

To touch or not to touch.

Male primary school teachers' experiences of touch:
a hermeneutic phenomenological study.

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Attestation of Authorship

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning."

Signed:..... **Date:** 18th February 2009

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Abstract

This thesis offers an interpretation of how eight male primary school teachers experience touch between themselves and their pupils/students.

Despite the positive benefits of touch and evidence suggesting that appropriate forms of touch should be encouraged, the many meanings, interpretations and reactions to touch potentially complicate the ways in which people react. The potential for touch to enhance human well-being is therefore often diminished

The taboo surrounding touch is particularly evident in the school environment where limited research has been undertaken. This study gives voice to male teachers as they share their experiences in an era when the risks associated with physical contact between teachers and pupils are increasing.

.Hermeneutic phenomenology was used to explore and gain deeper understanding of the meaning of touch in education through interpreting the day to day experiences of male primary school teachers in New Zealand.

Narrative interviews were interpreted and described thematically. The themes: 'being careful, cautious and visible', 'worrying about misinterpretation', 'feeling sad' and 'battling with boundaries', revealed a complex array of tensions that contributed to the findings.

Male primary school teachers are constantly aware of the risk they take when interacting with students. They experience tensions and conflict when deciding where and how they will touch children and whether this will be misinterpreted by others.

Consideration of the ways in which people respond to this complex and sensitive subject is necessary so that male teachers feel able to use positive and appropriate forms of touch without fear of suspicion and reprisal.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This research explores the experience of touch for male primary school teachers in New Zealand. It offers a phenomenological hermeneutic interpretation of the narratives of eight experienced and currently employed teachers. 'Touch' in this study refers to comforting tactile communication that may be given to reassure, console or congratulate children at primary school.

In this chapter a background to the complex and sensitive subject of touch is provided with an emphasis on meaning. Because van Manen's (1990) interpretive approach calls for researchers to make explicit the pre-understandings relating to their research, this chapter will also explain how my experiences have influenced this study. The chapter concludes with an outline of the structure of the thesis report.

Background

The first sensory input in life comes from the sense of touch experienced by a baby whilst still in the protective confines of its mother's uterus. Touch continues to be the primary means of experiencing the world around us through childhood, adulthood and into older age (Field, 2000). From birth, infants grasp hold of objects, put them in their mouths and cling to their parents. This early touching is an important part of brain development. It is widely recognised that touch is crucial for the physiological and psychological well-being of infants and subsequently for their social and intellectual development (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). Greenberg (1992) considers touch, both sexual and non-sexual, to be part of human closeness and relationships. It is essential to our developmental and life process. However, social mores mean that adults interpret touch differently according to the situations in which they find themselves. What is acceptable and pleasurable to one person may be distressing to another. The importance of touch continues through the lifespan retaining significance in later years for the elderly, who may yearn for the closeness that touch can provide (Montagu, 1986). As the ageing process continues

other senses become less acute, thus making touch a significant part of the human experience from birth until death (Roger et al, 2002).

Paradoxically however, touch is one of the most carefully guarded and monitored of all social behaviours and over recent decades in the western world this has become increasingly apparent. As an intrinsically intimate behaviour, touch has become subject to stringent social regulation and has thus become a difficult area to study (Fromme et al, 1989). Bentley (1998) argues that “touch has become taboo in crowded western societies where maintaining your space is a life’s work. Too easily associated with invasion, aggression and abuse, touch is neglected as a fundamental human need” (p.147). As the stigma pertaining to negative forms of touch has escalated, the importance that positive touch plays in enhancing human well-being continues to be undermined.

Despite evidence of the positive benefits of touch, as discussed further in chapter two, the manner in which touch is given and received in New Zealand society continues to be contentious. The use of touch has been highlighted particularly in the school environment where physical contact between children and teachers has, on occasions, been brought into question (Andrzejewski & Davis, 2008; Cushman, 2005; Jones, 2001; Jones 2003b). In particular, attention has been drawn to the use of touch between male teachers and children. Media reports on cases of inappropriate touch in the school environment may have caused people to be cautious of physical contact between adults and children. The impact of this may explain the continuing decline of men choosing to teach in primary schools. Currently, in New Zealand, the number of male teachers is significantly lower than female teachers. 14% of primary school teachers and only 1% of pre-school teachers are male. In contrast, male teachers in secondary schools number 46.7% (Jones, 2008).

This study describes the experiences of eight male teachers in the primary school environment, in an era where abstaining from physical contact between teacher and child is gaining momentum.

The meaning of touch in this thesis

The varied interpretations of the word touch are exemplified by the many entries listed in dictionaries. Examples include “to come into or be in

contact with another thing at one or more points” (Deverson, 2002, p. 864), and “to strike or push lightly” (Webster, 2006, p.1951).

The term touch has multiple meanings from those that are pleasurable to those that bring pain or fear. Touch is a part of everyday life. It is an act that occurs subconsciously and consciously when providing support and showing care and affection. Subtle forms include the touch on a shoulder or a pat on the back and more overt forms such as hugging, holding hands and a myriad of massage techniques. Touch may also refer to physical contact that has negative connotations and is harmful. It is the complex meanings of touch that can cause anxiety or confusion for people when the subject of touch or touching is raised. Throughout this thesis the word touch is usually preceded with ‘positive’ or ‘appropriate’ in order to remind the reader of the focus of this enquiry.

The terms ‘positive’ or ‘appropriate’ touch identify a form of touch that has the potential to promote physiological and psychological well-being of the individual who is being touched. The forms of touch most commonly used by teachers and those focused on in this study include comforting touch and the touch that is used more freely and regularly, such as a brief touch on the arm. Edwards (1998), classified touch into three categories: procedural, comforting, and directional. Procedural or diagnostic touch is the touch carried out by people as they work towards achieving a particular task. Directional touch, like procedural touch, is mainly used by people in their work environment where they guide others to a certain place. Comforting touch is used daily by many people of all ages. It is usually the conscious act of touching another in such a way as to reassure, soothe, calm or console at an appropriate time. This form of touch is used in the work, school and home environment, yet in today’s world, it often causes concern due to potential misinterpretation.

The term positive touch is synonymous with appropriate touch and both are used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

However, not everyone experiences touch as positive. There are members of society that suffer the negative effects of inappropriate touch. Although the focus of this thesis is on positive, appropriate touch, it is essential to remember that the impact of negative experiences is not forgotten. Finding ways to reduce the risk and incidence of inappropriate touch is crucial to

human well-being. Negative forms of touch include acts of bullying, physical and sexual abuse. It is the potential for these forms of touch to occur between teachers and children that have changed attitudes and practices relating to the use of touch in primary school settings.

Recent statistics have shown a sharp rise in cases of physical and sexual abuse against children, as outlined on page 13. This is particularly significant in New Zealand which now leads the world in countries where cases of child abuse are reported (Chamberlain, 2006). The impact of negative forms of touch has enduring repercussions. Accepting that such challenges exist and evaluating our attitudes towards touch is therefore of critical importance. When one considers factors such as, where touch is initiated, by whom, the response to touch and the relationship of the people involved in the touch, it is not surprising that attitudes, theories and research on the subject of touch vary enormously.

Researcher's background

I am fortunate to have experienced touch in positive ways. I was brought up in a family where using touch to express love and care was a normal part of my life. My siblings and I received positive experiences of touch from our mother and father and in turn, learned how to provide these to each other. We were generally reprimanded verbally rather than physically for our misdemeanours. My parents often held hands or cuddled in the kitchen whilst preparing dinner, although, as is common in puberty, I must admit to finding this awkward to observe.

My first tertiary diploma was in body and wellness therapies and involved working with people in a physically close and personal manner. I learned how to analyse posture, assess figure types and using a variety of massage therapies worked skin to skin. Using the medium of massage enabled me to observe both the physiological and psychological benefits of touch. I treated infants, athletes, pregnant women and the elderly, relieving pain, providing relaxation and, most memorably, for those with little tactile contact in their lives, an opportunity to experience touch as a positive form of human connection.

After qualifying and completing several years as a teacher in an English college, I migrated to New Zealand and continued to be aware of the

connection between positive touch and well-being, particularly for children. Having two children of my own provided first hand experience of the beneficial effects of touch to their general growth and development.

During the last nine years I have been employed as a lecturer at University. Working in this environment has enabled me to utilise my teaching skills and knowledge of human physiology to investigate the complex subject of touching in more depth.

Epistemological considerations

As can be seen from the previous section, I bring to this research project, pre-understandings that make it difficult for me to comprehend that others feel differently about initiating or receiving positive forms of touch. van Manen (1997) states that interpretive phenomenological research requires a combination of practical wisdom combined with a reflexive interpretation of the meaning of the lived experience. He acknowledges that pre-understandings or suppositions predispose researchers to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before the data is carefully analysed (van Manen, 1990). Other phenomenologist's have followed the assertion by the philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who argued that it was possible to 'bracket' or hold ones presuppositions in check while undertaking research (Koch, 1995). Yet many have asked: how is this possible? How does a person suspend the knowledge and experiences accumulated on the way towards a research topic? Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) a student of Husserl's, believed that pre-understanding is not something a person can put aside (Lavery, 2003) and this was supported by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) who argued that it was impossible to eliminate one's culture and history from one's interpretation of the world. In fact Gadamer believed that there was advantage in not being free of prejudice (Annells, 1996). Researchers following Heideggerian philosophy suggest that, rather than trying to ignore the knowledge about phenomena of interest, researchers should make their assumptions, biases and beliefs transparent throughout the research process (van Manen, 1990). This is supported by Koch (1995) in that "pre-understanding is a structure of our 'being-in-the-world'. It is not something we can eliminate or bracket, it is already with us in the world" (p. 831).

My personal and professional experiences as a teacher and massage therapist are a relevant and integral part of this study. They will be used to assist me in illuminating the experiences of the teachers in this study and in my interpretation of the phenomenon as a whole. This is consistent with van Manen's (1990) suggestion that phenomenological research is always a significant part of the student's personal or professional life and a phenomenological question must not only be made clear and understood, but also 'lived' by the researcher.

Justification for the study

Much of the current research on positive touch focuses on using massage as a touch medium and adopts a quantitative approach, providing a positivist point of view (Cigales et al, 1997; Diego et al, 2007; Field, 2000 & Field 2002a). These studies have contributed greatly to the understanding of this subject and have subsequently provided the stimulus for others to investigate this topic further. However, despite the myriad of quantitative studies that have been conducted, there is a paucity of qualitative research in the subject of touch. Studies have often generalised to groups e.g. comparing men with women, one culture with another. Little attention has been paid to the variations within groups. Individual responses and meanings have often not been acknowledged.

Whilst statistical information is important, it needs to be complimented by research that illuminates the less tangible dimensions of this topic. I believe strongly that valuable knowledge can be gained from listening to people's experiences.

A few studies that have focused on touch in education have used qualitative methodologies. They have explored the ways in which touch is used in educational settings and have focused on the experiences of both male and female teachers with wide ranging years of experience. For example, Cushman (2005) and Jones (2003b) have highlighted the uncertainty that male teachers experience regarding touching children. Cushman's work (2005) explored a variety of challenges facing male primary school teachers. However, in contrast to my study, physical contact was not the main focus of investigation. Salary and status were

also explored. Participants in Cushman's research had a variety of teaching experience, with some a little as two years. In light of the shifts in attitudes and changes in the educational guidelines pertaining to physical contact over the past twenty years, I wanted to hear from teachers who have lived through these changes. The shift in practices relating to touch between teachers and children is explored in chapter two. Although all teachers have been encouraged to think carefully about touching children, it is male teachers in particular that have found themselves under the public and media spotlight (Jelley, 2007; McCallum, 2006; McCarthy, 2008; Sargent, 2000). Therefore, listening to male primary school teachers with substantial teaching experience will add new insights to the accumulating body of knowledge on this topic.

Personal experience and anecdotal sources have prompted considerable thinking and questioning on my part. In particular, I have concerns about the potential for misinterpretation and the subsequent consequences for male teachers who touch their pupils/students.

I believe that gaining deeper understanding of this subject will encourage a more balanced approach to the use of appropriate touch in primary school education.

The Research Question

How do male teachers understand their experiences of touch with their pupils?

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be a male primary school teacher in New Zealand today, working with or without the close physical contact that being with young children may require.

Overview of chapters

In this chapter I have introduced the subject of touch in the context of education and outlined the various meanings of touch for those living in the western world. I have discussed my background and the implications this may or may not have for the research and provided a justification for this study.

A review of literature relating to touch is presented in Chapter Two. The many meanings of touch required me to narrow the field of the search to literature relating to positive touch and the affect on human beings if positive touch is withdrawn. Literature relating to mediums of touch, such as massage, is discussed and the general benefits of positive touch are outlined. Chapter Two also critiques the limited literature pertaining to touch in education.

Methodology and method are the focus of Chapter Three. An overview of hermeneutic phenomenology is provided and the philosophical notions underpinning this study are outlined. Recruiting participants and the methods employed in data collection and analysis are described. This chapter also includes discussion of the criteria used to establish rigour and trustworthiness.

Chapter Four presents the research findings. After sustained analysis, four major themes were identified: 'Being cautious, careful and visible', 'worrying about misinterpretation', 'feeling sad' and 'battling with boundaries'. Within each theme, verbatim excerpts are used to support the description and interpretation. Philosophical links are made throughout the analysis to the notions of the lived experience described by van Manen (1990).

Chapter Five discusses the findings of the study in relation to literature. The limitations of the study are presented and recommendations for education, teachers and society are made along with suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the literature

This chapter reviews knowledge relating to the subject of touch and will focus on the attitudes and beliefs prevalent in the context of primary school education.

In qualitative research, the literature review, in addition to justifying the need for researching a particular question, provides contextual background essential for understanding the research findings (Schneider, Elliot, LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2003). In hermeneutic research, it also helps the reader to understand the researcher's interpretation of literature and the ways in which this influences the research process. In this chapter the reader will be introduced to the subtle and variable meanings of touch.

The discussion will be presented thematically because meanings are central to hermeneutic research. I have reviewed and interpreted the literature under the following headings: 'touch as essential to human well-being', 'living without touch', 'social meanings of touch' and 'touching in the context of education'.

Touch as essential to human well-being

Touch is the first of the human senses to develop and it functions even after sight and hearing begin to fade later in life (Field, 2003). Lythgoe (2005) suggests that it is through the sense of touch that we learn to know and find our way in the world. As early as eight weeks gestation, an embryo is able to respond to a touch on the cheek and by 32 weeks, an array of sensory sensations are perceived through temperature, pressure, touch and pain (Montagu, 1986).

Touch is also one of the most basic forms of human stimulation (Montagu, 1986). However, calling it 'basic' should not detract from its potential impact in our lives. When other senses are impaired, touching is an essential form of communication. Helen Keller, a writer and lecturer who

became deaf and blind at 19 months old stated that: “My hand is to me what your hearing and sight together are to you... it is the hand that binds me to the world of men and women” (Lythgoe, 2005, p.40).

Touch can enhance a verbal message or can be an entire message in itself (Forden 1981). It is critical for growth, development and learning. It also serves to provide comfort and gives reassurance, therefore building self-esteem (Field, 2003). When touch is an integral part of an infant’s daily routine, growth and sleep are facilitated and performance on infant development tests is enhanced (Cigales et al, 1997; Field 2002a). Thus touch is essential to human health and well-being.

Research carried out by Crusco and Wetzel (1984) suggests that friendly or caring touch has a sub-conscious effect on personal well-being. Patrons in a restaurant left higher tips for waitresses who touched them as they returned their change regardless of ratings about quality of service or food. Residents in a retirement home who received tender stroking touch by the nursing staff over a period of 12 weeks similarly reported positive outcomes (Sansone, 2000). In this study, positive tactile communication was deliberately incorporated as part of the daily routine. Pain and anxiety scores were reduced and 84% of residents reported enjoying being touched. The nursing staff also found that using touch tenderly helped them to communicate more effectively with the residents. Emphasising use of positive touch with the elderly has also been shown to significantly reduce depression (Bushmann, Hollinger-Smith & Peterson-Kokkas, 1999). Similarly, massaging patients with dementia has been shown to increase emotional and physical relaxation (Oh, 2000). However, although there is clear evidence that this form of touch increases quality of life, rest home nurses and carers report not having sufficient time to spend with residents in this way (Sansone, 2000).

The positive links between caring touch and well-being of older adults has also been demonstrated at the other end of the age spectrum. This is clearly evident in the therapeutic use of massage in infants (Schneider-McClure, 1978).

In the western world, where touching children is most often reported in a negative context through media reports (Montagu, 1986), an interesting shift in thinking is evident in the growing interest and enthusiasm for infant

massage. Although infant massage dates back many centuries and is a practice carried out on a daily basis in some Indian and Asian cultures, it is a relatively new addition to the parenting practices of people in New Zealand and other western countries.

The International Association of Infant Massage (IAIM) was founded in 1981 by Vimala Schneider McClure who had been training instructors since 1977. Through the IAIM, infant massage is now taught in 33 countries. The benefits of infant massage are well researched and documented (Diego et al, 2007; Field & Hernandez-Reif, 2001; Field, et al, 1996; Hernandez-Reif, Diego & Field, 2007). “Being touched and caressed, being massaged, is food for the infant, food as necessary as minerals, vitamins and proteins”, (Leboyer, cited in Schneider McClure, 1978, p.1). Indeed, much of the discussion about infant massage and the reason for its use are based on the physiological and psychological benefits it brings to an infants well-being. However, the vision statement of the IAIM does not mention these benefits at all. The vision of IAIM is that, ‘by fostering and encouraging infant massage throughout all cultures we will begin to see more compassion toward and responsibility for fellow human beings’ (International Association of Infant Massage [n.d].). This vision speaks of a deeper meaning that underpins infant massage practice. It suggests we have a ‘tool’ that not only enhances the physiological and psychological benefits of infants but has the ability to have a far reaching effect on society.

The need for touch continues as infants become children. Implicit in many texts promoting positive touch is the assumption that adults make the decision regarding when to or when not to touch a child. However, others argue that touch should be initiated by the child (Piper & Stronach, 2008). Touch is part of their body language and thus an important aspect of communication.

Other studies researching touch advocate massage as a medium for improving physiological effects of people in all age groups. Massage has the potential to increase blood and lymphatic flow, increase respiratory function, boost the immune system, relax skeletal muscle tissue and decrease heart rate (Field, 1998; Zeitlin, 2000; Moyer, Rounds & Hannum, 2004). The decrease in heart rate is consistent with the parasympathetic response of the autonomic nervous system. Nevertheless, where massage

is a new experience or not enjoyed, the opposite effect may potentially occur. Studies also showed benefits with regard to alleviating physical discomfort (Hernandez-Reif, et al, 2001; Lawler, 2006; Preyde, 2000; Quinn, Chandler & Moraska, 2002). Studies using massage to reduce pain levels are diverse given the potential for pain to manifest in any area of the body at varying degrees. Sources of pain that have been studied include headaches, burns and pain during childbirth. Findings indicate fewer incidences of migraine headaches and a decrease in intensity when they do occur (Hernandez-Reif, Dieter, Field, Swerdlow & Diego, 1998; Lawler, 2006). Children who received massage during the change of dressing to a severe burn area showed minimal distress compared with the control group, suggesting that massage attenuates children's' distress responses to aversive medical procedures (Hernandez-Reif, et al, 2001). Moreover, touch and massage have also been shown to be effective in relieving psychological problems (Moyer, Rounds & Hannum, 2004). Research has demonstrated decreases in anxiety, depression and stress hormone levels (Field, 1998; Field & Grizzle, 1997; Hart, Field, Hernandez-Reif & Nearing, 2001; Luscombe, 2002).

Interest in massage has been growing among both the scientific community and consumers (Moyer et al, 2004). In the United States consumers now spend between four and six billion dollars annually for massage therapy, in pursuit of benefits such as improved circulation, relaxation, feelings of well-being and reduction of pain (Moyer et al, 2004).

Despite some encouraging findings, caution is necessary. A randomised controlled trial into the effectiveness of massage therapy for back pain (Preyde, 2000) reported that the massage group experienced less intense pain and a general decrease in pain when compared with the groups receiving soft tissue manipulation, postural education and sham [simulated] laser therapy. However, the findings of this study are limited because voluntary recruitment suggests participants may already have faith in the benefits of massage which may have skewed results.

Touch, because it is a uniquely variable experience, is very subjective in nature, and in many of the studies reviewed there is limited acknowledgement of the difficulties this poses in effective research. When

Dunn, Sleep and Collett (1995) examined the potential benefits of three 'therapies': massage, aromatherapy and a period of rest on patients in an intensive care unit, there were no statistically significant differences in the physiological stress indicators, although patients receiving aromatherapy treatment reported significantly greater improvement in their mood and perceived levels of anxiety.

Undertaking research in an environment such as an intensive care unit is challenging and fraught with variables. Ensuring that patient health and safety is not compromised needs to be uppermost and, despite the claims of positive findings in the above study, there were several factors that could potentially skew the results. The patients in each group did not receive the same number of treatments nor did they receive the treatment for a standard time frame. The massage was performed using a light effleurage yet some research has shown that light effleurage is ineffective in producing many of the desired physiological effects (Field, 1998; Malkin, 1994).

Others members of society do not experience touch at all. The lack of this vital contributor to well-being has been termed skin hunger (Field, 2000) or touch deprivation. The literature associated with this is outlined in the next section.

Living without touch

There is evidence in the literature that people in all age groups are adversely affected if they do not experience positive forms of touch throughout their lives. Most research has focused on touch deprivation on the young. Yet what happens early in life invariably influences later experiences (Field, 2002b; Prescott, 1990).

Children who are deprived of touch often suffer physiological and psychological problems. The earlier in life this occurs, the more serious the implications and outcomes (Hertenstein, 2002). Infants suffering from touch deprivation suffer more illness from a suppressed immune system, poor sleeping patterns, reduced mental capacity, increased hyperactivity and an increase in aggressive behaviour (Field, 1999).

Extremes of touch deprivation severely effect well-being. Some years ago Romanian orphans were found to have reached half of their expected height and had considerable problems with cognitive and emotional development (Rutter, 1998). When images of these children were broadcast throughout the world, their anguish was clear. Although a combination of factors such as social isolation, poor nutrition and unhygienic conditions resulted in the physiological and psychological effects these children suffered, investigation into touch deprivation has identified that the removal of love and positive touch from the lives of children in particular, often has a detrimental effect on human well-being (Caplan, 2002; de Young, 1988; Davis, 1999; Field, 2003; Hertenstein, 2002).

The situation for children in New Zealand is vastly different from the Romanian orphans; however, the freedom to touch children has markedly reduced in recent decades. The lessons that could have been learned from the experiences of the Romanian orphans and others like them do not appear to have been remembered for the positive benefits they bring.

Field (2003) suggests that touch deprivation during childhood and adolescence may contribute to a higher incidence of violence in adulthood. Prescott (1990) found that in societies where more physical affection was given to children, there was also a lower rate of adult physical violence. These findings were supported more recently in a study comparing the amount and types of touch between groups of French and American adolescents in cafés and the levels of aggression demonstrated by people in this age group. The American adolescents showed less leaning, touching, hugging and kissing than the French, and played more with their own hands and hair. They also engaged in more eating and drinking and less talking than their French counterparts (Field, 1999). Comparing this information to the rates of violence in these countries is interesting. The National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control (1996) reported that homicide rates by males between 15-24 years in the U.S.A were 22/100,000 population compared to 1/100,000 in France. However it is important to remember that such a comparison does not account for gun availability or the different laws surrounding the freedom with which they may be accessed in these countries.

Violence in contemporary New Zealand appears to be increasing. In the past 50 years the incidence of homicide has increased by 4000% and violent crime by 108%. Nationwide there is a violent offence occurring every 43 minutes (Morris & Reilly, 2003). Police recorded 56,380 family violence occurrences in 2005, at which around 65,000 children were present (Doolan, 2006). Tragedies resulting from violent acts are commonly reported on television and in the newspapers. Thus it is not surprising that considerable efforts are being made to reduce these statistics by implementing new strategies, policies and practice, many of which involve limiting physical contact. The Ministry of Education Guide to Safe Practice (2006), New Zealand Educational Institute - Physical Code of Conduct (2006) and the Ministry of Justice, Children Young Persons and their Families Amendment Act (2008) are recent examples of policy and legislation that have assisted in reducing the risk of negative touch. However, they may also have reduced the benefits of positive touch in a society that is already reported as having a 'low-touch culture' (Hoby, 2002). This will be further discussed on page 18.

New Zealand is rated third highest in the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) for child death through maltreatment (Chamberlain, 2006). Child Youth and Family notifications increased 90% in the three years to August 2004 and reached 53,000 in the 12 months to June 2005. Of these, 13,017 were confirmed as cases of abuse. The public are being encouraged to speak up about their concerns, which are commendable, but there may be ways in which society is being adversely affected. According to Field (2000), it is possible that the high levels of violence are linked to lack of touch or negative touch in society in general and particularly in relation to young children.

Despite the findings of studies that suggest a causal link between lack of positive touch and an increase in violence, there are many other social values that need to be considered and studied before strong connections can be made. It is important to remember the complexities surrounding touch between people are not overstated.

Within the school environment male teachers report that many young children do not have their emotional needs met at home and thus they look to teachers for support and reassurance (Cushman, 2005). If immediate family and carers are not engaged in touching children in ways that

promote optimal mental and physical development, what are the future consequences for developing individuals and for New Zealand society as a whole?

Although much of the concern relating to touching has centred on the young, adults, especially those in the older age bracket are also vulnerable. Many elderly adults in New Zealand live alone or in retirement homes. Living without a partner or being geographically distanced from other members of their family, often means living a life without touch. Although people differ in their need for touch (McCann & McKenna, 1993), those who want and do not receive touch become uncommunicative (Connelly, 1999). Amongst hospitalised patients Simington, (1993) found the psychotic and elderly were touched the least. Individuals in residential nursing home are touched every day, but this touch is almost always 'task orientated' related to being bathed, dressed and/or examined. Absent for many of these elderly adults is touch that communicates caring and ensures they feel valued and important (Sansone, 2000). At a time when elderly people risk being isolated and lonely, this fundamental human need is being deprived.

Being deprived of touch clearly has the potential to cause serious and long term problems in many areas of society. The evidence indicates a need to better understand the meaning of touch in New Zealand. The issues are complex and inextricably related to values and attitudes.

Social meanings: Attitudes towards touch

Understanding societal attitudes towards touch in educational settings requires understanding the feelings people have and the value or otherwise that is placed on positive physical contact.

There is evidence that New Zealand adults are more hesitant about making physical contact with children, friends and work colleagues in everyday life (Cushman, 2005). Such caution can be linked to a variety of factors including guidelines in the workplace aimed at eliminating sexual harassment. But it is the media that seems to be the driving force behind such cautiousness. Cases highlighting adults, primarily men, being

accused of physical and sexual abuse, appear to be increasing. Recent examples include the conviction of Heremia Smith in February 2008 and Derek McCarthy in September 2007 both New Zealand teachers convicted of child abuse. Although many accused teachers have been found innocent ("Teacher cleared of sex with girl", 2006; "Teacher cleared of indecency charges", 2007), stigma is associated with adults touching children in New Zealand society. Adults have become fearful of the repercussions that may ensue if touch is misinterpreted. Added to this potential for misinterpretation is the possibility that many New Zealanders feel uncomfortable about expressing themselves through physical contact (Chamberlain, 2006; Harris, 2008; Jones, 2003a; Jones, 2004). Perhaps this social phenomenon means that people are less comfortable using touch and more aware of the potential 'problems'.

There are other countries that mirror the New Zealand attitudes to touch, where handshaking is commonplace but hugging is generally a restricted 'activity' and accidentally touching someone's hand in the workplace is apologised for (Ojanlatva, 1994). Studying the ways in which people around the world engage in positive forms of physical contact has resulted in researchers naming cultures of 'high' and 'low' touch. Hall's 1966 study was one of the first that examined 'touch cultures'. This seminal work contributed to acknowledging the differences between cultures and the importance of touch within groups. A study by Remland, Jones and Brinkman (1995) video recorded naturally occurring touch interactions in England, Greece, the Netherlands, Scotland, Ireland, Italy and France. The findings partially supported Hall's study but recommended that age and gender be studied in more detail to reflect the touching habits of a culture. More recently, similar studies by the Touch Research Institute (TRI), have confirmed these earlier findings. The TRI, situated in the University of Miami School of Medicine, was formally established in 1982 by Director Tiffany Field. The centre was the first to be devoted solely to the study of touch. Its goal was to better understand the relationship between touch and its contribution to health, well-being and the treatment of disease.

A myriad of research studies have been carried out by the TRI. Field (2003) identified Mediterranean countries such as Spain, Italy, and Greece as high contact societies. In these countries welcoming people with a hug and a kiss is commonplace. Countries such as Great Britain and the

United States were categorised as 'low-touch cultures'. An article entitled "The no touching epidemic – an English disease" (Heylings, 1991), describes symptoms of loneliness, isolation, emotional inhibitions and feelings of insecurity due to lack of touch. This is synonymous with findings on the effects of touch deprivation as discussed previously by Connelly (1999) and Hertenstein (2002).

Studies of this type are valuable in that they provide a broad picture of countries and their cultural practices. However the terms 'high' and 'low' touch cultures generalise and present a rather simplistic view which may 'label' people inaccurately. Within any country, touch related practices will differ from region to region, within families and between individuals. For example, Zur (2004) describes regional differences in touch in the United States stating that Californians touch each other more casually than New Englanders. Mid-westerners, whose origins lay in German and Scandinavian cultures, are more restrained in their physical contact. In contrast the Latino Americans, whose heritage comes from the Mediterranean, finds Americans who use touch freely with each other.

Moreover, even in societies described as having higher levels of touch, the meanings have changed significantly within the culture of teaching over the last three decades. In the school environment extra care is being taken to ensure that children are safe and free from harmful touch. The following section discusses the current literature relating to touch in educational settings.

Touching in the context of education

Changes in attitudes relating to physical contact between New Zealand teachers and children seem to have undergone a significant shift over the last 20 years. Where once it was deemed acceptable to play with another person's child on your lap, in New Zealand primary schools this practice is now treated with caution (Chamberlain, 2006). This is a notable change from the post second world war classroom environment where physical touch between teacher and pupil was an accepted and expected part of

the nurturing role of a teacher. In the 1960s and '70s it was commonplace to see primary school children holding the hand of their teacher as they strolled around the playground (Jones, 2002). Teachers today work in a climate that has been influenced by media coverage of high profile cases despite the fact that rates of accusation and conviction are very low (Skelton, 2001). The need to act with caution has potentially affected all teachers but this may be particularly so for male pre-school and primary teachers who, during the late 1980s, became targets of supposition and suspicion (Dalingwater, 1999; Jones, 2002; Jones, 2003a; Jones, 2003b; Skelton, 1991; Trevitt, 2006).

Concern for the safety of children in New Zealand schools and pre-schools was exacerbated following a highly publicised case – *R v Ellis*, which found a pre-school teacher guilty of 16 counts of sexual abuse on seven children. Despite the absence of adult eye witnesses and physical evidence, the teacher was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. The conviction sent a clear message to New Zealand society that any teacher was a potential threat to the safety of children in their care (Trevitt, 2006). This case marked a significant shift in education risk management despite the fact that no research had shown an increase in child abuse between teachers and pupils (Jones, 2002).

Debate about touch in New Zealand schools continues. Despite strong arguments from both sides, (Finkelhar & Meyer-Williams, 1998; Harris, 2008; McCarthy, 2008; Jones 2003a; Jones, 2004) the shift towards abstaining from any form of physical contact between teacher and child has gained momentum and is now an accepted strategy in most schools and preschools. Adults engaged in careers involving the care of children are more highly scrutinised than previously. Policies and guidelines have been implemented in schools and pre-school centres including the requirement for all new staff to undergo a police check. Programmes such as The 'Good Touch – Bad Touch' and 'Keeping ourselves Safe Programme' have been introduced into schools by the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Police. A similar programme in the United Kingdom 'Stranger Danger' is argued to have been effective over many years (Piper & Smith, 2003). In fact such programmes appear to have become the preferred option for dealing with child abuse on the basis that

they will provide children with the skills and knowledge to reduce the occurrences of abuse (Woolley, 1999).

The shift in public perception has inevitably led to changes in education policies and procedures for those teachers involved in the care of young children (Jones, 2004). Teachers have become potential targets of suspicion and the innocent practices of comforting an upset child or giving a deserved pat on the back risk being misinterpreted (Bainbridge & Mongeau, 1997).

Indeed cases of misinterpretation are not unusual. In November 2007 the New Zealand Herald reported that Russell Thompson, a teacher, had been cleared of indecency charges NZPA, (2007). Despite the finding of innocence, cases such as this increase negative attention and adversely impact the acceptance of appropriate forms of touch in the teaching profession.

The following extracts are taken from two schools guidelines, compiled specifically for the school and designed for the teachers to reinforce touching protocol. Such guidelines signal an implicit feeling of surveillance.

“Staff must bear in mind that even perfectly innocent actions can sometimes be misconstrued and must therefore conduct themselves accordingly”.

“Even when totally innocent of ulterior motives, this misconstruction [by pupils] can return in the form of malicious accusations, which even to deny, can cast a shadow over careers”

(Piper & Stronach, 2008 p.38)

The ways in which touch is interpreted and used by other professionals such as nurses or physiotherapists is different to that practised by teachers.

Although research into physical touch has been extensive in psychotherapy and nursing, the exploration of meanings relating to touch in education has been limited (Andrzejewski & Davis, 2008).

When people live in a low-touch society, their attitudes and responses to touch, especially when linked to children can be confused. Adults are often unsure of when to touch, who to touch and where to touch (Piper & Smith,

2003). The proliferation of social anxiety pertaining to touch has resulted in many parents, health professionals and teachers being afraid to display physical affection should it be misinterpreted. This is particularly so for male teachers (Appleton, 2005).

Prior to changes in 2006, the guidelines for physical contact, as provided by the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI), withdrew some of the freedom with which physical contact could be made. The original 1998 guideline stated that any physical contact with children represented a risk to the teacher. The Code for Physical Contact implied that there was a simple causal connection between touch and risk, “like staying out of the sun to avoid skin cancer” (p.6). The Code provided its members with lists of appropriate contact situations and it advised all teachers to avoid physical contact if possible. Teachers in pre-schools and primary schools were advised to remove themselves from situations in which they were alone with a child. Staff members were not permitted to toilet children alone and there was to be no transportation of children to and from school by staff. Comforting an upset child with a hug or sitting them on your lap was specifically discouraged along with holding children’s hands and giving congratulatory pats on the back to successful students (NZEI, 1998). The response to the 1998 guidelines was one of confusion. Such guidelines indicated a link between teachers touching children and child abuse. Piper and Smith (2003) stated that, “we try to impose draconian measures in pre-school settings, where proven cases of sexual abuse are rare” (p.880). This is supported in New Zealand by statistics that show a high percentage of abuse against children is carried out by a member of the victim’s family or a person close to the family (Morris & Reilly, 2003).

Since the introduction of the Code of Practice some experienced primary school teachers have argued that being physically close to pupils is part of the nurturing process and integral to their profession (Furedi, 2002). Believing in the power of positive touch, many said they would continue to use positive physical contact regardless of the guidelines. McWilliam and Jones (2005), reported one teacher who stated “the benefits of touching and the securities and the interdependence and confidence you build in the children, far outweighs the potential danger” (p.117). However, other teachers have disputed this form of compromise, believing that avoiding all

physical contact was necessary in order to protect themselves (Jones, 2002).

In 2006, the NZEI Physical Code of Conduct was revised acknowledging Jones' (2004) research. The updated guidelines stated that teachers *should* assist children in an accident or medical emergency situation and that physical contact was acceptable when required for effective lesson delivery. The 2006 guidelines also made it acceptable for teachers to provide emotional support by comforting children around the arms, shoulders and back. Despite these changes, male teachers remain concerned about the potential for misinterpretation should they adopt a more relaxed attitude to physical contact between themselves and children. A television programme in 2006 revealed that a culture of fear exists among teachers, causing them to avoid touching children (Mc Callum, 2006).

In an effort to obtain clarification relating to the use of touch in primary schools between teachers and children, I contacted the Ministry of Education (MOE). My enquiry was passed onto a team leader who communicated with the Ministry legal team. According to this source, there are no MOE documents pertaining to physical contact in schools. School managers are expected to manage physical contact as they deem appropriate in their environment. This has attributed to the confusion about the subject of touching children meaning some male teachers have set their own boundaries to keep themselves safe (Jones, 2002; Jones 2003b; Piper & Smith, 2003).

Confusion is also evident over UK policies and legislation. Piper and Stronach (2008) state, "Nowhere could we locate any formal limitation placed on physical contact between children and non-family carers" (p.23). Using the Children's Act (2004) as baseline, the Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted) and local authorities have written guidelines and policies on physical contact. However, the guidelines remain unclear and the Ofsted inspectors, child protection inspectors and quality assurance officers carry the responsibility of interpreting the guidelines (Piper & Stronach, 2008). A recent personal communication with Dr. Piper confirmed that the confusion relates to the loosely worded policies and a need for those 'below inspector level' to interpret the wording and act

accordingly (H. Piper, personal communication, September 30, 2008). Thus it is not surprising that teachers, particularly men, feel anxious about the boundaries between themselves and the children in their care.

Sargent (2000) has suggested that male teachers have three options. The first is to reject the commonly held belief that the role of a teacher involves nurturing and pastoral care. The second option is to follow personal intuition and integrate the typically associated female behaviour and become physically closer to children. The third option is to acknowledge their inability to be free with touch and therefore adopt other compensatory behaviours.

Authorities in many other parts of the world have also been prompted to implement strategies and government policies to reduce risks associated with touch in educational settings. According to Field (1999), teachers in most states in the United States of America have been warned not to touch children in their care because of the potential for litigation. Yet, since legislation regarding limiting touch between teacher and child was implemented by school district boards, there has been no reduction in the number of cases of inappropriate behaviour made against teachers (Field, 2000).

In New Zealand, the latest Ministry of Education statistics show that males comprise 14% of primary school teachers, compared with 42% in 1956. Only 1% of pre-school teachers are male (Mackenzie, 2008). Another factor contributing to this concern is the fact that most solo parent families in New Zealand are headed by women (Jones, 2008). Thus these children may rarely interact with males who model positive touch. There is concern that pre-school and school aged children do not experience the unique skills and attributes that males provide. The relatively low numbers of male primary school teachers is becoming a matter of concern in the western world because of the possible impact the lack of male teachers will have on children (Lahelma, 2000; Sargent, 2001; Skelton, 2003).

The reported shortage of male teachers in New Zealand schools has also been linked with the incidence of violence in many areas of society. Martirosyan (2008) argues that a lack of male role models in schools is one of the reasons for uncontrolled and undesirable manifestations of

youth masculinity. She states, "...significant research ties the juvenile male social behaviour with feminised schools" (p.3). This is supported by Jelley, (2007) who links the increasing number of educational underachievement of boys with the declining number of male primary school teachers. This concern relates to the belief that boys require good male role models. Hoff-Sommers (2000) argue that the 'feminisation' of primary schools i.e. higher percentages of females in teaching and management roles results in teaching that favours girl's learning styles. Skelton (2003) states that there is an assumption that raising the numbers of male primary school teachers will provide boys with a style of teaching that will promote more effective learning. However, these assumptions are based on notions of gender socialisation whereby masculine and feminine behaviour exists only within male and female bodies respectively. Others argue that consideration needs to be given to the fact that gender is multidimensional, whereby masculine and feminine behaviour is shaped by social class, religion, age, sexuality and ethnicity (Skeggs, 1997; Whitehead, 2001). According to Jones (2008) the lack of male teachers is irrelevant, as long as children have access to good teaching, their gender not important.

As the debate surrounding the lack of male primary school teachers continues in academic circles, a small number of researchers have spoken directly to male teachers. Cushman (2005) sought to determine whether the attitudes and experiences of male teachers matched the commonly espoused academic discourse and media reports. Although salary scales and status were rated as major reasons for leaving the profession, the overriding reason for them reassessing their role was the potential for misinterpretation when making physical contact with children. For all participants this risk was something that "permeated their thoughts and actions" (p.235). The study was one of very few to focus entirely on male teachers' perspective and is therefore important for this reason. However this study examined the reasons for low numbers of male primary school teachers and did not specifically focus on touch between teachers and children.

My reading, experience and thinking in relation to touch in primary school settings has generated numerous questions. I wanted to hear about male teachers' experience of using, or refraining from touch in their work environment. I was concerned about the messages being communicated

to children when male teachers avoid touching them and from there, the implications for society.

Interestingly, in contrast to policies that have reduced or removed touch from certain places in society, the Massage in Schools Programme has been promoted internationally to bring touch back into the school environment. Originally trialled in Sweden in the early 1990s by teachers and massage therapists Mia Elmsater and Sylvie Hetu, this programme actively promotes massage in schools. Children between the ages of four and twelve perform a short and simple massage routine over clothing on each other in the safety of the classroom environment. Early and anecdotal results of the programme were extremely pleasing and encouraged promotion of this technique.

The Massage in Schools Programme (MISP) was thus founded in 2000. Its vision is that: '...every child attending school experience positive and nurturing touch every day... everywhere in the world' (p.1).

Belief in the importance of nurturing touch to facilitate and enhance learning was the impetus behind this thesis. The initial success of the programme provided the necessary encouragement to develop the project to a level that could be promoted to the international arena. In the past few years the programme has been introduced to many countries including Japan, New Zealand, Canada, Sweden, Argentina, Italy, Australia and the U.S.A with encouraging results.

New Zealand currently has 18 instructors trained to teach and promote the value of the Massage in Schools Programme. Several schools are successfully implementing the programme. Anecdotal reports thus far have shown a dramatic increase in concentration levels of the children participating in the programme, less bullying and more positive interaction between peers (Trower, 2001). Communication and interaction between pupils increased, as did expressions from the children regarding their enjoyment in learning. Similarly many families also reported improved relationships with their children. Anecdotal reports also support that teachers gain greater job satisfaction due to the calmer classroom environment and opportunities to use a wider range of teaching methods because behaviour is less disruptive (MISP, 2002).

Personal experience of having visited a school using this programme supports these findings. In conversation with a teacher about the problem of bullying, she commented that bullying was virtually absent from the school which she believed was largely due to the daily massage programme. "It's very hard to beat up on someone whose back you were rubbing 30 minutes before" (A. Westlake, personal communication, July 5, 2008). However, schools offering a massage programme are indeed few in New Zealand. Several school principals I spoke to said it would not be acceptable to most parents, and thus staff would not 'risk it'.

Touch clearly has multiple meanings for society, but it seemingly has a specific meaning in education. Is this and/or how is it affecting teachers and children in New Zealand?

Summary

Current attitudes towards touch, together with the many different ways in which touch may be experienced and interpreted, reveal that there is much to understand about the meanings and implications of 'no' or 'low' touch in education.

The implementation of policies and guidelines appears to have altered attitudes towards touch in New Zealand society and adversely impacted on male teachers (Jones, 2002), perhaps contributing to a decline in numbers of males in the profession.

Studies indicate that confusion and frustration exists amongst teachers throughout the world. The tensions inherent in this complex topic are becoming more transparent, yet further research is required. I believe that hearing from male teachers and focusing on the meaning of touch in the school environment will assist better understanding of this important phenomenon. A qualitative exploratory approach has therefore been selected with the expectation that the findings and recommendations will provide insights and facilitate progress that meets the needs of both teachers and children. The methodology and methods used in this study are articulated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology and Method

This study used a qualitative methodology informed by van Manen (1990). The philosophical underpinnings of his approach derive from hermeneutic phenomenology. Following an overview of the research methodology the methods used in the study will be described. This will include the initial planning, recruitment of participants, data collection and its subsequent analysis. The processes used to ensure trustworthiness or rigour of the study will also be outlined.

Methodology

Traditionally much of the research into touch has used quantitative methodologies which have sought to identify physiological changes and potential improvements to human well-being. However where others have attempted to define touch, I believe defining and/or measuring touch is fraught with difficulties because meanings and attitudes towards touch and touching are significantly influenced by social context. A qualitative approach was therefore selected for this study in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of touch in education through interpreting the socially situated experiences of male primary school teachers.

Hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen because it is “a human science which studies people and focuses on describing human experience as lived and interpreted” (van Manen, 1990, p. 6). It is therefore an appropriate methodology for exploring the experiences of the male teachers in New Zealand primary schools.

Hermeneutic phenomenology and van Manen’s methodology has its roots in the writings of Heidegger (1889-1976) and Gadamer (1900-2002). Heidegger used the term Dasein, or ‘being in the world’ to describe the way in which human relationships are open to and inseparable from what

is happening because of the human capacity to comprehend one's own existence (Cohen, Kahn & Steeves, 2000; Maggs-Rapport, 2001). Heidegger suggested that 'being in the world' was revealed in the ways in which we share the meanings and practices that make sense in everyday life. Being with others, having pre-existing meanings and being able to interpret these meanings was also integral to the philosophy espoused by Gadamer and used by van Manen, in research. It is the meaning of everyday life of male teachers working in the primary schools that is the focus of this study.

Gadamer's goal was to uncover the nature of human understanding. He argued that people's consciousness is affected by their history and culture. He believed that being able to interpret a text involves a 'fusion of horizons' (Crotty, 1998). Gadamer used the above metaphor to describe the necessarily broader vision that a person should have to understand a phenomenon. He therefore emphasised the need to look well beyond what is close, to see the proportions of the phenomenon and its clear place within the whole (Annells, 1996).

Gadamer (1983) also argued that prejudices contribute to personal horizons and that one's present horizon is continuously being re-formed. Past events influence the way a phenomenon is interpreted and thus it is through the acknowledgment of culture and history that true meaning becomes clear (Maggs-Rapport, 2001).

Phenomenological research seeks to gain a deeper understanding of experiences that are often taken for granted and passed over in everyday life. It involves studying how people interpret their lives and how they take meaning from what they experience (Cohen et al, 2000). "We take what is commonplace so much for granted that we often fail to notice it, and, therefore phenomenological study is required" (Cohen et al, 2000, p.8). It is a particularly helpful and appropriate approach when researching topics about which little is known.

The word 'hermeneutics' is derived from Greek language and mythology. Hermes was the messenger charged with liaising between the Gods and the Greek mortals. Thus hermeneutics brings 'to understanding particular meanings where the process involves language' (Annells, 1996). When linked with phenomenology, hermeneutics emphasises the interpretive or language dimensions of experiential being.

In relation to the current study, I cannot divorce myself from the experiences that have shaped my beliefs about the importance of human touch in the context of primary school education. As a daughter, massage therapist, teacher and mother, I interpret and respond to what I have read, seen and heard in ways that differ from people with other contextual backgrounds. I therefore bring particular prior understandings to this research and it is essential that I recognise and explore the ways in which these understandings inform the research process. These pre-understandings were discussed in chapter one.

The Hermeneutic Circle

The hermeneutic circle is an important feature of hermeneutic phenomenology. It recognises the cyclical nature of understanding. People understand present events and anticipate the future according to their past experiences in an on-going way (Spence, 2004). This is because 'every experience is taken out of the continuity of life and at the same time related to the whole of ones life' (Gadamer, 1983 p.69). Understanding the hermeneutic circle requires coming to understand the whole of a phenomenon by grasping parts and comprehending the meaning of the parts by divining the whole (Crotty, 1998). Put simply, this means that it is impossible to fully understand parts of a phenomenon until the whole is understood. Equally, until adequate understanding of the whole occurs, it is not possible to comprehend the parts. This does not infer a paradox whereby interpreters are trapped, but rather that understanding and interpretation is interdependent and never fixed.

In relation to research, Geanellos (1998) states that "the way to reveal the phenomenon under investigation is to engage with the text within the hermeneutic circle by addressing pre-understandings, reflecting upon their origins, adequacy and legitimacy, and considering their influence upon the research/er" (p.161).

As a methodology, hermeneutic phenomenology respects the capacity of a person as self-knowing. One of the strengths of this methodology lies in its ability to encourage the researcher to reflect on this knowing and as such,

to identify the attitudes and prior understandings that influence the human interpretations of behaviour (Robertson-Malt, 1999).

The phenomenon of touch in the context of primary school education is, in my view, poorly understood. In relation to male teachers, it has also become controversial, as argued in the previous chapter. The aim of this study is therefore to provide clearer understanding of a phenomenon that is often misinterpreted.

According to van Manen (1990), phenomenological human science research is about exploring the lived experience of daily life. These lifeworlds are complex and numerous with people concurrently inhabiting different life worlds, for example, “the lived world of home and the lived world at work” (p.101).

Heidegger used the term ‘existential’ to denote the understandings that people have of our existence and all that belongs to it (King, 2002). Existentials are a way of giving structure to the meaning of the lived experience and being in the world, and how they can be described and interpreted reflectively. van Manen (1990) described the following existentials: lived space or spatiality, lived other or relationality, lived body or corporeality and lived time or temporality.

The places and spaces in which people spend time, shape their daily experiences. Different spaces have different significance and thus engender different feelings and interpretations. Being in the space known as ‘school’ has or engenders different memories or recalled experiences for every individual. It is generally expected that schools are places of learning. They are usually safe and supportive places where children and teachers have positive experiences. However, school can also be experienced as oppressive and frightening. Children can experience bullying and/or failure. Parents may have awkward or painful memories of school or alternatively have happy recollections. Teachers also have memories and experiences that affect the way they respond in this ‘lived space’.

Lived other or human relationality, refers to the way people relate to the ways of others in the world that then influences our behaviour (van Manen,

1990). A teacher's attitude towards touching children is influenced by previous experiences and knowledge of social attitudes. For example, personal belief that touching children in a positive way is important and may conflict with other socially communicated meanings. Children's actions and their desire for physical contact from their teacher are also part of this human relationality.

Lived body or corporeality denotes how our physical body or the presence of it reveals or conceals something about a person (van Manen, 1990). van Manen explains that when others observe our physical body, it may lose some of its naturalness or be enhanced depending on the person observing. In the classroom, teachers may lose their natural ability to comfort or congratulate a child because they fear how this will be interpreted by others who are present.

Lived time refers to time as experienced rather than the time according to a clock. Time at school can be time that is enjoyed and passes quickly. It can also be time that drags or must be endured because it erodes self-esteem. Thus, past experience influences the way in which a person acts now and in the future (van Manen, 1990). In essence, this historically lived time, has the potential to influence the attitudes and reactions of teachers and children to physical contact.

Drawing on the above philosophies, Max van Manen, a researcher in human science, developed methodological and inquiry approaches to phenomenological research and writing. It is van Manen's approach to human science research that was used to guide the research approach for this study.

van Manen's (1990) discovery orientated approach involves the use of the following six overlapping research activities:

- 1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world. My previous experiences and ongoing interest led me to focus on this complex and little researched area of touch.

- 2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it. This was the main reason for the chosen methodology. I have tried to stay focused on describing experiential meaning rather than discussing concepts related to the topic. As van Manen (1990) states, “the meaning of the lived experience is usually hidden or veiled” (p.27) and it was through reading and re-reading the stories that the deeper meaning of the phenomenon became apparent.
- 3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon. A theme can be defined as “the main idea or topic in a discussion”, (Collins & Selina, 1999, p.912). Thematic analysis involves reflectively analysing the structure or thematic aspects of a particular experience, a means to get at the notion being addressed (van Manen, 1990). It provides a means for continued reflection necessary in order to unravel the hidden meanings.
- 4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting. During the initial stage of analysis each interview was read and re read on an individual basis, to identify key stories and possible themes. Once all interviews had been completed, I reviewed all of the stories, once again looking for what the themes may be. The writing and re-writing was the means by which key meanings were crystallised. This exemplifies the hermeneutic nature of phenomenological research and demonstrates the two following components articulated by van Manen:
- 5) maintaining a strong and orientated pedagogical relation to the phenomenon.
- 6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (van Manen, 1990, p.30).

Method

Research question – How do male teachers experience touch in the context of New Zealand primary schools?

The phenomenon of physical touch between male teachers and primary school children was the focus of this study. Research by Cushman's (2005), as described in chapter two, provided some insight in to the way in which touch is 'managed' in schools but the participants in Cushman's study had limited teaching experience. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of how meanings may have changed over time and thus I chose to explore the experience of males with more than ten years in teaching at primary school level.

van Manen's phenomenological method was selected because it recognises the overlapping nature of the activities inherent in researching complex, sensitive and little known phenomena.

Ethical Issues

The design and implementation of this study was guided and approved by the principles required by the AUT University Ethics Committee (AUTEC). Ethical approval was provided from AUTEC on 21/05/07 (see appendix D) Participants were provided with written information about the study (see appendix A). Further information and clarification prior to the interview was also available by phone and e-mail. Examples of the questions to be used in the semi-structured interview were also provided prior to the scheduled meeting (see appendix B) and participants were asked to sign a consent form and return this to the researcher in pre-paid envelopes (see appendix C). The participants' privacy was protected by the use of a pseudonym. Their geographical location has not been disclosed and personal information that may lead to identification has also been omitted. Privacy and confidentiality were additionally maintained by ensuring that information collected during the interviews was stored securely. Password protected electronic data and hard copies were stored in a locked cabinet for six years as required by AUTEC.

Another aspect for ethical consideration was the importance of reporting the experiences of participants in an accurate and authentic manner. The

participation of human subjects within any research, and certainly if one is researching sensitive topics, means that care must be exercised in ensuring that the welfare of the participants is protected (Polit & Hungler, 1997). This was achieved by ensuring privacy was maintained as discussed above, returning the transcripts to participants for verification and offering counselling, if needed, following the interview process.

Selecting and recruiting participants

The decision to recruit experienced male primary school teachers into the study was based on the desire to understand evolving interpretations of the phenomenon throughout their careers. Purposive sampling (Polit, Beck & Hungler, 2001) was therefore used to select experienced teachers willing to talk about the phenomenon of touch within the primary school education. An advertisement was initially posted in the *Education Gazette* (appendix E) although after four weeks this proved to be an ineffective recruitment tool. Letters were then sent to 27 primary schools in the Auckland area (appendix F). Addressed to the school principal, the letters outlined the study and requested that information sheets be forwarded to staff that fitted the profile.

Nine teachers subsequently returned consent forms, but one later withdrew from the study when he transferred to a school in the South Island. Six of the eight participants identified themselves as New Zealand Europeans and two as Maori. The ages of the participants ranged from 34 to 61 and this reflected their years of teaching practice. I had wanted to recruit participants from a variety of geographical and socio-economic areas and to some extent this was achieved with participants from North and South Auckland.

Data Collection

Interviews in hermeneutic phenomenological research are used to gather rich descriptive information about human experience (van Manen, 1990). Each of the participants was interviewed at a time and location that they

determined. Most chose to meet at their place of work and one requested to be interviewed in his home. At the beginning of the interview, the process was outlined and participants were once again asked permission for the interview to be audio-taped prior to the interview commencing. Two recording devices were utilised as surety in case of malfunction. Interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes.

The initial interview questions used were deliberately open, and were followed by questions that probed for deeper meaning. Several topic areas were prepared in advance. These included:

- 1) Tell me about a time when you became conscious of touching or not touching a child.
- 2) How were you feeling at this time?
- 3) What were you thinking?
- 4) What else was going on around you at that time?
- 5) How did you respond?
- 6) How has your reaction to providing touch differed with regard to the many contexts in which touch may be utilised – for example, in the playground, during sports activities, at a school camp?
- 7) Tell me about the impact (if any) the recent changes in guidelines from the NZEI have had or may have for you personally.
- 8) Can you provide an example?

Questions sought to encourage the conversations to flow freely and to provide participants with the opportunity to describe their feelings and experiences in their own words. I was aware of needing to stay close to the research question and to encourage participants to detail their experiences as fully as possible. On two occasions interviewing was interrupted: once, by another person entering the room and the other, because the participant needed to answer his phone. Unfortunately this led to a slight loss of focus for the participants and in one case the interruption led to a change in direction of the conversation. Repetition of our last words was the means by which I returned the participant to his story.

Awareness of the influence of researcher prejudice was assisted by a pre-supposition interview with one of my supervisors and careful consideration of the wording of the interview questions, the nuances and body language used during the interviews. I was mindful of not showing approval or otherwise of the feelings expressed by the participants. However, as I listened to some of the stories unfold, I found myself thinking 'what a great story' and 'this will be useful in my thesis'. Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong, (2007) state that the sense of excitement experienced when collecting data from people is in stark contrast to the ethical guidelines regarding 'using' people for research purposes.

Following the first interview I realised I had participated too much in the dialogue and not allowed for the silent moments necessary for deeper thinking. I therefore used this original interview as a 'practice run' and an opportunity to re-evaluate my approach to interviewing prior to continuing with subsequent interviews.

For each of the participants in this study, this was their first opportunity to tell their stories. Dickson-Swift et al (2007) suggest that in researching sensitive topics, researchers concern themselves with the possibility of opening up a 'Pandora's Box', not only for the participants but also for themselves. I was grateful for the care that I had taken during the preparation of the study and the efforts made during the ethical process to ensure the well-being of participants was planned for as described on page six. Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggest that participants are more likely to tell stories in more depth if they believe the researcher is familiar and sympathetic to their world. During the interview process, I battled with how much to offer my own opinion. I wanted to put them at ease but needed to ensure that I did not judge or encourage specific stories. I was mindful that offering personal insights might also lead participants to tell stories they thought I wanted to hear.

I was also very aware that, I was a female encouraging males to tell stories about touching children. The way in which the participants reacted to me during the interview varied. Some appeared relaxed and talked about their experiences freely. Others were obviously guarded, only relaxing and telling their stories once the tape had been turned off. In these situations, I

made additional field notes immediately after the interview and integrated these to the data collection. Recording my thoughts and observations following each meeting was an important way of tracking my evolving understandings and the ways in which my pre-understandings were being revealed through the process of data collection.

Following each interview I personally transcribed the tapes verbatim. Using a transcriber would have saved a considerable amount of time, but doing the transcriptions myself enabled me to become immersed in the data more quickly and provided the valuable opportunity to gain a fuller understanding of the teachers' experiences.

Transcriptions were returned to each interviewee for verification. This provided an opportunity to delete any data and/or to add further clarification of information. Few changes were made. The main comment from participants was surprise at their spoken language, particularly the frequent habit of not finishing sentences. There were three other instances of meanings being clarified by telephone. These clarifications were then integrated into the original transcript.

Data Analysis

The purpose of phenomenological reflection is to try and grasp the essential meaning of something (van Manen, 1990). It involves making sense of the data by reflecting on the lived experience described by participants and thinking about the significance of that experience. However, the meaning of a phenomenon is not simple. It is multi-dimensional and made up of many layers.

In this study, data analysis began whilst listening to the participants' stories during their interview. Following transcribing of the interviews, the text was read through many times in order to gain a better 'feel' and understanding of the teacher's experiences. Initially it was frustrating as I worked through the data provided by the participants. There seemed to be so many experiences that needed to be included in the analysis. It was through sustained reading, re-reading and questioning my interpretations that the

essence of the lived experience as a whole became clearer and thus the essential themes became apparent. As previously mentioned, reading, writing and re-reading exemplify van Manen's description of strong orientation and involvement with the phenomenon of interest. van Manen (1990) states "one must meet with it, go through it, encounter it, suffer it, consume it as well as be consumed by it", (p.153).

Themes are a means of identifying and describing the experiential structures that make up the experience (van Manen, 1990). When undertaking phenomenological analysis it is important that a distinction is made between incidental themes and essential themes (van Manen, 1990). During the analysis of the data, many themes were initially identified, but some were not essential to the fundamental meaning of the phenomenon.

I spent time reflecting on the words of the participants and my interpretations of them. I met regularly with my supervisors who reviewed my developing analysis. The discussions that took place during these meetings encouraged me to 'unpack' the stories more deeply in order to get to the essence and the inherent meanings. I also discussed the emerging themes with colleagues familiar with the phenomenon and this served as a useful tool for checking my interpretations. This action is supported by van Manen (1990) who recommends the use of research groups and gathering the interpretive insights of others to the research text.

Over time and with patience, thinking, writing and re-writing, the themes became more explicit and are presented as findings in chapter four.

Rigour and Trustworthiness

Qualitative research methodologies are being increasingly adopted by the health professions. Yet debate continues regarding the significance of findings using these approaches (Barbour, 2001). Grant and Giddings (2002) suggest there is a common misconception by positivist researchers that suggests qualitative research is not as worthwhile as quantitative.

Moreover, the positivist notion of replicability is often at odds with the rigour of research in the interpretive paradigm (Sandelowski, 1993).

Traditionally, quantitative research uses criteria such as internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity. These rigorous methods adopted for quantitative studies facilitate an achievable standard for the expert or novice researcher. The nature of qualitative research means that standards of rigour are less easy to achieve or define, and opinions on what constitutes quality in interpretive research are continually emerging (Higgs & Adams, 1997).

In qualitative research, obtaining and defining this 'quality' requires the consideration of a variety of factors all of which are found under the umbrella of 'rigour' or 'trustworthiness' (Twycross & Shields, 2005). Sandelowski (1993) states that, "there is inflexibility and uncompromising harshness and rigidity implied in the term "rigour" that threatens to take us too far from the artfulness, versatility and sensitivity to meaning and context that mark qualitative works of distinction" (p. 1). She also clearly recognises the pressures that qualitative researchers experience in order to gain respect for their particular approach to research.

In this study I have used the framework provided by Polit, Beck and Hungler (2001) to demonstrate achievement of rigour.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence one may have in the truth of the data. Spending adequate time collecting data is essential. 'Prolonged engagement' encourages understanding of the matter under investigation and helps establish rapport and trust in the relationship between the researcher and participant (Polit et al, 2001). Field notes and journal documentation were used to increase self-awareness and provide data that I believe assisted triangulation. Writing field notes or keeping a journal are additional ways of establishing credibility, because they contain thoughts and observations pertaining to interactions with study participants during and after meetings (Tuckett, 2005).

van der Zalm and Bergum (2000) argue that all phenomenological descriptions can be challenged by other descriptions because the life world does not remain static. In phenomenological research, descriptions are validated by mutual recognition demonstrated by a 'phenomenological nod'. Others who were not interviewed but who have had similar experiences recognise and confirm interpretations as potentially valid.

Use of an audit trail was another means of achieving rigour. Journal notes, field notes and the interview data are important parts of this trail. Koch and Harrington (1998) argue that 'an internal or intrinsic logic' will show itself in the final written product if an audit trail is maintained throughout the entire study.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability to transfer the findings from the data to another group or setting (Polit et al, 2001; Streubert & Carpenter, 1995). Guba and Lincoln (1989) use the term 'fittingness', to describe the way in which readers can make judgements about potential transferability (Koch, 2006). Sandelowski (1986) also uses this term and reports that: a study meets the criterion of 'fittingness' when its findings 'fit' into contexts outside the study situation and when its audience views its findings as meaningful and applicable in terms of their own experiences. Information about primary school education in New Zealand, excerpts from data and the accompanying interpretation provide evidence on which readers can judge the transferability of this study's findings.

Dependability and Confirmability

Confirmability is achieved by the integration of credibility, transferability and dependability. Each part of hermeneutic research is dependant on the other parts in order to achieve congruence with a coherent whole (Koch & Harrington, 1998). I have endeavoured to achieve the criteria for confirmability through careful planning, on-going investigation and thoughtful analysis of the data.

Conclusion

Hermeneutic phenomenological methodology has been described and justified as an appropriate framework for exploring male teachers' experience of touch in the context of the primary school education. The methods employed in the study have been outlined and the criteria for establishing and achieving rigour and trustworthiness have been presented. The findings of the study will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents my interpretation of the participants' experience of the phenomenon. It derives from stories that provided an opportunity for participants to communicate real life experiences and feelings.

The findings are presented as themes that are essential to describing male primary school teachers' experience of touch. Verbatim excerpts shared by the participants will enable the reader to engage in interpretation of the data.

It is important to note that the themes overlap and are interconnected.

The include a) **Being: cautious, careful and visible**, b) **Worrying about misinterpretation** c) **Feeling sad** & d) **Battling with boundaries**, an overarching theme which reveals the interrelated nature of the previous three themes.

Being cautious, careful and visible

'Being cautious, careful and visible', describes the experiences of male teachers as they try to maintain personal safety. The participants spoke of the cautious approach they take to their work and how they are careful about their behaviour with children.

John recognises his behaviour has changed.

In the 60s and early 70s walking around the playground and holding hands with pupils was something I did. Then I became more conscious of it [holding hands] ...and I became more cautious. You're scared that things like hugging might be taken the wrong way and you need to be careful.

John notes the shift that has occurred in recent years from teaching forty years ago. He remembers the changes in his role as a teacher, from times when physical contact was accepted as normal and appropriate, to the

current school environment where such acts may be viewed with distrust. Now he worries that touching children might be viewed as suspicious. Concern about sexual exploitation of children seems to have gained momentum in the late 1970s. However, it was during the early 1980s that abuse of children was drawn to the attention of counsellors and those involved in the care of children (Piper & Stronach, 2008). Those working with children were asked to be vigilant for potential signs of abuse and media coverage of reported cases became more frequent. Mark also tells the story of holding hands in the playground in the late 1970s.

I remember vividly back in the late 70s being on playground duty and holding hands with the junior kids for almost the entire duty time. It was quite a challenge to the kids – who could get to me first to have the first five minutes of holding my hand. Then they'd swap with someone else. Continually taking turns until the end of the break. One on one side and one on the other. I told a new teacher about this years later and he asked me how it felt. I couldn't answer him as I didn't really think about it at the time. It was an accepted part of teaching practice. It was neither thought to be a negative or positive thing, just... accepted. So I didn't really feel anything about it. What I do remember is the delight on the kids faces when they strutted around next to me. They were great times. And now, well... you don't often see it, particularly from male teachers. Lots of female teachers do it, but they're lucky. They don't have to think so much about being safe. I still teach because I know I can make a difference to the kids, but I have to admit that I'd be thinking twice these days about being a male primary school teacher. Every day its about making sure you are visible, thinking about your actions with the kids. God it's changed...and I don't think its for the better for teachers or the kids.

Mark has vivid memories of the “delight on the kids’ faces”. There was no need to scrutinise such a natural and caring action. Holding hands was accepted as normal teaching practice and one which clearly contributed to the feeling of satisfaction in his role as a teacher. His comment that “they were great times” confirms this. Comparing this with the restricted freedom teachers now have, he draws particular attention to the differences between male and female teachers. He is envious that female teachers do not have these worries and seems resentful about the amount of effort he

must expend to keep himself safe. His reflections lead him to doubt current practices of touch and the benefits they bring. The vivid recollection of the children's "delight" when he held their hands indicate that, in the past, the child's response to his actions were what was most important.

Although John and Mark don't explain whether holding hands is something they still do, Nick specifically makes this point.

When I'm walking around I'm always conscious that the juniors may want to hold my hand, so I have to be careful about that. The guidelines we have at school suggest it's not a good thing. I just tell them nicely that I can't do that. I used to years ago, but not any more. I don't think it upsets them too much...but I just won't any more.

Nick no longer holds children's hands and explains this to them. He reassures himself that the children are not upset by this refusal. But the significant pause after this statement suggests his innermost thoughts are to the contrary. He seems to regret this, yet is firm in his decision to refrain from engaging in this form of touch. How must it feel to make this decision after experiencing the freedom of holding hands?

van Manen (1990) writes about lived time (temporality) and the way past experiences influence the present and future as time is lived:

Whatever I have encountered in my past now sticks with me as memories or as (near) forgotten experiences that somehow leave traces on my being...yet, it is true too that the past changes under the pressures and influences of the present (p.104).

For Nick, it is the experience of holding hands in the past, which now influences how he interprets the guidelines on physical contact.

Being 'visible' was essential for many of the teachers.

....But I don't want to be in a room with someone on my own, particularly like that. I just won't. So basically I leave the room or ask them to use the phone down there [in the office]. I just have to think those things through. In assessment, if I'm doing running records or if I'm number testing, I make sure I'm in an area where there are loads of people.

Andy is aware of the need to “be visible” to eliminate or reduce the risk of suspicion. He makes sure he is never alone with a child. He speaks of ‘thinking things through’ and ‘making sure’ that his behaviour is clearly visible to others. He is constantly alert.

Nick behaves similarly:

Well the door would be open [to the first aid room] for starters. That would mean I could be interrupted at any time. If I felt at all cagey about the particular child, I'd bring them out into the foyer from the classroom with some tissues and do it [treat his injuries] out there.

These teachers are constantly aware of space and their place within the school environment. They try to create a physical environment that reduces their chances of being left alone or hidden from the view of others. van Manen (1990) speaks of ‘lived space’ or spaciality as it is ‘felt’ (p.102). In this study, the lived space of the foyer provides greater feelings of safety because it is more visible than the classroom. Nicks concerns are supported by the NZEI guidelines for physical contact which send a clear message that being alone carries risks of being misjudged.

Teachers are very wary and because our logic really boils down to who you believe – the student or the teacher. When something does happen, everyone is very wary of being in that situation. They have to try and defend themselves so they try and not get themselves into that situation where they do have to defend themselves...and that's the tricky part. You need witnesses and things like that. So I'm wary when I have children in my office. I could close all the venetian blinds in my office but they're all open. You're always conscious of having another witness so its not always your word against someone else's.

John is aware of the fear that he and others feel about the risk of finding themselves in a situation whereby a child's ‘word’ may be believed over that of a teacher. He consciously works to reduce this risk by making sure he has witnesses. John experiences tension on several levels. At the interpersonal level he feels tension between the children and himself and on a societal level there are others who may mis-judge his actions. Heideggerian philosophy speaks of the ‘dictatorship of they’ whereby

others influence the way we interpret our circumstances. We are influenced subconsciously and insidiously by the actions of others, societal pressures in our immediate environment and via the media. Thus others may 'cause' us to act in a way that is not natural or comfortable.

Similarly conscious actions are reiterated by Richard.

I often deal with disciplinary issues. Luckily where my office is at the moment its attached to a classroom so there is always another teacher close by. So it is always a conscious effort. We have a younger male teacher and he started teaching here in his first year and is now in his fourth year. I've always advised him from day one, don't be caught alone. Don't be alone in the classroom. It's just for your own safety.

Richard, like others in the study, is conscious of how important it is to be safe. His concern for a new staff member is revealed in the way he mentors and provides support to ensure protection of male teachers' professional development and reputation.

Andy feels uncomfortable when touch is initiated by children and cannot behave as some of his colleagues do.

I think that some teachers have 'natures' which are very maternal. I feel that maternalism comes as part of the package of them becoming teachers. You might see a child walking up to a teacher to show them something they've done on a piece of paper and they'll stand very close to the teacher and they're leaning right on their leg. The teachers will say, "wow, that's wonderful" and they'll have their hand on their back. I've seen that loads of times, thousands of times, but I don't [touch students], I don't at all.

Andy recognises that the "nature" of many teachers means that demonstrating 'maternal behaviours' is quite common. Referring to this as "part of the package", he seems to be suggesting that touch between a teacher and student is integral to their work. Yet touch is not part of his "package". He consciously avoids all physical contact between himself and the children.

Conflict arises for male teachers who want to teach and respond in a more holistic way. They struggle internally fearing that there may be serious implications for them if a situation is misinterpreted,

It's about how you interact as a teacher to the kids. It's almost expected as part of the nature of the teacher that there will be a certain amount of touch particularly with the junior kids, comforting when there is upset situations. So there are good reasons when they might touch but I don't ever. I don't teach as a junior teacher because I don't want to be anywhere near that [touching)... I just won't be a junior teacher.

Richard knows that how teachers interact with students is important. He also believes that physical contact with students is an acceptable part of being a teacher. Research confirms that young children require positive touch to meet their needs for optimal development (Kim & Buschmann, 2004) and beginning primary school is often a major step away from the home environment. School should be a place where they can seek comfort. Moreover, young children are naturally very tactile. Yet despite recognising these “good reasons” Richard consciously avoids touching children. Like Andy, he makes sure he does not put himself in a position where he could potentially face this ‘problem’.

Richard has chosen to teach older children because their needs for physical contact are less.

Mike vividly remembers wanting to console to a child but feeling unable to do so.

Once there was a time when I should have given comfort because this kid could have really hurt themselves and was in tears. I kind of froze. It happened a few years ago. One of the other teachers came in and just grabbed the kid and calmed him. She basically hugged him to calm him down and again I was thinking that this was something that possibly I could've done... But I wasn't prepared to do it.

Mike experiences frustration after a female colleague openly provides the physical comfort that he feels he should have given to a child. Mike cannot bring himself to lower his guard in order to comfort the child. It is too much

of a risk. He makes a conscious decision to not respond by cuddling the child.

There are also times when different interpretations and responses are considered and used.

I teach year six and recently a couple of the girls who had left to go to intermediate school came back to see us. They wanted to see me and give me a hug and that sort of thing. I thought at the time...uh... should we do this sort of thing or not? It's the type of child that they are. It's OK with me but I'm glad I have a few years of experience under my belt.

Richard's length of experience as a teacher enables him to feel comfortable when returning students give him a hug, but his questions reveal a hidden caution. His response borders the Heideggerian notions 'present-at-hand' and 'unready to hand'. Heidegger uses these ideas to describe the contemplation associated with encountering something (Collins & Selina, 1999). This is evident in Richard's slight hesitation as he decides whether or not hugging a past pupil is acceptable.

Worrying about misinterpretation.

Despite the fact that the participants believed that positive physical contact was an appropriate and integral part of their role as a teacher, they worried that their motives for touching could be misinterpreted.

Fear that a child, teacher, parent or onlooker might misinterpret the reasons for touching a child significantly influences the lives of male teachers. Rob explains:

I have read that there was a change in attitude [towards touch], but saying that, you only have to go through that sort of incident once and you'd be bloody careful in the future because you know where it could lead. The thing that scares most male teachers at the moment is that the most innocent of situations, if misconstrued, could lead to a problem. And once you'd had that you would be damn careful.

The recent, more relaxed, changes in policy give Rob little comfort. In the back of his mind he worries that the innocent act of touching a child could adversely affect his career and thus he has changed his behaviour to protect himself.

John also talks about his fears regarding the potential for misinterpretation:

I have to recognise that not all people see one situation in the same light. One person might see a male teacher holding hands with a child in the playground and think nothing of it and others might see it as strange. They may think the teacher was doing something they shouldn't. I suppose that's human nature but it doesn't make it any easier for us. It's something we have to be careful about because it only takes one misinterpretation and it could be the end of a much loved career.

John knows that there are a myriad of ways in which individuals interpret situations. He sees the potential for an onlooker to misconstrue the intentions of a teacher holding hands with a child and is resigned to the fact that being careful is part of ensuring the continuation of his career.

Rob is even more forthright:

Its PC gone mad. I mean I guess it comes down to the parent. If the parent wanted to make a fuss then ... If they had it in for you they could probably conjure up grounds. I guess we are all on the firing line so to speak. Yes, it is frightening and it doesn't pay too much to think about it otherwise you'd just be paranoid wouldn't you?

'PC' or political correctness relates to something that "expresses resistance to any affirmative action against language bias" (Peters, 2004, p.430). It was coined in the mid 1980s in the backlash against pressures to avoid sexism and other kinds of non-inclusive action. Rob's use of the term 'PC' reveals his anger and concern that the way parents' interpret or misinterpret situations may have negative consequences for teachers. He tries not to dwell too much on these possibilities in order to limit further anxiety. The 'dictatorship of they' (Collins & Selina, 1999) is again evident in Rob's resentment of the impact others have on his profession.

Despite their anxiety, several participants gave in to their natural instinct to provide physical comfort. However their concern became evident soon after the contact had been made.

It's almost automatic (touching a pupil). It is automatic! So when something a bit...out of...dare I say it, 'unprogrammed' happens I'm very quick to reflect, 'hang on, am I going to get any trouble here', or not trouble but 'is everything above board, yes it is'. If it's not and someone's misinterpreted it, what should I do? Now and again when I have over analysed I'm pretty quick to run off to a senior member of staff and talk about it.

Mike's questions reveal his concern. All of a sudden he becomes conscious of touching a student. An action that is normally an automatic response becomes problematic as he worries about whether or not he will get into trouble and what he should do if someone misinterprets his actions. There have been times when he has sought reassurance from another staff member.

His use of the word 'unprogrammed' exemplifies the overlapping nature of the lifeworld existentials: 'lived body', 'lived space' and 'lived human relation' (van Manen, 1990, p.101). Human beings experience bodily space in relation to others in a preverbal or largely unreflective manner – as Mike says "it's almost automatic". But the meanings associated with what is acceptable and not acceptable vary in different situations because of the social and cultural conventions. Mike's questions show his awareness that others may judge his behaviour negatively and once more this reveals the Heideggerian notion of the "Dictatorship of They" (Collins & Selina, 1999).

Ian recalls a situation in which he is able to provide comforting touch but reconsiders his actions after the event.

There's been a couple of times when I've had very upset kids with me and I'm the only one around... and then I've thought twice. Yeh, I've thought twice.

One time there was a child that I had a really good relationship with and the family. Some really bad news came to school that day and someone

that we all knew had passed away. This kid just burst into tears and I just gave her a huge hug and I ended up planting a kiss on her forehead and then I realised where I was and I looked around. To this day I remember that so vividly and next time I saw the parents I told them what had happened. They were cool with it but I was worried, put it that way. I guess if someone in the distance had seen me it would have looked very..., it would have looked a little bit out of place.

Past experiences have helped Ian set boundaries that are situationally dependent. He vividly recalls a spontaneous action whereby he kissed a child on the forehead and concern that this might be misinterpreted caused him to inform the parents of the child as soon as possible.

Despite the mixed feelings associated with the risk of being misinterpreted, some participants chose to integrate touch as part of their teaching.

Although there is slight discomfort when they hug me, that's only because I'm worried what people will think. Personally I like it. It gives me a good feeling to think they have good memories of their time with us... with me. It makes me feel like I've fulfilled my holistic role, if you like, as a teacher.
(Richard)

The term 'holistic' refers to a philosophy of teaching that requires good teachers to respond to children's social, intellectual, emotional and physical needs. For Richard, the teacher does more than foster effective learning. He or she must interact with children in a way that helps them develop in the whole sense of being human. Although there is an underlying nervousness when Richard hugs a child, he is generally positive about these experiences.

Nick has also given thought to this issue.

I think offering comfort is an instinctive thing, so it's done on the spur of the moment. I don't think people think, "well, I don't know whether I should cuddle that kid or... should I give them a pat on the back or put an arm around them".

If a child was upset and needing comfort I would not chose to leave that child without comfort for fear of it being misconstrued. I would choose to

help that kid in a positive way and if some form of reassuring touch was needed then I would instinctively give it.

This excerpt demonstrates a high level of confidence experienced when touching children. Nick has difficulty understanding why people would think twice about this instinctive action and is undeterred by the potential misinterpretation. He stands firm in the belief that he will continue to provide physical comfort for children who are distressed.

As a teacher with over forty years of teaching experience, Rob is also able to follow his instincts.

I think it's [touching] a natural instinctive thing for humans. For parents it's obviously a natural instinctive thing to do with your own kids. Perhaps I've always been fortunate that no one has ever taken the wrong connotation.

Rob uses the words 'natural' and 'instinctive' to describe physical contact with children. He likens it to the natural instinct of parents demonstrating affection. Reflecting on the numerous occasions in which his teaching has involved touching children, he recognises that he is lucky to have never been in a position where his use of touch has been misconstrued. Thus, in the back of his mind, this possibility remains evident.

Mike experienced misinterpretation in a very different context. He vividly recalls being prejudged by a complete stranger.

I was introduced to this guy for the first time through another teacher. It was in a pub so he'd had a few drinks, he just said "oh, what do you do?" I told him I was a teacher. Then he asked "what college do you teach at?" I explained I was a primary school teacher. Then he said, "ah well, you're either gay or a child molester". He said that straight up to me. I'd never met the guy before. I was speechless. Although thinking about it later on I shouldn't have been surprised. I mean, often when you see teachers in the media it's to report some awful bloody misdemeanour they have supposedly done.

This story exemplifies the attitudes of some members of society towards men choosing primary school teaching as a career. Mike is rendered speechless and confused by the reaction. Reflecting on the encounter he later realises the influence of the media as a 'they', dictating how teachers' actions should be interpreted. Mike's experience is similar to those reported by other male teachers (Sargent, 2000).

Feeling sad

As I listened to the stories, I wondered about the unintended consequences for children of curtailing a teacher's natural instinct to provide comfort through touch. Within the stories was a sense of loss and feeling of sadness as the teachers reflected on the quality of their time with children.

....not making contact with pupils. I guess we live with that cloud over our heads. Do you risk it or do you become so desensitised to the needs of the kids that you develop this hard shell in order to protect yourself and your own family? It's so sad. I think subconsciously its there all the time. Most guys I know that teach, keep away from it [touch] as much as they can. They only touch when it's absolutely necessary, particularly the young guys. And let's face it, why would they...why would they risk their career but what about the kids? What about our responsibility to them?

Chris ponders the question of touch and his role with children. He describes a "cloud over our heads". The subject weighs heavily on his mind. He thinks about the pros and cons relating to touch between male teachers and children and questions his decision to not engage in physical contact. He is torn between wanting to protect himself, his family and his career and/or becoming a teacher who is 'desensitised' to children's needs for touch. According to Dickson-Swift et al (2007), desensitisation occurs when a particular happening or situation has little or no emotional response for a person. But this is not Chris's experience. He worries about touching. He worries about the well-being of the children and his responsibilities. Although many of his male colleagues have chosen to refrain from using touch, he is concerned about how well he can fulfil his

role as a teacher. There is a sense of loss and sadness in the questions he asks.

Feeling sad is also inextricably linked with societal attitudes and fears as Mark reveals:

There have been some situations where kids have come to me and I haven't been able to help them but a female teacher has. It makes me wonder what the kid must be thinking...maybe, 'I went to that teacher and got no comfort', so...and I find that semi heart breaking. At the same time it's the society we live in and I guess it makes sense.

Mark hankers after the ease and freedom with which female teachers interact physically with their pupils, contrasting this with the boundaries imposed on male teachers. He worries about the subliminal message he is sending to the children and is saddened by the impact this has on the role of male teachers. Marks' use of the phrase "semi-heartbreaking" is a strong expression of feeling. Like Richard, in the next excerpt, he seems sadly resigned to the fact that this is how it 'is'.

Society has definitely led the change. It's what's happened in society in general and that's reflected in the schools. It has made me feel more conscious about what I'm doing when you give a kid a hug or something - a girl or a boy, for whatever reason. Maybe they are sick or crook or whatever. In some cases you still do it, but most of the time you don't and you're keeping them at arms length even though you don't want to ...You tend to think that maybe I'm being seen as cold or...not having any feelings or whatever, but that's what its come down to really. It's a really sad reflection on our society.

Richard describes "keeping them [children] at arms length". He worries about being labelled as "cold" or without feeling, but the knowledge that society will view his behaviour negatively, drives him to limit his contact with students. Richard resents having to resist his natural urge to comfort and respond to children, but his sadness goes beyond the personal level to society's attitudes towards touch.

Chris talks similarly about the sadness he experiences:

Sometimes I get really despondent at the way I see society going and as a teacher I feel I have the ability to make a difference. But such restrictions and the on-going suspicion of men in teaching, especially in primary, is becoming an unpleasant part of the work. Last month a child in my class became very upset as her grandad had died a few days before. She was six years old and was sobbing uncontrollably after some other kid had been talking about going to spend time with her grandad in the next holidays. The fact that I had to think twice about putting my arm around her to give her some comfort shocked me. How could I even stop to think about it? Its incredibly sad that I automatically went through that thought process. The fact that it went through my head not to do it is bad enough. I just thank God that I chose to do what felt right and put my arm around her.

Chris is shocked and saddened by his initial hesitation to provide comfort to a sobbing child. He asks: 'how could I stop to think about that', revealing his shock, sadness and frustration that touch in his profession has become a source of suspicion in relation to male primary school teachers. What is it like to want to put your arm around an upset child yet feel unable to do so?

Andy describes a similar sadness and feeling of loss.

Back in the 60's, things were quite different. That side of things has changed, incredibly so. I don't feel angry about it but saddened that as a society we have chosen to buy into fear, when there has been no need to travel that road. I haven't thought about it [touch] much until now but I guess it is about fear.

Andy has been teaching long enough to have seen and experienced the changes in attitude towards male teachers and he recognises that the fear associated with male teachers providing physical comfort to children is a recent phenomenon. His sadness is associated with a sense of frustration and he accuses society of 'buying into fear' which he does not believe is justified.

Battling with boundaries

Clearly evident throughout the previous three themes are tensions and dilemmas that male teachers experience as they struggle to identify the boundaries associated with appropriate use of touch in the school environment. The following stories accentuate the interrelated nature of the three previous themes. Even though well-meaning guidelines have been introduced in primary school education, the complex and confusing nature of the phenomenon means that male teachers must constantly check their actions and reassess their boundaries.

Mark's story shows how he has battled with feeling that he should have given comfort to a young girl:

There was a girl who was very upset and I'd had a good rapport with her throughout the year and it [touching her] might have been the right thing to do at the time. She was in tears and it just felt that it may have been the right thing to do. Its not that I wanted to do it, more that I thought it might be an appropriate thing to do here. It might fit in here quite well. But because of thinking about guidelines and the way things can be misinterpreted I thought it would be best not to do that.

It was almost as if she was looking at me and as if she wanted some kind of reassurance, a touch on the back or something like that. It wouldn't have been out of place if I'd done it, but I didn't do it because of what others might think.

Mark is clearly grappling in the moment, and retrospectively, with the feeling that he should have used touch to comfort this girl. He says, "I wanted to do it", "I thought it might be appropriate", "it might fit here", but he remembers the guidelines and worries about boundaries. He recognises her emotional need and openly acknowledges that comforting touch would be appropriate, but the fear of potential misinterpretation weighs heavily on his mind. What is permissible does not align with what should be instinctual. He chooses the former but lives with the tension this creates. This seems to be the crux of the tension that male teachers live.

There are the times they [children] try and jump on your lap or hang off your leg. Most of the time they'd detach themselves fairly quickly from my leg but sometimes I had to gently ask them to jump off my lap. Don't know why really. Maybe that was the boundary for me to feel safe.

Unlike many male teachers in the profession, Nick feels relatively comfortable openly engaging in some aspects of physical contact with his pupils. However, he has set limitations on these actions in order to safeguard his position. He sub-consciously 'draws a line in the sand', in regard to contact with children.

Just a couple of days ago, a kid got injured on the bottom field while we were playing sport. The normal reaction would be to pat them on the shoulder and check they are OK. I went over but I didn't touch her. You get programmed not to do that. I always ask if they are alright and check they can get up by themselves and all that kinda stuff. Then we had to move the kid because she was in the way, so I got two of her mates to help her out. But she had really badly twisted her ankle, she really had. After putting ice on it for 10 minutes I thought we'd reached the point where I'd have to pick her up and take her up there. I think most teachers would have done that as well. I don't know about the initial stages of not even touching to see if the kids alright. I touched her ankle to assess it, but no, I didn't give any comforting physical contact. It was a kid that was actually in my class last year, so I knew her very well and her Mum works here part time. I felt very reassured and confident with this child, but I still didn't physically comfort her.

Chris uses the term 'programmed' to describe his response when a girl is injured on the sports field. He communicates verbally when assessing the situation but asks her friends to assist. Using peers in this way removes Chris from engaging in close physical contact. The touch used when assessing the ankle is nothing more than diagnostic. He subconsciously distinguishes between task orientated touch and comforting touch. Chris reinforces that he was prepared to check the child for physical harm and yet, despite knowing this child and her mother and feeling confident with them, he appears to have avoided responding to her emotional state by providing comfort through touch. He talks about "reaching a point" where

he knew he would need to carry her and seems to be comfortable with the boundaries he sets himself.

Mark endeavours to achieve a balanced approach:

It worries me in case other teachers think I'm naïve and also in case a parent disapproves and takes it further with the principal or something. But as for the kids, yeah, I think it's neat that they feel comfortable with me. If it makes school life more balanced or gives some kids a male role model who they can feel OK touching, then it's OK with me. It makes the complete package I guess, even though I feel a bit envious when I see my female colleagues having much more freedom to touch the kids.

There is a feeling of conflict inherent in this excerpt. Mark battles to resolve his desire for approval from peers and parents with his philosophy of teaching. He is envious of female colleagues who worry less about touching and recognises the importance of being a positive male role model. Mark believes that male teachers should respond to children's need for positive touch because this is part of a balanced approach to teaching.

John, shows how he meets the needs of children by holding hands:

I think [holding hands] is a sign of trust. It tells me that they trust me and they like me. They respect me and like to see me out in the playground, so that they can show me things and so that I can see them with their friends. And I'll often say, "look I've got to go now" because I don't like to just undo their hand. I don't want to just do that blankly without some sort of signal in some way.

John is a teacher with extensive teaching experience. He searches for words to describe his feelings when children hold his hand. John enjoys children's trust and respect that he experiences during playground interaction and understands their needs for physical touch. Such 'knowing' however includes knowing how to extricate himself in a way that does not offend the children. His 'knowing' shows in the way he approaches holding hands. There is a level of consciousness in his action as he untangles his

hand from theirs. However, underlying this practical approach to hand holding he shows how he reconciles this with personal boundaries.

Chris, in contrast, experiences greater conflict now as a teacher than he did in the past:

Talking about touch during training came in after the Peter Ellis case and that's maybe why we talked about it a bit. Being safe, for me, is using commonsense. For me it's about knowing the boundaries for touch and not being too paranoid about it. Some of my friends think I'm mad teaching in the climate these days but I think if you make sure everything is always out in the open and you don't take stupid risks like taking a child into the sick bay with you on your own and stuff like that, I think you should be OK. The trouble is, it's changed such a lot. Even though the physical contact guidelines changed last year, men are still really cautious. But where does it end? What about all the important things that kids need? Its not just about teaching, it's thinking about the whole picture. I think a lot about my role as a teacher and what it means to me these days.

A number of unanswered questions cause Chris to reflect on the way current attitudes towards touch between teachers and children are impacting on society. He clearly believes that touch is an important component in promoting and encouraging the healthy development of children. Common sense should make it possible for touch to be a natural and normal aspect of school life. Yet Chris knows that even with the new, more relaxed, guidelines in place, male teachers will continue to feel cautious in their relationships with children.

Battling boundaries goes further than inner battles with self. Male teachers face subliminal messages from parents, other teachers and the wider community. They struggle with wanting to meet everyone's expectations. They experience conflict as they try to establish boundaries for touching the children. Their primary focus is meeting the needs of the children. And they also want to demonstrate positive and holistic male role modelling. At the same time they need to gain acceptance from others about their decisions to use positive forms of touch.

Summary

Being, cautious, careful and visible describes the conscious efforts made by male primary school teachers in relation to contact with their pupils. The natural instinct to touch students appropriately is curbed. Behaviours, once taken for granted, are carefully examined for potential risks and steps are taken to ensure that all physical contact with children happens in places that are clearly visible to others.

Closely related to being cautious, careful and visible is an internal worrying about being misinterpreted. Male teachers, unlike their female counterparts constantly live with the fear that peers, parents and society will wrongly interpret their use of touch in the context of their practice as primary school teachers. Both prospectively and retrospectively they seek guidance and reassurance from peers and superiors, worrying for themselves in terms of their careers and for their pupils whom they believe may be adversely affected by a lack of physical contact.

An underlying sense of sadness accompanies their concern and a degree of loss is experienced both personally and professionally. The stories of the teachers in this study reveal that the caution and inability to use appropriate touch erodes personal philosophies of teaching and humanity.

The NZEI guidelines for physical contact appear to have done little to clarify and reduce the anxiety experienced. Media reports of teachers rightly or wrongly accused of misconduct weigh heavily on the minds of male teachers. The participants in this study were constantly aware and saddened by their need to monitor and minimise their use of touch. Each teacher has a line in the sand and battles with this boundary. Discussion of the implications of these findings and recommendations for practice and research will be made in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and recommendations

This thesis has focused on the meanings relating to touch from a male primary school teacher's perspective. The complexities and variable interpretations have been discussed, with a focus on positive or appropriate touch. There is a plethora of research on certain areas of touch such as massage, but only a few studies have focused on touch in the context of teaching, specifically touch between male teachers and children. Using hermeneutic phenomenology, experiential meanings of touch have been explored in this study. Thematic descriptions of the essential elements of the phenomenon of touch in the context of primary school education have been presented. In this chapter, the implications of these findings are discussed and recommendations are made for society, education and further research. The chapter concludes with an outline of the study limitations and a final conclusion.

The understandings gained as acquired through the course of this study have enabled me to reach a deeper level of appreciation of male teachers' experience of touch in the primary school environment. This two year journey has allowed me the time to engage with this complex phenomenon through immersion in literature and the valuable insights provided by the study participants. Some of my original thoughts and expectations have changed. Prior to conducting the study I believed that male teachers, who consciously removed themselves from places where they might have to touch children, were lacking in compassion. Cohen et al (2000) speak of "a journey leading to a place neither controlled nor predicted" (p.3). I now understand that life for a male primary school teacher is far from straightforward.

Being cautious about touch to safeguard one's professional reputation is integral to being a male primary school teacher. However, children of primary school age invariably seek physical contact as part of building trust and a healthy relationship with their teachers. This study has shown that these male primary school teachers are reluctant to touch students

because they fear the consequences of being misinterpreted. The multifaceted and interrelated nature of this was revealed in the themes:

- Being careful, cautious and visible
- Worrying about misinterpretation
- Feeling sad
- Battling boundaries

The following sections discuss the implications of these findings.

Needing to be safe

Inherent in 'Being careful, conscious and visible' is a defensive mode of being, in which numerous strategies are used for self protection. The participants spoke openly about the worries of personal safety. This confirms findings of a study by Jones (2002) who found that for almost all the teachers, male and female, participating in a focus group, being visible was the most important safety strategy in order to avoid the risk of sexual abuse allegations. Being alone with a student is no longer advisable for male teachers.

Efforts are, and must be, expended to ensure that face to face communication between a teacher and child is witnessed to reduce the risk that the words of a child are believed over the words of a teacher. In light of various court cases involving accusations from a child against teachers, such as Paul McCann, 2005, Michael Frederick, 2007, Heremia Smith, 2008 and Derek McCarthy, 2007, educational institutions in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the world have introduced the Lone Working Guidelines. These send a clear message that being alone with a child should be avoided to reduce the possibility of others misjudging a situation.

The findings of this study also reveal the tension between maintaining safety by adhering to guidelines and acting in ways that seem more natural and appropriate. Although the guidelines have sought to protect both

teachers and children, it could be argued that they limit the spontaneity of teachers to be able to comfort children when necessary. The current culture of fear pervading the working life of these teachers is thus in some ways counter productive.

Participants who were near to retirement had noticed the shift in the attitudes relating to touch over past decades. In the past, physical contact with children was something that was neither encouraged nor discouraged. It was an accepted part of teaching for males or females and was a normal part of communication between two people in the classroom or playground.

Teachers with extensive teaching experience had a more relaxed attitude towards touching children. Their confidence was strengthened by the knowledge that they were nearing the end of their career. However, they still felt pressure to adhere to the NZEI guidelines and had worries about societal perceptions. Several participants spoke about the effects of this daily awareness and the way it affected job satisfaction. Although none of the participants stated that this worry alone would cause them to leave the teaching profession, many knew of male teachers who had resigned or others who had chosen not to enter the profession because of these potential 'risks'.

Despite remaining committed to primary school teaching, the decision by these teachers not to work with the youngest children is resolute. This choice may be understandable, but how will the absence of male teacher's effect children in this age group?

Tension and conflict

The tensions inherent in deciding whether or not to provide physical comfort to children were clearly evident. Tensions were experienced at societal and interpersonal levels. Male teachers worried about how parents and other teachers might judge them if they engaged in touch and whether there would be undesirable outcomes from such encounters. The NZEI 2006 guidelines have encouraged a more relaxed approach to physical contact between teachers and children. However, this change may be unwittingly causing further tension and conflict for these teachers.

Sectors of society send messages that male teachers should not touch children and this conflicts with the practices suggested by NZEI. Participants believed that appropriate physical contact was part of the teaching role, but felt unable to respond to children's needs for touch. Whilst some suggest that it is not the role of a teacher to engage in positive forms of touch (Ashley, 2002), others maintain that touch is an important part of a child's well-being (Clare, 2007; Cushman, 2005; Furedi, 2002). Children deprived of positive touch at home could benefit from being able to witness and experience appropriate touch at school. Thus, it could be argued that this is an essential part of a teacher's role. The statement by Prete (1997) that not touching children in school could be considered a form of abuse is thought provoking. Yet taken at face value this is a simplistic because the complex and multifaceted dynamics within teacher/child relationships need further exploration.

The teachers linked their sadness to wider society and the ways in which some members of the public have come to judge men touching children. There was little anger about this and indeed, for most, even understanding. Nevertheless for some it detracted from what they believed the role of a teacher should be and the message this sent to young children regarding the role of males and their capacity for nurture. Reactions by some members of society towards male primary school teachers seem to be discouraging men from embarking on teaching as a career.

Worrying about being misinterpreted was a key finding of this study. Although the level of this concern varied, it permeated the working life of each of the participants. The worry that the participants in this study experienced is supported by Piper and Stronach (2008) who also recognise that increasing emphasis being placed in all school settings on staff not being alone with children. In the United Kingdom 'Lone working guidelines' (2003) have been produced and are being included in schools safety manuals throughout the country.

This study's findings suggest that the many ways in which society interprets or misinterprets male teachers touching children is responsible for the confusion and conflict that they experience. The Heideggerian

notion of lived space (van Manen, 1990) has provided insight into male teachers' experiences of the changing nature of their work. Mindful of potential misinterpretation, male teachers may stand physically close to students to comfort them, but the physical distance seems huge if they are unable to provide children with a comforting hug.

Conscious effort was required by participants to reduce the risk of being seen touching a child. Yet such consciousness is not natural behaviour and does not enable male teachers to be the male role models society expects. How can male teachers be effective role models when they are unable to use one of the most natural forms of communication to achieve this? Conflict is evident between what could or should be instinctual and 'permitted', and what has instead become taboo.

Making decisions about whether or not to touch created an inner conflict for these male teachers. The tensions inherent in wanting to do what is 'natural', 'automatic' and 'instinctive' and wanting to be safe was articulated in the theme 'battling boundaries'. These findings support the work of Piper and Smith (2003) who reported a sense of helplessness for teachers when trying and wanting to meet the needs of children. Participants in my study struggled with boundaries because of mixed messages received about making physical contact. These messages largely circulate within society in general, but also from within the schools in which they work. Decisions made about touching children were dependent to some extent on the level of confidence acquired through years of teaching. The teachers with more than twenty years experience had a much more relaxed approach to the use of touch than their counterparts with less years of teaching practice. Nevertheless, ever-present and often eroding their confidence was an underlying fear that one mistake could have life changing consequences.

Revisiting the guidelines

Guidelines for physical contact between teachers and children have been developed with the intent of protecting both parties. However, it could be argued that they have not achieved what they intended. International studies have shown no decrease in the accusations against teachers since the implementation of guidelines for physical contact (Field, 2003).

Although NZEI guidelines are designed for all teachers, it is male teachers that are impacted most heavily. The work of Cushman (2005) supports my findings that male teachers feel unable to pick up an injured child or put a congratulatory arm around the shoulders of a child who has performed well.

The changes to the NZEI guidelines for physical contact in 2006 were a marked transition from those previously promoted. The guidelines now recognise that teachers who withdraw from physical contact may not be acting as positive role models. However the participants in this study were unaware of these revisions and continued to experience anxiety about their use of touch. Similarly, Piper and Stronach (2008), report that where guidelines were implemented in their study, they were viewed as negative rather than having a positive contribution. The guidelines came to be seen as engendering fear in teaching staff rather than promoting confidence. Thus they were either ignored or found to be unworkable.

NZEI recognise that building a positive and caring environment will inevitably involve some physical contact with children and expect their guidelines to be part of on-going professional development. For the first time in half a century teachers are being encouraged, by their governing body to demonstrate positive caring touch to children, yet teachers still receive 'no touch messages' from media and some members of society.

Media reports of charges made against teachers by children make headline news and reporting cases of abuse is an effective way of raising public awareness. However, an unfortunate outcome is that such reports can exacerbate concerns about men touching children and continues to label male teachers as a potential risk.

Until there is synergy between teachers/school and society/media, primary school teachers, particularly male teachers, will feel unable to show a more demonstrative side to their nature.

Recommendations

Over the last few decades strategies have been introduced to reduce rates of physical abuse and violence in New Zealand. Organisations and government bodies have worked tirelessly to ensure the public are aware that inappropriate touch of children is not acceptable. The effort to disseminate this message to the wider community has been carried out via school and community programmes and as a result, people are more mindful about maintaining personal safety. In making the following recommendations I do not wish to detract from the importance of eliminating negative forms of touch in society. My focus is on promoting health and well-being by encouraging positive, appropriate forms of touch, thus developing a better understanding of this essential means of communication.

For society

The policies on touch prevalent in many schools throughout New Zealand reflect attitudes that are shaped socially and historically. Male teachers in New Zealand, like their international counterparts, are facing constant public scrutiny. Changing the way in which male teachers are perceived is likely to take considerable time and effort. The media is potentially the most effective way of disseminating information that could alter current public opinion. Yet media reports continue to highlight negative cases. This has resulted in a culture of fear associated with touch outside the immediate family group, despite the fact that most abusive forms of touch are carried out by family members (Morris & Reilly, 2003).

As well as reporting negative forms of touch, the media also need to explain the importance of appropriate, positive touch and the effects of touch deprivation in terms of well-being. Producing a documentary

conveying the meaning and importance of appropriate touch for people of all ages would be valuable. Academics need to share findings from studies relating to touch in appropriate journals but, more importantly, this information must also be shared with the general public. Articles in magazines and national newspapers with wide readership would increase the dissemination of such information. Television, radio and the church also offer excellent mediums for creating a more balanced view of this essential form of human communication.

Similarly, the Ministry of Education needs to focus on encouraging New Zealanders to see teaching as a valuable and trustworthy profession. Although advertising campaigns have gone some way to attract people into teaching as a rewarding career, they also need to promote teaching as exciting and fulfilling. This is essential if male teachers are to be recruited into the profession. Focus needs to be given to the benefits of male role models in teaching and the gender specific qualities they bring to the school environment. Male teachers need to be confident that their role can contribute substantially to the development of children and therefore to the well-being of New Zealand society as a whole.

Parenting programmes provided by New Zealand organisations such as Plunket, Child Youth and Family services and Parent Centre are well acknowledged for their promotion of cohesive and balanced family environments. Parent Centre is currently endorsing skin to skin contact between newborn infants and their parents because this has been proven to benefit health of the infant (Anderson, Moore, Hepworth & Bergman, 2003; Newman, 2005). Such organisations may also be appropriate avenues for further teaching of the benefits of positive touch.

Similarly, promoting the practice of infant massage encourages positive touch between parents, caregivers and babies', subliminally sending the message that 'touch is OK'. Broadening this practice to midwives, paediatric nurses, doctors and all those involved in infant care would also help to ensure that positive/appropriate touch becomes part of 'normal' daily life.

For schools and the teaching profession

The relaxation of the NZEI guidelines relating to physical contact in 2006 was important and well meaning. However, the findings of this study and anecdotal feedback from peers, suggests that male teachers continue to be wary of the guidelines. It is important to remember that these are guidelines, not law and that schools are able to decide their own acceptable forms of touch.

Currently the way in which New Zealand schools manage touch varies considerably. Some schools encourage positive touch with programmes such as the Massage in Schools Programme whilst others, at the opposite end of the spectrum, have been known to send notices to families stating that hugging between children in schools is no longer permitted (A. Westland, personal communication, April 3, 2008). The Massage in Schools Programme (MISP) provides a way of integrating positive touch into schools without involving touch between teacher and child. This programme provides a unique tool that could meet the needs of all who participate.

Greater nationwide consistency in the way in which positive touch is, or is not, implemented in schools would be beneficial for society and teachers. The variable nature of school philosophies creates confusion for teaching staff. Educational conferences are another forum for creating a more balanced approach to the subject of touching children, including the benefits of appropriate touch. This would encourage teachers to adopt the recommendations made by NZEI in 2006 yet should not detract from the need to continue programmes such as 'Stranger Danger' and 'Good Touch, Bad Touch'. Individual schools need to ensure that policies relating to touch are clearly communicated to their staff. Support with regard to managing physical contact should be provided to all teachers particularly male members of staff. This could take the form of a senior member of staff mentoring new staff in the specific protocol regarding physical touch, so accepted forms of touch are transparent to all. Open discussion forums on sensitive topics could also be instigated as part of professional development.

I must reiterate however, that it is unrealistic to expect schools to adopt a more relaxed attitude until society changes its attitudes towards male teachers touching children,

For general education

Tertiary educational institutions also need to support the previously made recommendations for society and the teaching profession.

Training programmes that involve professionals working with members of the public, such as nursing, medicine, teaching, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, would benefit greatly from a more thorough understanding of the importance of positive touch in their work. Currently, understanding the complexity of touch is mentioned fleetingly, if at all, and the inclusion of touch into health related programmes features mainly when demonstrating a specific procedure or task. Little emphasis is given to fostering the ability of health professionals to combine procedural tasks with caring and comforting touch to assist in reducing pain and increasing well-being. Introducing touch into the education programmes of people working closely with others would increase their understanding of the benefits brought by positive, appropriate touch. Similarly understanding the effects of touch deprivation would provide further understanding of the ways in which people react to situations and live their lives. Integrating the principles and theories of touch would also be advantageous in teacher education. Clearer understanding of the benefits of positive touch could reduce the anxiety that some teachers have regarding touching children.

I believe that the long term benefits of including touch in professional education will, in turn, permeate society as a whole.

For future research

Review of the literature and the changing face of societal attitudes to touch indicate there is a clear need for more research in this field.

There has been considerable research on the general health benefits of massage and the problems resulting from touch deprivation but the research I have presented has raised additional questions.

Areas worthy of investigation include:

- Conducting a study to investigate the effects of MISP in schools currently offering the Massage in Schools programme would be valuable. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies would provide valuable information. Focus groups with staff and children would provide insight into the less tangible benefits of the massage programme and a survey could be used to evaluate changes that may or may not have occurred outside the school environment.
- There is also potential for exploring the use of touch in other age groups. Studies examining the effects of positive touch in facilitating learning in the tertiary sector are limited and dated (Anderson, 1979; Steward & Lupfer, 1987). A longitudinal case study could provide information about the practice-related usefulness of including touch in the programmes preparing health professionals. Conducting retrospective audits and/or an appreciative inquiry could provide information about the success or otherwise of existing programmes.
- Investigation needs to be conducted into how the NZEI 2006 guidelines are being implemented in schools. How many schools have made the changes transparent to staff as suggested by NZEI? In schools where changes have been encouraged, how have staff implemented these in their practice? Such questions could be answered by using grounded theory methodology and/or a quantitative survey to collate staff responses.
- Programmes such as 'Good Touch, Bad Touch' and 'Stranger Danger' have been implemented in schools in western societies for several decades. Although internal reviews have been carried out there seems to be no formal evaluation on the 'Good Touch Bad Touch programme' and limited research into the 'Stranger Danger' programme (Kulkofsky, 2004; Bevill & Gast, 1998). Evaluation research is therefore needed to identify the successes and/or failures of these programmes.
- The study findings suggest that male primary school teachers struggle with the feeling that they must constantly watch themselves. How does

being continually 'on guard' affect one's performance and job satisfaction? A grounded theory approach could facilitate exploration of social processes in the school environment.

- Finally, the experiences of male primary school teachers in this study and others (Jones, 2002; Cushman, 2005; Piper & Stronach, 2003) indicate that teachers believe society opposes male teachers making physical contact with children. How dominant and widespread is this view? A discourse analysis would provide insight into social attitudes relating to touch.

Limitations of the study

The small number of participants interviewed in this study is not unusual for a phenomenological study. However, given the constraints of a Masters thesis, eight participants is a significant limitation. Therefore it cannot be assumed that the experiences described in this thesis are the same for other male teachers in New Zealand.

Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) state that researchers involved in qualitative research on sensitive subjects often experience challenges throughout the research process. In the initial planning stage of this study I had not fully realised the implications of being a female attempting to elicit sensitive information from men whom I had not previously met. For most of the participants this was the first time someone had asked them to talk about their experiences of touching children. Although they appeared to speak freely about their experiences it is possible that there could have been greater disclosure if the interviewer had been male.

It could also have been useful to have undertaken a second face to face interview with each of the participants. Having only one opportunity to talk about their experiences may have limited the data collected. Developing a relationship with the participants over a period of weeks would have allowed the participants to think about the subject between interviews and

may also have deepened the disclosures made during the second interview.

Conclusion

This thesis has analysed male teachers' experience touch in the context of New Zealand primary schools.

Data obtained from the participants was analysed to reveal four themes: Being careful, cautious and visible; worrying about misinterpretation, feeling sad and; battling with boundaries. These themes overlap and demonstrate the interrelated nature of the phenomenon.

Concerns about physical contact between adults and children, mean that associations such as NZEI must make every effort to guide and protect their members and the children of New Zealand. Initially, the NZEI guidelines appeared to ignore the importance of appropriate touch in the school environment. However, even with the recent more relaxed approach to physical contact between teachers and children, little appears to have changed for male teachers. It remains true that most male primary school teachers are reluctant to engage in physical contact with children. How do we marry the needs of children, with those of teachers and expectations of the society in which we live? In the current era of what has been termed 'moral panic' by Furedi (2002), it is not surprising that feelings of sadness, bewilderment and frustration are evident.

A male teacher's world is peppered with decisions regarding touching children. Finding a balance between doing what they believe a teacher's role should encompass and compromising this because of societal fears and expectations is the reality for these men. They recognise the importance that positive touch has for the well-being of children and some have found ways of working within certain boundaries. There is still much to learn about touch in the school environment but this study has provided a beginning insight into this complex subject.

The study began with a desire to hear about the ways in which experienced male primary school teachers choose to use, or not use, touch in their daily practice. There are many factors that influence these teachers and the decision making with regard to touching children. Despite the evidence that strongly supports the need for using positive touch with children, I now have a deeper understanding about the meaning of touch for male primary school teachers and the decisions they make. Clearly, the momentum for change regarding touching between teacher and child is not solely up to the teachers. They should not be expected to be the only initiators of change for they have much at stake. Any changes that may or may not occur must begin with the way in which members of society understand positive appropriate touch. Perhaps with a better understanding of this phenomenon, there will be greater acceptance of using this form of communication so that those within the school and wider community benefit from positive forms of touch.

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Participant Information Sheet



Date Information Sheet Produced: 15th February 2007

Project Title

Male primary school teachers experience of touch - A hermeneutic phenomenological study.

An Invitation

I am currently completing a Masters of Health Science qualification. You are invited to participate in the above titled study because I am interested in researching your experience of changes that have occurred in the last decade and the influences of recent policy changes regarding the use of touch. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

What is the purpose of this research?

This study will describe the phenomenon of touch for male teachers in the context of primary schooling in New Zealand. The findings will assist understanding of how teachers make decisions about touching children in their care and enlighten readers as to the experiences faced by these teachers and the changes that have occurred regarding physical contact between teacher and pupil throughout the last decade. They may provide recommendations for teacher training and further development of policy.

How was I chosen for this invitation?

You were chosen for this study because you are a male teacher and little has been researched on this topic from a male perspective.

You have also practiced as a primary school teacher in the classroom environment for 10 or more years and will have experienced changes over the past decade.

What will happen in this research?

After you have signed the consent form you will be interviewed at a time and place of your choice (questions attached). The interview which will take about 60 minutes will be tape recorded and transcribed. You will be sent a copy of the transcription and may alter details at this point should you so wish. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Because of the potential sensitivity of this topic, you may experience feelings of distress as you recall past events.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

I will endeavour to ask questions sensitively and to respect your feelings. I will also respond to any request by you to turn off the tape. Counselling can be arranged for distress that is directly related to the interview process. Up to three sessions are available through the AUT Health and Counselling service at no cost to you.

What are the benefits?

Offering to participate in this study will help to advance the understanding and implications of the 'low' or 'no touch' philosophy within the school environment and the wider community. It will also give voice to the male teachers.

How will my privacy be protected?

Information provided will be kept confidential. All identifying information will be removed. Pseudonyms will be used to prevent identification of your name and your place of work. Data that contains your personal details will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the University. Computer files will be password protected and all tapes destroyed following data collection.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

A maximum of two hours of your time will be required for the interview and confirmation of the information gained.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You will have three weeks to consider this invitation. I am seeking to obtain 6 - 8 participants and when that number is reached it is unlikely I will require any other participants.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you wish to take part in this research it is requested that you sign the attached consent form and return it to the address provided. A self-addressed envelope has been enclosed for your convenience.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Following analysis of the information collected you will be offered the opportunity to be sent a copy of the thesis on CD ROM.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor – details below.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH,
Madeline Banda, madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 8044.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details: Nicola Power
Division of Sport and Recreation.
ph: 921-9999 ext 7319

Project Supervisors Contact Details: Dr. Deb Spence
Dept of Health Care Practice
ph: 921-9392
Or
Dr. Sean Phelps
Division of Sport and Recreation
ph: 921-9999 ext 7094

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 21st May 07
AUTECH Reference number 07/46

Interview questions

These questions form the framework of the interview that serve to purely guide the process.

- Tell me about a time when you became conscious of touching or not touching a child.
- What were you feeling at this time?
- What were you thinking?
- What else was going on around you at that time?
- How did you respond?
- How has your reaction to providing touch differed with regard to the many contexts in which touch may be utilised – for example, in the playground, during sports activities, at a school camp?
- Tell me about the impact (if any) the recent changes in guidelines from the NZEI have had or may have for you personally.
- Can you provide an example?

Consent Form



*Project title: **Male primary school teachers experience of touch – A hermeneutic phenomenological study.***

Project Supervisor: Dr. Deb Spence and Dr. Sean Phelps

*Researcher: **Nicola Power***

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 15th February 2007
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that the interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

.....

Participant's name:

.....

Participant's contact details:

.....

Date:

.....

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
 on 21/05/07 AUTEK Reference number 07/46**

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.



MEMORANDUM

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

To: Deb Spence
 From: **Madeline Banda** Executive Secretary, AUTEC
 Date: 23 April 2007
 Subject: Ethics Application Number 07/46 **Male primary school teachers' experience of touch: a hermeneutic phenomenological study.**

Dear Deb

I am pleased to advise that the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) approved your ethics application at their meeting on 16 April 2007, subject to the following conditions:

1. Clarification of the inconsistency between the responses to sections B.7.1 and G.2.1 of the application and provision of a Confidentiality Agreement if someone other than the researcher is transcribing the interviews;
2. Amendment of the Information Sheet as follows:
 - a. Inclusion in the section titled 'An Invitation' of advice that participation is entirely voluntary;
 - b. Alteration of the first sentence in the section titled 'How do I agree...' to include a conditional phrase like 'If you wish to take part in this research' at the beginning and by replacing 'required' with a term like 'asked' or 'requested'.

I request that you provide the Ethics Coordinator with written evidence that you have satisfied the points raised in these conditions within six months. Once this evidence has been received and confirmed as satisfying the Committee's points, you will be notified of the full approval of your ethics application. If these conditions have not been satisfactorily met within six months, your application will be closed and you will need to submit a new application should you wish to continue with the research.

You may not of course commence research until full approval has been confirmed. You need to be aware that when approval has been given subject to conditions, full approval is not effective until *all* the concerns expressed in the conditions have been met to the satisfaction of the Committee.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, we ask that you use the application number and study title in all written and verbal correspondence with us. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact Charles Grinter, Ethics Coordinator, by email at charles.grinter@aut.ac.nz or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 8860.

Yours sincerely

Madeline Banda
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Nicola Power nicola.power@aut.ac.nz, Sean Phelps



WANTED

Male teachers with experience in the primary sector to participate in a Master of Health Science Thesis study.

Project Title - Male primary school teachers experience of touch.

The study requires male teachers with experience in the primary sector who are interested contributing to the understanding of touch in the relationship between teacher and pupil. Focus will be placed on changes that may have occurred in the last decade and the influences of recent policy changes regarding the use of touch. I therefore need participants to have had a minimum of ten years classroom experience.

Offering to participate in this study will help to advance the understanding and implications of the 'low' or 'no touch' philosophy within the school environment and the wider community.

Participants should currently be in a position which includes teaching and/or supervising physical activity as part of their teaching week.

The study involves a maximum of 2 hours of your time, including a 1 hour interview.

If you are willing to contribute to this study, please phone Nikki Power 021-208-9861

APPENDIX F

21st June 2007

Dear

I write to ask your assistance in a research study that I am undertaking this year. I am currently fulfilling the requirements of a Master of Health Science Degree and as such I am embarking on a research project.

As a teacher of over twenty years and a mother of two I have long held an interest with regard to the well-being of all people in our society.

Over the past three decades, the stigma pertaining to physical contact has escalated and it is argued that the importance positive touch plays in enhancing human well-being has been undermined. This social anxiety is often evident in the classroom environment where it is reported that many teachers have felt pressured to maintain physical distance from children.

This study seeks to describe the experiences of male teachers who have lived through changes in policy regarding touch in the classroom.

Although recent changes have amended past guidelines, I am keen to investigate changes that may have occurred for male teachers over the years. For this reason it is important that participants in this study have had a minimum of ten years teaching experience.

Finding 6 - 8 participants who fit this criteria and are willing to give some of their limited time may not be easy. I therefore ask and sincerely appreciate your assistance in passing on the enclosed information sheet to any staff that may be interested.

It is hoped that the findings from this study will form part of further work seeking to improve community well-being and will provide us with a clearer understanding of this complex subject.

Thank you for your assistance in this project.

Kind regards,

Nicola Power
Senior Lecturer
Division of Sport and Recreation
AUT University