NARRATIVES OF VARIATION IN TEACHER-PUPIL RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS A CAREER

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Abstract This paper reports on the findings of a research study focused on teacher perceptions of their relationships with pupils over three phases of a career. Data collected from thirty primary school teachers using a critical event narrative approach were coded and compared across the three groups of teachers at different points in their careers; 0-7 years, 8-23 years, and over 24 years. The study, based in the United Kingdom, highlighted a complex development amongst teachers which centres on five key areas identified as differentiating between the three career phases; interaction, behaviour, expectations, proximity and control. Results indicate that teachers go through a series of relationship transitions in relation to these five areas, and that these transitions can often confront teachers with conflicting views of what positive teacher-pupil relationships are and create personal dissonance as they try to make sense of their role in these relationships. Based on empirical evidence, this paper argues that positive relationships with pupils are not necessarily associated with experience and that the transitions teachers experience through their career is of concern given the centrality of teacher-pupil relationships to effective teaching.

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers are acknowledged as adults whose relationships with children contribute to the social, emotional, and cognitive development of those children (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Kington 2005). The relationship that a child has with his or her teacher in the primary phase of schooling is associated with a range of child outcomes, including children's competent behaviour in relationships with peers, as well as their relationships with future teachers (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Howes & Hamilton, 1993; Howes, Matheson, & Hamilton, 1994). Aspects of the teacher-child relationship are also linked to school adjustment and academic achievement (Birch & Ladd; 1997; Greenberg, Speltz & Deklyen, 1993; Howes et al, 1994; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995). In addition, positive teacher-child relationships can serve as a buffer against risk (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992; Mitchell-Copeland, Denham, & DeMulder, 1997; Pianta et al., 1995).

Past research has also focused on associations between teachers' perceptions of their relationships with children and their judgements about children's school adjustment (e.g. Birch & Ladd, 1997), children's feelings of satisfaction with school (Baker, 1999), and pupils' social status in the classroom (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). There have also been a number of other studies regarding elements of classroom activity which doubtless have an impact upon teacher-pupil relationships, such as the creation of productive

classroom environments (Hook & Vass, 2000), the role of authority in the classroom (Robertson, 1996), and how pupils interact with one another in the classroom, both academically (e.g. Kutnick & Kington, 2005) and socially (Hartup, 1998). Findings such as these indicate that positive early teacher-child relationships may help place

children on a trajectory towards higher levels of school adjustment and competence, whereas negative early relationships with teachers forecast a less promising trajectory for children (Kington, 2005, 2009).

This paper presents findings from a study investigating teacher-pupil relationships by analysing teachers' narratives about these relationships, and examining links between these narratives and teachers' career phase. More specifically, the extent to which the phase of a teacher's career can suggest similarities and difference in the development and formation of teacher-pupil relationships is examined. The paper describes the perceived qualities, elements of the formation and development of teacher-pupil relationships, as well as aspects of classroom life such as interactions, expectations, and proximity. It is important to emphasize that these data are not presented as examples of a particular data collection technique, but aim to illustrate that viewing teachers' perspectives on their relationships with pupils from a career-oriented perspective can be an important means of understanding classroom processes that subsequently contribute to child outcomes.

Conceptual framework

In much policy thinking there has been a conflation between 'career stage' and 'professional development phase' which has limited understandings and appreciations of the different needs of teachers which are necessary to sustain effectiveness over a career. For example, the career structure suggested by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 1998) set out prescribed stages of recruitment, training and promotion and targets aimed at rewarding teachers for role-related high performance. The Teacher Development Agency (TDA) and National College for School Leadership (NCSL) both provided for teachers and headteachers in relation to organisational needs for role performance only at particular promotion-related stages. Studies on teachers and teaching have also defined teachers' careers in a sense that they are closely related to role-related promotion: 'it [teaching career] implies a commitment on the part of a person to obtaining promotion through the status hierarchy that exists according to some time schedule' (Maclean 1992: 188; also Huberman, 1989, Prick, 1989). Likewise, studies viewing teachers' career patterns from the perspective of age (see Sikes, Measor & Woods, 1985) fail to take into account factors independent of age and therefore, are limited in their ability to explain the complexity of teacher professional life development. Sikes et al. (1985) argue that 'teachers are first and foremost people, and like everyone else they are subject to changes which are associated with ageing, and how the process is viewed in the society' (1985: 56).

Another approach used in the study of teacher development suggests phases which a teacher experiences over the course of a career. The model suggested by Super (1957) essentially posits four identifiable stages: exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. Although related to sequential life cycle theories (e.g. Erikson, 1964), Super and others have emphasised strongly that individuals do not proceed through the phases in a linear manner. Not only is there considerable variation in the timing of the stages, individuals can miss stages, revert to 'earlier' stages or remain in a single stage during a career (Huberman, 1989; Smart & Peterson, 1997; Super, 1990). It follows that the term 'stage' may not be consistent with recent theoretical conceptualisations. Integrating Super's (1957) model with his own, Huberman (1989) argued for a career stage model specifically for teachers' professional work, and his study on the lives of Swiss secondary school teachers has been widely cited for its development of a non-linear empirically-based schematic model of a five phase teaching career cycle (career entry, stabilisation, experimentation, conservatism, and disengagement). One major contribution of Huberman's research was his identification that 'a large part of development is neither externally programmed nor personally engineered but rather discontinuous' (Huberman, 1993: 195). Huberman asserts that teachers' professional career journeys are 'not adequately linear, predictable or identical' (1993: 264).

Since Huberman's seminal work in this area, a number of empirical studies focusing on teaching during the professional careers of teachers have been conducted (e.g. Agee, 2004; Brown, 2001; Craig, 2001; Henke, Chen, Geis, & Knepper, 2000; Manuel, 2003; Mulholland & Wallace, 2005; Pigge & Marso, 2000; Stinebrickner, 2001; Verjovsky & Waldegg, 2005; Wilhelm, Dewhurst-Savellis, & Parker, 2000). However, there are two limitations to these studies; firstly, that they are largely based on self-reports of teachers; and secondly, none of these studies included a focus on change in practice based on perceptions of students. Other studies on the characteristics of phases of a teaching career have focused on pre-service teacher education (e.g. Conway & Clark, 2003; Price, 2001) or the beginning of the teaching career (e.g. So & Watkins, 2005; Woolfolk Hoy & Burke Spero, 2005, Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985), whilst some have focused on differences between novice and expert teachers (Meyer, 2004) or veteran teachers (Day & Gu, 2009). Although these studies were not designed to describe changes across the teaching career, they implicitly started from the assumption that becoming an expert teacher follows some kind of developmental process (e.g. Castejou & Martinez, 2001; Jay, 2002).

In a study by Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington and Gu (2007) some of these previous limitations were addressed. The impact of the interaction between professional and personal contexts on teachers' career development, as well as the possibility of distinctive key influences relevant to teachers in different phases of their careers were considered. In this study, teachers' careers were divided into six phases[i] based upon an extensive review of previous studies on teachers' careers and professional development. The evidence from this investigation in teachers' work and lives revealed that, for the majority of primary teachers, their original call to teaching was articulated as linked to the opportunity to work with children, and that those pupils remained the main source of their motivation and commitment. The research also found that teachers derive commitment and resilience to sustain such commitment from differing sources in different contexts and in different phases of their professional and personal lives. Their functional positions/role-related career advancement only comprises part of these. The notion of teachers' professional lives, rather than careers, therefore, enabled an understanding of the complex factors which influence teachers in different phases of their work and how these affected their commitment. More recently, these career phases have been utilised in a further study into effective classroom practice (Kington et al, 2011). As with this study, for the purpose of some of the analyses, these six phases were conflated into three broad career phases (0-7 yrs, 8-23 yrs, 24+ yrs) whilst retaining the characteristics of the original phases.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The sample

Adopting the three broad career phases from previous research (Day et al, 2007; Kington et al, 2011), a purposive sample of thirty primary school teachers was selected to participate who had been practitioners for between 0 to 7 years (N=10), 8 to 23 years (N=10) and over 24 years (N=10). The sample size was appropriate for a study using the chosen method of data collection and gave enough rich data for a meaningful analysis. These teachers were based in a total of ten primary schools in the Midlands region of the UK and were chosen to represent different geographical locations (e.g. rural, suburban, inner city) and levels of social disadvantage (as measured by pupil eligibility for free school meals[ii]).

Data collection

Teachers' narratives regarding their relationships with pupils were elicited through a critical event narrative approach and were analysed in relation to teachers' professional experience. The critical event narrative interview was conducted once with each of the participant teachers and comprised two parts:

Narrative approach interviews

The narrative approach gives access to rich and complex understandings of teacher-pupil relationships throughout a career for individual teachers. Furthermore, this approach has the ability to take account of several contextual elements with importance for teachers' perceptions of their work (Gudmundsdottir, 2001), as well as the longitudinal aspects of personal and professional experience (see Clandinin & Connelly; 1988; Huberman, 1988; Sikes, Measor & Woods, 1986).

Narrative methods have previously been used to assess parents' working models of their attachment relationship with their own parents (George & Solomon, 1996) as well as with their children (Bretherton, Biringen, & Ridgeway, 1991). Parent narratives, elicited via semi-structured interviews, have been found to relate to parenting behaviours (Crowell & Feldman, 1988; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985), child behaviours toward parents (Crowell & Feldman, 1988), and parent-child relationship quality (Benoit & Parker, 1994; Bretherton et al., 1991). Findings such as these suggest that adult-child relationships are complex, multifaceted systems.

The narrative approach elected for this study did not seek to collect entire life stories or seek extended accounts of lives that developed over several meetings. Instead, the interview offered the teachers an opportunity to reflect on relationship stories organized around specific critical events. In this sense, each interview was tailored to the situations, contexts and concerns of individual teacher-participants, in order to focus on developments in their professional lives and changes over time. Therefore, the narrative was directed towards a number of core areas, including key events, significant people and changes in beliefs, values and practices which have affected, and were affected by, classroom, school, and broader social and policy contexts.

Critical event line (adapted from Day et al., 2007)

It was important to contextualise the individual accounts of teachers' relationships with pupils. Such a contextualisation is considered to be necessary, as:

> ....lives and stories link with broader social scripts--they are not just individual productions they are also social constructions. We must make sure that individual and practical stories do not reduce, seduce and reproduce particular teacher mentalities and lead us away from broader patterns of understanding (Goodson, 1997: 1 16).

If teacher narratives are not contextualised, the resulting stories could potentially be reduced to an uncritical reproduction of researchers' understandings of teachers and the teachers' understanding of themselves. Measor (1985) identifies three types of critical events: extrinsic (can be produced by historical or political events), intrinsic (occur within the natural progression of a career, e.g. entering the teaching profession, mid-career promotion, etc) and personal (relating to family events, illness, etc). Critical 'incidents' (Flanagan, 1954) included three features: a description of the situation, an account of the actions or behaviour of the key player, and the outcome. Woods (1993) writes about critical events in relation to teaching and learning maintaining that they promote understanding in uncommonly accelerated ways and that they are critical for change:

> Events are exceptional by virtue of their criticality. This relates not so much to the content..., as to the profound effect it has on the people involved (Woods, 1993: 356).

Further, Woods (1993) says that critical events are important in four ways: i) they promote student learning in accelerated ways; ii) they are critical for teacher development; iii) they restore ideals and commitment in teachers; and, iv) they boost teacher morale.

At the beginning of the narrative interview, teachers were asked to recall 'turning points' (Strauss, 1987: 67) in their working lives – key moments and experiences that have had a significantly positive or negative impact on their relationships with pupils. These critical 'turning points' provide a context for interpreting the relationships and also provide rich data to identify and track patterns of critical events in the three broad career phases. This task required teachers to draw a line on a chart, indicating changes in their relationships during their career, noting any critical events or turning points that, in their opinion, had a significant impact on their effectiveness. Each critical event was coded as *interaction, behaviour, expectation, control or proximity* depending on the nature of the event. This event line acted as the primary focus for the interview, enabling the researcher to discuss particular events in relation to specific points in time.

DATA ANALYSIS

The notion of critical incidents did not only prove useful as heuristic tools in analysing the career narratives, but they were also considered as theoretical concepts, referring to events, people or periods that were perceived by the teacher as having a specific and clear impact on their relationships with pupils. This process depends on the subjective meaning that is attributed by the teacher and, therefore, the specific content of a critical incident therefore can strongly differ among teachers and has to be understood in relation to the entire career story.

All interviews were digitally recorded and fully transcribed. Qualitative data was coded, categorized and transferred into analytical matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994) which were used to refine emergent themes and identify patterns. Grounded theory coding techniques were used to define, refine and specify influences, capture variations and emerging variables in the relationships. Subsequently these data were subjected to a thematic analysis using NVivo.

In addition, basic techniques were carried out on all statistical data collected via the event lines in order to explore the frequencies of different professional and personal events relating to different points during a career which impacted upon teachers' relationships with pupils. This statistical analysis was then imported in NVivo, along with individual teacher attributes such as gender, age, etc. In this way the qualitative and quantitative analyses was integrated and thus enhanced the resulting interpretation which was subsequently validated by the teachers themselves.

FINDINGS

Analysis of the critical event narrative data revealed a number of underlying core characteristics of teacher-pupil relationships and career phase. Teachers in all three phases identified the following characteristics:

(1)   The ability to build and sustain good relationships with pupils was said to be crucial for the majority (93%, n=28) of teachers across all three phases. A number of factors influenced this, e.g. getting to know the pupils well, establishing good rapport and interaction, using humour, listening to what the pupils had to say and communicating effectively with them.

(2)   All the teachers were concerned about the quality of the relationships established with pupils, being accepted by pupils and with understanding them. They also highlighted the need for relationships to be based on fairness and consistency, and offered in a supportive and caring way.

(3)   The majority of teachers (87%, n=26) were concerned about discipline, yet at the same time understood that too much discipline could undermine the quality of the relationships.

(4)   The data show that the teachers gave more time to developing individual relationships with pupils, and focused upon building self-esteem, engendering trust and maintaining respect.

(5)   Finally, many teachers (73%, n=22) appeared to empathise with their pupils' needs and efforts in terms of their academic performance and desired academic outcomes.

The categories shown above are, inevitably, broad descriptions of teacher-pupil relationships. However, differences in these relationships were noted in terms of the three broad phases of a teaching career; early-career (0-7 yrs), mid-career (8-23 yrs) and late-career phases (24+ yrs). There follows an exploration of the themes that arose from a statistical analysis of the quantitative data generated via the critical event line, combined with a qualitative analysis of the narrative interviews.

Interactions

Maintaining positive interactions with pupils was important for teachers across all phases. The majority of teachers (90%, n=27) agreed that the degree of positivity (or negativity) expressed during interactions with children was often reflected in the development of the relationships. For example, children with whom the teacher had positive relationships were more likely to be those who had more positive classroom experiences and whom the teacher was more positive about when talking about them.

> You tend to see those children who you have nice chats with as those who also seem to do well in class, I guess they enjoy the class more if they like their teacher (Early-career teacher).

Not surprisingly, teachers stated that relationships were more negative with a pupil after more negative interactions with that child. This is also suggestive of a dyadic systems perspective on relationships, in which pupil and teacher hold mutually positive (or negative) beliefs and expectations of one another that are reinforced or confirmed in their interactions. The positive or negative affect expressed in relationship narratives was related to the frequency of interactions between teacher and pupil.

> The more you get to spend time with a pupil, the more likely it is that you're going to form a good relationship with them because you get to know them, you know,...bits and pieces about them that help you to connect to them in some way (Late-career teacher).

Early-career teachers defined their interactions with pupil as positive if there was a certain level of humour and rapport with the aim of getting to know the pupil and establish a level of familiarity:

> It's really easy to develop relationships with some children, especially those who you can laugh and joke with sometimes, and that flows over into the classroom (Early-career teacher).

Mid-career teachers tended to focus their attention on academic-related interactions, but also reported that they maintained their personal interest in pupils outside of lesson time.

> When I'm in class I tend to talk about work most of the time, I don't know when that changed (Mid-career teacher).

> Even though I like to keep classroom talk about work, I like to keep in touch with what they're doing in their own time as well, so try to talk to them in the playground and on breaks (Mid-career teacher).

Whereas late-career teachers stated that they try to combine both of these previous approaches and that they often used humour and a relaxed, informal approach to teaching in order to utilise their relationships with pupils during the learning process.

> The more relaxed children are during the lessons, the more they enjoy it and the more they learn... and in fact, the more they enjoy learning (Late-career teacher).

Late-career teachers also reported that they play a role in shaping relationships through the emotional quality of their interactions with children, as well as their responsiveness in terms of frequency and consistency to children's needs. This was seen as particularly important to pupils in the later stages of primary school who are often undergoing profound shifts in their sense of self and are struggling to negotiate changing relationships with their parents and peers. Since teachers have the advantage of standing outside these struggles, they can provide a safe context for support and guidance, while transmitting adult values, advice, and perspectives.

Behaviour

Overall, the majority (83%, n=25) of teachers felt that the behaviour in their classrooms was good in spite of some occasional disruptive behaviour by a minority of pupils. Maybe unsurprisingly, all teachers stated that any negative behaviour expressed in the classroom was due to negative interactions between teacher and pupil. Findings suggest that these relations may be more complex than they first appear.

Perceptions of behaviour occupied the thoughts of early-career teachers more than those with more experience. It was this group of teachers who believed more strongly that aspects of their relationships with pupils were related to pupil behaviour.

> The way that I've approached this is that, if I work hard on the relationship aspect, the good behaviour will follow. It doesn't always work and it can take time in some cases, but there is definitely a connection between the two things (Early-career teacher).

Although a higher proportion of the teachers in the early-career phase felt positive about pupil behaviour compared with the other two phases, the mid- and late-career teachers defined good behaviour in terms of strategies adopted in order to help them manage any disruptive behaviour and keep maintain pupil discipline.

> It's not so much about promoting good behaviour, that should be the default setting. It's really about managing the situation if that doesn't happen (Mid-career teacher).

In addition, late-career teachers were more likely to become dissatisfied with pupil behaviour. The high demands on pupils were reported to impact upon behaviour which was usually handled easily by these experienced teachers, but which could gradually become a threat to a positive classroom atmosphere.

> Behaviour becomes more and more difficult the longer I teach. The things that used to work when I was younger don't work now so I have to be stronger and impose more discipline as soon as I think behaviour is changing for the worse (Late-career teacher).

As a consequence, these teachers stated that they used further strategies to reverse the situation which, in turn, can stimulate a negative communicative spiral.

Expectations

All teachers in the study, regardless of career phase, reported that high expectations which were clear, consistent and understood by pupils was an important issue that was closely related to positive relationships with pupils. They also emphasised the value of establishing rules and boundaries at the outset.

Early-career teachers reported that they made behavioural expectations clear from the start of the year by formalising them in a document or as part of a display.

> We had a talk at the beginning of the school year and went through all the rules for the class and what I was not willing to put up with, like shouting, and then they all signed it (Early-career teacher).

They explained that they based their academic expectations around targets or learning objectives which provided a consistent way to demonstrate their aspirations for the class. This was also the approach taken by the majority of late-career teachers who said they differentiated expectations according pupils' abilities.

> You have to be so careful when developing expectations of students because it can either motivate or de-motivate them. I try to keep everything connected to what they are capable of and not project a standardised set of outcomes on all of them (Late-career teacher).

Further to this, late-career and mid-career teachers were also more relaxed about stating the behaviour expectations to the students. Maybe due to experience, they explained that there was an assumption that students knew how to behave and dealt with any problems if they occurred. However, they were clear that poor behaviour was not acceptable.

> It's a self-fulfilling prophecy, I think. If you act as if behaviour has to be good, then it usually is (Late-career teacher).

Mid-career teachers also focused on expectations that were individualised, consistent, sequential and differentiated, but tried to give pupils more control over their learning.

> It's having high expectations of children and making sure that you know the level of each child and can make sure that they know what the expectations are for the next level do they can aspire to them (Mid-career teacher).

For late-career teachers, the 'history' of the relationship was a component that affected expectations between teacher and pupil. The history was significant because it connected the familiarity and shared knowledge which had developed between participants.

> It helps when you know something about a pupil, either because you have taught them before or from a colleague. You can be more realistic about communications and expectations, and the overall atmosphere is generally more relaxed and positive (Late-career teacher).

That said, relationships were continually subject to negotiation by members, such that they did not necessarily need to remain stable, and the content of the relationship bond had potential to change substantially.

Proximity

An important principle in the development of relationships was proximity. Many of the teachers (70%, n=21) identified proximity as a means of building relationships with pupils. Early-career teachers also indicated that this factor supported learning targets or objectives, and forms of informal assessment.

> It is so much easier to support the learning of pupils who are positioned in certain places in the classroom. I try to make sure that the children I need to support more or who I know will benefit from more attention are nearer my desk (Early-career teacher).

> The ones who sit the furthest away are the ones who will have more problems, especially with homework or independent classroom activities (Early-career teacher).

Examination of the data showed that the mid-career teachers, like their early-career colleagues, used classroom seating and proximity with pupils to promote positive relationships, develop rapport, and establish boundaries. In addition, this organisation offered opportunities for the teachers to engage with pupils in dialogue about learning.

> I make sure that I stand close to the children who are a bit too chatty sometimes and who might distract the others. It means I can reinforce the rules if necessary without having to stop the lesson and draw attention to it (Mid-career teacher).

Findings suggest that teachers' perceptions of proximity and teacher-pupil relationships were fairly stable for the first two career phases. However, there was a decline in the use of proximity towards the end of the career.

> I don't give the children set places, they can move around each day if they want. So the way in which I maintain relationships with the pupils has to overcome that and not be based on where they might be sitting (Late-career teacher).

Control

All teachers reported that feeling they had a level of control and influence in the classroom was important. Unsurprisingly, early-career teachers were less confident about this issue than the other phases. However, they defined this construct in terms of the impact of their control on pupil behaviour.

> I have to have control all the time. This spills over into my planning and organisation and means that I have control, or I feel that I have control, over the behaviour in the classroom (Early-career teacher).

The major concern of mid-career teachers related to their perceived difficulty in balancing friendliness with authority and control.

> I can't seem to do a thing right. Last week I was very friendly with the pupils. I smiled a lot, spoke to them as equals, joked with them... Today I was stern. I kept some of them in at lunch time, I yelled and moved them away from others but I still don't have complete control (Mid-career teacher).

Classroom control is generally perceived as an end in itself amongst early- and mid-career teachers in the sample, for whom it is an important component of the functional and positive relationship. Among late-career teachers control seems to be taken for granted.

> If you are well-planned, willing to be flexible and can manage the lesson, the classroom control follows (Late-career teacher).

These more experienced teachers display a more holistic view of classroom management and are preoccupied by issues such as flexibility and the overall management of time.

DISCUSSION

This paper has presented a description of changes in teacher-pupil relationships during the teaching career. Although there were perceptions of relationships that were common across all three phases, there also appears to be a significant developmental transition occurring for teachers in the early- and mid-career phases and those in the late-career phase. For example, early-career teachers felt that the relationships with their pupils were central to their motivation and commitment, sense of self-efficacy and job satisfaction, whilst the mid-career teachers were generally more positive about pupil behaviour than other phases. Both the mid-and late-career phases had over half the teachers stating interactions and expectations influenced their relationships in a positive way, whereas the early-career teachers were more likely to have a problem with pupil behaviour. On the basis of these data, there are three generalisations that can be made regarding variations in teacher-pupil relationships across a career.

i)   *Early-career teachers*

In this early phase, teachers were concerned about the quality of the personal relationships they established with pupils, being accepted by pupils, and with understanding their needs. As part of this, they focused on qualities which facilitated empathy with pupils, as they reported the value of knowing and being familiar with pupils and

understanding their backgrounds. In this sense, the findings confirm the view that teachers in the beginning phase (Huberman, 1993) benefited from a combination of influences that were mostly positive. That said, teachers in this group reported the negative impact of poor pupil behaviour on their work as a teacher.

Teachers in the latter part of this career phase demonstrated a primary concern over their confidence and feelings of having effective relationships with pupils, which is only partly in accord with Huberman's findings that teachers with 4-6 years of career experience were found to be going through a phase of 'stabilization, consolidation of a pedagogical repertoire' (1993: 13). In contrast with the teachers with 0-3 years of experience, there were more frequent references made by teachers to heavy workload which was seen as reducing the time they had to spend with pupils. In line with Day et al's (2007) study, many of these teachers reported that they had benefited from leadership support which helped to reduce the impact of workload, although there were a small number who had experienced a lack of support from the school leadership. This indicates that, even at this early stage, school leaders are a key mediating influence on the relationships between teachers and pupils.

ii)   Mid-career teachers

For mid-career teachers, the intensity and strength of the relationship depended on the teacher's willingness to exhibit genuine feelings to the pupils rather than play a role. The teachers who felt more successful in the development of their relationships were those who acknowledged and accepted the fact that, although the relationship could be reciprocal, it was unequal and this inequity should not be abused within the classroom environment. This encouraged a continuous negotiation of the relationship which was achieved by constant discussion with pupils which, in turn, allowed the discovery of boundaries whilst maintaining authority and influence.

Positive pupil-teacher relationships for this group of teachers were also characterised by low levels of behavioural problems and high levels of closeness, supporting children's motivation to explore, as well as their growing ability to regulate social, emotional, and cognitive skills (Kutnick & Kington, 2005). This behaviour was grounded in the care and consistency demonstrated over a period of time, in which a teacher's concern was reflected in response to an individual pupil and the actions they were prepared to take in order to support and develop the child and their relationship.

Huberman (1993: 7) discusses a phase of experimentation and diversification after the 'stabilization'/'pedagogical consolidation' phase. He posits that teachers, with between 7 and 25 years' experience, 'having made an initial tour of duty in the classroom' set off in search of new challenges and new stimulations (1993: 8). For the mid-career teachers in this study, these challenges were in the form of promotion and additional responsibilities (Day et al, 2007) which had started to play a significant role in the relationships developed with individual pupils. Promotion at this career phase supports research by Hilsum and Start (1974) who noted that the first promotion was usually achieved for primary teachers after seven years, and Maclean (1992) who found that the average number of years for promotion was eleven years. However, in this study (and in common with the early-career teachers), the challenge of new roles was combined with excessive paperwork and heavy workload which were seen as key hindrances to their relationships in the classroom. In contrast to the earlier phase, school leadership was not considered a supportive factor.

iii)   Late-career teachers

Teaching was seen by late-career teachers as an interrelated whole. By this phase, teachers appeared to have replaced the early-career phase view of pupils 'as people' with a view of pupils 'as learners' and were more likely to empathise with their pupils' needs and efforts in terms of their academic performance and desired academic outcomes.

For these teachers, development of relationships was perceived to be based on interconnections between patterns of interaction and other elements. Moreover, positive interactions, behaviours, influence and expectations developed through familiarisation, shared construction, and knowledge of the relationship. However, this did not guarantee that a 'good' relationship would develop; it seemed that teachers needed to see, hear and interact with pupils sufficiently often in order to recognise the aspects of them that would contribute to a sustained relationship. This supports findings by Kington (2005, 2009) that suggests that if the teacher is unable to communicate with pupils frequently, and considers there to be differences between the self and the other (themselves and the pupil), the means for establishing a common activity may be hindered.

The opportunity and time children had to interact with the teacher was an important factor in relation to this. Limited positive interactions and controlled impositions by the teacher (proximity or interruptions of interactions) sometimes diminished the shared opportunities with the teacher and opportunities to experience reciprocity in their relationship. Conversely, teachers perceived that pupils whose development led to an increased number of social encounters enjoyed more opportunities to learn about others and about relationships. This group also acknowledged a lesser use of proximity which may suggest a greater confidence in relationship development based on experience as a practitioner.

In common with the mid-career teachers, external policies and initiatives continued to demonstrate a strong negative impact on teachers' relationships with pupils. Although they were able to manage it, deteriorating pupil behaviour was a key influence on teachers in this cohort. As a consequence, they were more likely to be facing challenges to sustaining positive relationships with individual pupils. However, teachers reported that pupils' progress and positive teacher-pupil relationships were the main source of job satisfaction in this phase.

Huberman (1993) maintains that there is a phase of 'disengagement' towards the end of teachers' careers. However, this was not confirmed by the teachers in this study who reported a continued commitment to maintain positive relationships and engage fully with pupils.

The preliminary conceptual framework for understanding teacher-pupil relationship on the basis of career phase was elaborated and grounded in empirical data. These findings provide a baseline to analyse changes of individual teachers during their career and can help diagnose special situations of individual teachers at a given point in their career or regarding their development in a certain period.

CONCLUSION

This study has indicated that, as teachers develop, there are areas of tension which they often confront and which may have an impact on their future relationships with pupils. These areas of tension include: whether to be friendly with pupils or to exercise authoritarian management techniques; whether to value a well managed classroom or quality learning outcomes; whether to value academic outcomes or recognise and respond to the individual needs of pupils.

Rather than a specific type of teacher-pupil relationship, a range of relationships was found to occur for teachers according to career phase. This research suggests that, in order to understand classroom relationships, one should perceive them as a dynamic, developing and contextual process. Dynamic in the sense that they involve more than one person in the negotiation and construction of shared meanings; developing because relationships continuously change in various ways; and contextual in the sense that teacher-pupil relationships, as a process, take place within a certain definable context.

Using the critical event narrative interview has led to a thorough, rich, meaningful, and warranted approach to the study of teacher-pupil relationships resulting in a research-informed description and explanation of factors contributing to these relationships and the connection between these and teacher career phase.

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[i] The six phases were 0-3, 4-7, 8-15, 16-23, 24-30 and 31+ years.

[ii] Pupils' free school meal (FSM) eligibility was divided into four categories. FSM 1 describes schools with 0-8% of pupils eligible for free school meals. This percentage rises to 9-20% for FSM 2 schools, 21-35% for FSM 3 schools, and over 35% for FSM 4 schools.