	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you try to keep promises that you've made to other kids?	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you try to keep secrets that other kids have told you?	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you do the things you've told other kids you would do?	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you try to help your classmates learn new things?	1	2	3	4	5

	DISAGREE A LOT	DISAGREE A LITTLE	DON'T AGREE OR DISAGREE	AGREE A LITTLE	AGREE A LOT
Students in my class are willing to go out of their way to help someone.	1	2	3	4	5
My classmates care about my work just as much as their own.	1	2	3	4	5
My class is like a family.	1	2	3	4	5
A lot of students in my class like to put others down.	1	2	3	4	5
Students in my class help each other learn.	1	2	3	4	5
Students in my class help each other, even if they are not friends.	1	2	3	4	5
Students in my class don't get along together very well.	1	2	3	4	5
Students in my class just look out for themselves.	1	2	3	4	5
Students in my class are mean to each other.	1	2	3	4	5
When I'm having trouble with my schoolwork, at least one of my classmates will try to help.	1	2	3	4	5
Students in my class treat each other with respect.	1	2	3	4	5
Students in my class work together to solve problems.	1	2	3	4	5
When someone in my class does well, everyone in the class feels good.	1	2	3	4	5

	NEVER	HARDLY EVER	SOME- TIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
In my class students have a say in deciding what goes on.	1	2	3	4	5
The teacher lets us do things our own way.	1	2	3	4	5
In my class the teacher is the only one who decides on the rules.	1	2	3	4	5
The teacher lets me choose what I will work on.	1	2	3	4	5
In my class the teacher and students together plan what we will do.	1	2	3	4	5
In my class I get to do things that I want to do.	1	2	3	4	5
In my class the teacher and students decide together what the rules will be.	1	2	3	4	5
The teacher in my class asks the students to help decide what the class should do.	1	2	3	4	5
Students in my class can get a rule changed if they think it is unfair.	1	2	3	4	5
In my class the students get to help plan what they will do.	1	2	3	4	5

	NOT AT ALL TRUE OF ME	USUALLY NOT TRUE OF ME	SOMEWHAT TRUE OF ME	OFTEN TRUE OF ME	VERY TRUE OF ME
Understanding the work in school is more important to me than the grade I get.	1	2	3	4	5
I like school work that I'll learn from even if I make a lot of mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5
The main reason I do my work in school is because I like to learn.	1	2	3	4	5
I like school work the best when it really makes me think.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel most successful in school when I learn something I didn't know before.	1	2	3	4	5
I'm certain I can master the skills taught in school this year.	1	2	3	4	5
I can do even the hardest school work if I try.	1	2	3	4	5
If I have enough time, I can do a good job on all my school work.	1	2	3	4	5
I can do almost all the work in school if I don't give up.	1	2	3	4	5
Even if the work in school is hard, I can learn it.	1	2	3	4	5
I'm certain I can figure out how to do the most difficult school work.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX D: RESEARCH FLYER

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS WANTED

Dear Colleagues,

If you are interested in exploring an interesting approach to promoting knowledgeable, responsible, and caring students in your classroom as part of your professional development then you may be interested in participating in my research study. As part of my PhD degree in Education at Simon Fraser University I am exploring the influence of care theory and attachment theory on social and emotional development and how this impacts social responsibility in children. I am looking for classroom teachers at the elementary level who would be willing to participate in this research with me.

The study is structured to include on-going dialogue meetings to introduce you to the constructs of care theory and attachment theory and their implications with regard to the psychological and developmental processes of the children in your classrooms. It is designed to incorporate a full teaching year.

If you are interested in participating, or would like more information, please feel free to contact me (primary researcher) at the number listed below.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jocelyn Reeves

(604) 464-9730

APPENDIX E: INFORMED TEACHER CONSENT

Title: *The Impact of Dialogue Group Participation on Teachers' Relational Pedagogy and Climate in Their Classrooms*

Investigator Name: Jocelyn Reeves

Investigator Department: Education

The university and those conducting this research study subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of participants. This research is being conducted under permission of the Simon Fraser Research Ethics Board. The chief concern of the Board is for the health, safety and psychological well-being of research participants.

Should you wish to obtain information about your rights as a participant in research, or about the responsibilities of researchers, or if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the manner in which you were treated in this study, please contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics by email at hweinber@sfu.ca or phone at 604-268-6593.

Your signature on this form will signify that you have received a document which describes the procedures, possible risks, and benefits of this research study, that you have received an adequate opportunity to consider the information in the documents describing the study, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

Any information that is obtained during this study will be kept confidential to the full extent permitted by the law. Knowledge of your identity is not required. You will not be required to write your name or any other identifying information on research materials. Materials will be maintained in a secure location.

Having been asked to participate in the research study named above, I certify that I have read the procedures specified in the Study Information Document describing the study. I understand the procedures to be used in this study and the personal risks to me in taking part in the study as described below:

Risks to the participant, third parties or society:

There are no known risk factors to participants, third parties, or society with regard to this study.

Benefits of study to the development of new knowledge:

The aim of this study is to help elementary teachers develop a deeper theoretical understanding of the influence of social and emotional learning on academic performance and how they can implement and incorporate this learning into their daily classroom curriculum and routines.

It is expected that the results of the study will add empirical evidence to an increasing body of knowledge showing the influence social and emotional variables have on cognitive functioning and academic performance and that this must be considered in teacher training programs.

Procedures:

1. Classroom Teachers:

Focus Group Teachers:

- will participate in a 20-minute audio-taped interview 2 times during the study (beginning and end)
- will participate in a dialogue group which will meet on an on-going basis throughout the study
- will be encouraged to keep a reflection journal for the school year
- will be encouraged to read material provided by the investigator on an on-going basis
- will be asked to collect consent forms from their students and to be present in their classroom during data collection of their students
- sign consent form indicating they understand the purpose of the study and what is expected of them

2. Comparison Group Teachers:

- will participate in a 20 minute audio-taped interview at the beginning of study only
- will be asked to collect consent forms from their students and to be present in their classroom during data collection of their students
- sign consent form indicating they understand the purpose of the study and what is expected of them

3. Students:

- will complete likert type scale questionnaires during classroom sessions in October and may (each set of questionnaires will require two 45 minute periods)

I understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time. I also understand that I may register any complaint with the Director of the Office of Research Ethics or the researcher named above.

I may obtain copies of the results of this study, upon its completion by contacting the investigator named above.

I have been informed that the research will be confidential.

I understand that my supervisor or employer may require me to obtain his or her permission prior to my participation in a study of this kind.

I understand the risks and contributions of my participation in this study and agree to participate:

Participant Last Name: _____

Participant First Name: _____

Participant Contact Information: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX F: PARENTAL CONSENT

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am a certified teacher and PhD student presently working on my doctoral degree in Education at Simon Fraser University. I am exploring the influence of social and emotional factors on students learning within the classroom context. As part of my research I am conducting a survey with students in (teacher's name) class asking them their opinions about their classroom experiences.

I will be administering surveys to students in your child's class at two different times throughout the school year, once in the Fall and once in the late Spring. The data will be gathered during regular 45-minute class sessions. Your child's teacher will remain in the classroom while students fill out the surveys.

All surveys will be anonymous. All data will be kept confidential. Your child will not have to answer any of the questions if he or she does not want to. The University and myself, as the primary researcher, subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of participants. The School District and your school's administrator have also approved this research.

Your consent is required in order for your child to participate in the survey. Please fill out the bottom portion of this consent form and return it to your child's classroom teacher. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me either through the school administration or at the number below.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jocelyn Reeves
(604) 464-9730

I give consent for my son/daughter _____ to fill out the surveys administered by Jocelyn Reeves for the purpose of obtaining data for her research study. I understand that all data will be kept confidential and that I can revoke my permission at any time.

Signature of Parent or Guardian: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX G: CLASSIFICATION RUBRIC OF TEACHER ORIENTATION WITH REGARD TO AIMS IN EDUCATION AND THEMES OF ENGAGEMENT IN TEACHING — ADAPTED FROM SELMAN (2003)

Indicators of **an external pedagogical orientation** of social-emotional competence:

- good social behaviour is important so that students are able to learn academic subjects
- the teacher's aim is to control students' behaviour so that they can learn academic content
- teacher reacts to students' poor behaviour and want student's to get along without considering the context
- social skills, emotional well-being, and relationship development are interpreted as additive, not the main focus in teaching

Indicators of **an internal pedagogical orientation** of social-emotional competence:

- awareness that learning in school must include promoting an understanding of social relationships
- social relationships are equally as important as math, science, or literacy
- the aim is provide students with the skills necessary to learn to get along with one another and to develop life skills and the inner strength to manage in society both in and outside of school
- teachers use a proactive approach to promote social understanding and work to create a classroom environment that will address and improve students' abilities to interact prosocially with peers and adults
- want to provide students with the tools to function successfully in society

Indicators of **a relational pedagogical orientation** toward social-emotional competence:

- awareness that strong academic and social competence are necessary in the education of students to be able to maintain and improve society
- teachers strive to empower students by fostering their capacity for autonomy (freedom and control over their lives) and caring (being able to care and love)
- teachers focus on fostering relational skills in a transactional way, that is they are aware of their need to listen to and consider students' perspectives as well as their own
- collaboration, communication, and self-expression are all fostered in students to help them develop trusting relationships
- teaching is perceived as a critical function within society

Indicators of **a good fit:**

- comment on the good match between own inclinations and the primary activities involved in teaching, i.e., patient, caring
- enjoyment of working with children

Indicators of **convenience:**

- went into teaching for practical reasons, i.e., schedule fit with other commitments

Indicators of **a desire to change society:**

- expression of a political commitment to changing things for the better

Indicators of **default:**

- expression of not having other choices to entertain when making the decision to become a teacher

Indicators of **a calling:**

- expression that teaching was what one had always wanted to do
- an identification with a teacher in the past.

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