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Developing good teacher-student relationships

A multiple-case study of six teachers' relational strategies and perceptions of closeness to students

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Abstract

Research demonstrating the importance of good teacher-student relationships as a contributor to high learning achievement is strong, but exactly what teachers can do to develop good relations with students is less well-documented. This study contributes to filling this research gap by exploring the relational strategies of six teachers through the application of a new reflective practice tool: the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) map. The teachers used the tool to examine the quality of their relationships with one group of students in a series of three interviews over a six-month period. The findings are presented in six case studies and a cross-case analysis discussing the teachers' relational strategies in view of existing research. The main strategy for developing good teacher-student relationships was getting to know students in terms of academic performance, interests, and their personal problems. Teachers gained this knowledge through engaging students in conversation, not only in the classroom, but also in the school hallways and outside of school. The results reveal that the teachers predominantly formed good relationships with students who initiated contact with them. Consequently, it is essential that teachers are aware of their responsibility for making contact with all their students to prevent relational inequity in the classroom. This study illustrates that engaging in a simple reflective exercise like the IOS map can help teachers identify those students with whom they need to interact more. The teachers in this study reported a 17 percent increase in close teacher-student relationships, which they partly attributed to the use of the IOS map making them more aware of their interactions with students. The case studies and the IOS map are tools that can be used in teacher education programmes to discuss relational strategies and behaviour management in schools.

Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Word count (exclusive of the reflective statement, list of references, and appendices): 44,904 words.

Dagny M. Fosen

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Glossary

AF	Academic Functioning
EdD	Doctor in Education
FoP	Foundations of Professionalism
IFS	Institution-Focused Study
IOS	Inclusion of Other in the Self
MA	Master of Arts
MITB	Model of Interpersonal Teacher Behaviour
MoE1	Methods of Enquiry I
MoE2	Methods of Enquiry II
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PE	Physical Education
QTI	Questionnaire of Teacher Interaction
UCL	University College London
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USA	United States of America

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REFLECTIVE STATEMENT

This reflective statement provides a context for evaluation of my doctoral thesis. I explain why I embarked on the Doctor in Education (International) (EdD) programme at the Institute of Education, University College London (UCL), and how the programme contributed to my professional development over a four-year period. This statement is structured according to the components of the EdD programme starting with the initial taught course assignments; the Institution-Focused Study (IFS) (MA thesis equivalent); and finally the doctoral thesis. In conclusion, I share my thoughts on my professional development journey so far, and what my thesis contributes to research and my own professional practice.

Starting my EdD journey

When I applied for the EdD programme in 2011, I was working as an education professional for the United Nations (UN) in South Asia, based in Kathmandu. I had worked for the UN in several countries and regions in the area of education for a number of years. A feeling of frustration had been sneaking up on me. The challenges in education globally were so great, and I was not sure whether I was investing my energy in interventions that were making a difference. The number of children enrolled in school worldwide had increased remarkably over the last decade, but a similar increase was not seen in statistics of students' learning achievement. Evidence from multiple learning assessments presented disheartening examples of high percentages of illiteracy among students after five, or at times, even up to eight years of schooling (UNESCO, 2010).

I had worked on an array of education programmes designed to address poor access and quality of education: printing textbooks for distance learning; buying and distributing supplementary readers; building boarding facilities for girls in remote areas; talking to traditional leaders about the importance of girls' education; developing standards for community schools; and organising in-service teacher-training. I wondered if these were the most effective education interventions. A colleague argued that training principals on school management had more impact on education quality. Based on my experience as a former teacher, I believed that investing in teacher-training would improve the quality of education for the largest number of students. The UN was

promoting teacher-training in its child-friendly education approach (UNICEF, 2009) encompassing child-centred teaching methods and positive interactions between teachers and students. However, I worried that these courses did not go sufficiently beyond discussing child-friendly education as an abstract concept, to describing concrete examples of teacher behaviour in the classroom. A colleague in Save the Children, an organisation also advocating the concept of child-friendly education, shared my concern, doubting that teachers participating in training courses were subsequently applying the theoretical concept of child-friendly education to practice.

I realised I needed more knowledge about the effectiveness of education interventions, especially programmes addressing softer elements of education such as teacher interpersonal behaviour. I needed an overview of research in this area both for my own conviction, but also for the purpose of convincing others, such as donors. In my work, I required material I could draw on as an education professional advising on the design of training courses aimed at improving teacher-student relations. However, my dilemma was that the demanding administrative workload of my position at the time left little time for systematically updating myself on technical aspects of my work. I was frustrated because I felt that I was becoming a mere bureaucrat, and not the education professional I wanted to be.

Discovering the language of professionalism

The first taught EdD course, Foundations of Professionalism (FoP), introduced me to literature debating what it means to be a professional. FoP allowed me to take a step back and think about my motivation for wanting to do the EdD, as well as how I would like to continue developing as a professional. In particular, I found the writing of Hoyle (1975) and Whitchurch (2009) on different types of professionals therapeutic, because it gave me a language in which I could articulate the frustration I had been feeling. Part of my dilemma could be described by Hoyle's (1975) distinction between a restricted and an extended professional. Restricted professionals are satisfied with not continuing to develop their technical expertise: they do not update themselves on literature in their field; they do not value peer learning; and they do not reflect on their own practice (Hoyle, 1975). Extended professionals on the other hand, are reflective practitioners who continuously seek to improve themselves (Hoyle, 1975). I am

not satisfied being a restricted professional, which I see as mirroring part of Whitchurch's (2009) concept of a bounded professional. She describes this type of professional as someone who is happy to perform their work inside the strict boundaries of their job description. Whitchurch's (2009) equivalent to Hoyle's (1975) extended professional is the blended professional, who has the ability to work across boundaries in an organisation, for example blending both technical and managerial domains.

Struggling with theoretical perspectives

The next course, Methods of Enquiry I (MoE1) explored theoretical and methodological issues associated with a range of research designs. I was introduced to the use of theory in research. It made sense that different views about what reality is (ontology) and how we can study it (epistemology) influence the researcher's approach. I soon realised that seeking to gain a full overview of existing paradigms of epistemological and theoretical perspectives was a time-consuming study in itself. After just scratching the surface of this area of philosophy through the recommended course readings, I concluded that Robson's (2011) presentation of pragmatism was the theoretical perspective closest to my own. I am first and foremost an education practitioner who is 'guided by my practical experience rather than theory' (Robson, 2011, p. 27). I believe that knowledge is 'both constructed and based on the reality of the world we experience' (Robson, 2011, p. 28), and I am open to using a variety of theories and methodologies depending on what works best for a particular research problem (Robson, 2011).

As a pragmatist, I also recognise that my research is guided by my own personal value system (Robson, 2011), which is derived from international human rights values; seeing quality education as a fundamental right of all students globally (UN General Assembly, 1989). Likewise, I acknowledge that my attraction to a pragmatic approach to research, embracing both quantitative and qualitative research methods, is linked with, and shaped by, the context of my previous practical experience (Phoenix, 2014). I have worked in an organisation that historically values qualitative research, but at the same time I have been cooperating and appealing to partner organisations and donors prioritising quantitative research for decision-making.

Exploring research methodologies and piloting my ideas

Following my supervisors' advice, I focused my research interest to the topic of teacher-student relationships, one element of the child-friendly education model. As my review of literature on teacher-student relationships progressed, I discovered there was already overwhelming evidence on the importance of teacher-student relationship quality for students' learning achievement. However, there were gaps in research documenting how teachers can develop good teacher-student relationships.

Based on my pragmatic approach to research developed through MoE1, I decided to pilot both quantitative and qualitative methods in my following two assignments, Methods of Enquiry II (MoE2) and the IFS. Through these pilot studies (Fosen, 2013a, 2013b), I formed the view that asking teachers about their teacher-student relationships was best done through the conversational style of a semi-structured interview (Robson, 2011). For example, in my IFS, I explored teacher relational strategies in a sample of second language teachers in Norway (Fosen, 2013b). I used an online survey as well as interviews with a smaller sample of the group. I realised that I needed an in-depth case study approach for learning more about the formation of teacher-student relationships and teachers' rationale behind their relational strategies. Therefore, for my larger EdD thesis, I designed a multiple-case study with six teachers with a longitudinal dimension. Due to having moved to Australia, my second home country, I was not able to conduct this study in a developing country context as originally planned, but I recruited four teachers in Australia, and two teachers in Norway.

Contributing to knowledge and professional practice

My thesis contributes towards three current research gaps in the area of teacher-student relationships: 1) what relational strategies teachers can use to develop good relationships with students; 2) which student and teacher characteristics negatively affect relationship quality; and 3) how to discover and address relational inequity in the classroom. My findings demonstrate that teachers can develop good relationships with students by strategically collecting knowledge about individual students and by engaging them in conversation. However, I argue that it is not sufficient to educate teachers on how to develop

good relationships with students without applying an equity lens to teacher-student relationship quality in their classrooms.

The most distinctive characteristic of my research is the development of the new tool: the IOS map (Appendix C). While using this instrument with the research participants to reflect on their teacher-student relationships, the percentage of close relationships across the six teachers increased by 17 percent over a period of six months. I believe this is a simple, but potentially powerful, instrument for engaging teachers in reflective practice on inequity in their teacher-student relationships. The tool can be used in teacher professional development in different ways; in reflective practice at individual or group level, in teacher education programmes, or in specific interventions aimed at improving teacher-student relationship quality, such as UN's teacher-training on child-friendly education. I am in the process of submitting a journal article to *Teaching and Teacher Education* to present my development of the IOS scale as a mapping tool for reflective practice. This is in response to other researchers' reports on the use of the IOS scale in previous issues of this journal. I am further contributing to research dialogue by submitting my literature review to the journal *Review of Educational Research.* Finally, I am revising a third article accepted by UCL's *Educate* journal, which is based on my IFS, exploring teacher relational strategies in the context of immigrant students in Norway.

Further, my work on the EdD programme has engaged me in a wide range of literature, including early childhood education, student motivation, and behaviour management models, which has already benefitted me in my work advising on education programmes as an education consultant in Australia. I have become familiar with the rich literature on effectiveness of various education interventions which will be an integral part of my future work in education. More than before, I am drawing on existing research and theory in my practical work. I have also achieved my objective of developing my understanding of research methodologies and elements of designing studies. I now feel confident that I will be able to function as an extended professional, who will continue developing my technical expertise, as well as a blended professional who can better balance both managerial and technical demands of a position without giving in to frustration. This includes applying knowledge

about relational strategies discovered in this study with colleagues and supervisees, and also seeking to continue contributing to the body of education knowledge.

I want to note that during the last four years, this study has made me continuously reflect on my own teaching experience ten years ago. In my office I have a present from a former student in a gold frame. It is a picture of colourful paper-butterflies meticulously cut by the student. In one corner, the student has written: You are a good teacher. I can still recall the stunned emotion of mystery I felt when she gave it to me, thinking: What did I do? As a result of my EdD journey, I now have an answer, although I have realised that as a teacher at that time, I did not have relational equity in my classroom. As a reflective practitioner, I will not make that mistake again, because I will continuously question myself how I can engage all my students.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: STUDY RATIONALE

This study is concerned with the problem of low learning achievement among students globally. Statistics from developed countries show that 19 percent of 15-year-olds, one in five students, do not achieve basic literacy skills (OECD, 2012). Comparatively, in several developing countries less than half of students can read when they leave school (UNESCO, 2014). I have encountered the challenge of low learning achievement in both developed countries and developing contexts during my career. For example, as a former second language teacher for refugee children in Norway, I taught students with large gaps in their learning. Later, as an education professional for the UN in Zambia, of the 74 percent of students reaching Grade 5, only 35 percent were able to read (Ministry of Education, Zambia, 2005).

The field of education has a myriad of interventions designed to improve student learning outcomes. Research indicates that among these, the quality of teacher-student relationships is one of the most important influences on learning achievement (Hattie, 2009). For example, several studies show a positive link between close teacher-student relationships and literacy, such as learning alphabet letter names (e.g. Webb, 2008), grammar gain (e.g. Schmitt et al., 2012), writing quality (e.g. White, 2013), and reading performance (e.g. Lee, 2012). Overall, the quality of teacher-student relationships is associated with students' motivation to learn (Roorda et al., 2011). Good teacher-student relationships are linked to higher levels of student participation, as well as reducing disruptive behaviour, absences, and dropout (Cornelius-White, 2007). A negative relationship between teacher and student, marked by chronic conflict, is on the other hand associated with underachievement (Spilt et al., 2012a).

Empirical evidence on the importance of good teacher-student relationships for student outcomes is strong, with a large number of studies conducted during the last 20-30 years (Hughes, 2012; Newberry and Davis, 2008; Roorda et al., 2011). Hughes (2012) refers to this effectiveness research as the first generation of research on teacher-student relationships. The second generation of research in the field currently underway concerns itself with understanding

how good teacher-student relationships are formed, and evaluating relational interventions (Hughes, 2012). Based on other researchers' recommendations about future research needed in the area of teacher-student relationships, I identified three current research gaps. First, teachers and educators need to know more about characteristics of students at-risk of developing poor relationships with teachers, so they can actively prevent this from happening (Nurmi, 2012; O'Connor, 2010; Rudasill et al., 2013; Rudasill and Rimm-Kaufman, 2009). Similarly, teachers ought to be aware of how their own characteristics influence the quality of their teacher-student relationships (Liew et al., 2010; Rudasill et al., 2006).

The second knowledge gap requiring better documentation is what exactly teachers can do to develop good relationships with students (Aultman et al., 2009; Lewis et al., 2012; Newberry, 2010; Newberry and Davis, 2008; Wu et al., 2010). For example, Scarlett, Ponte, and Singh (2009) call for more information about specific relational strategies. Such documentation of teacher relational strategies can be utilised when developing tools and interventions for improving teacher-student relationships (Hughes, 2012; McCormick et al., 2013; White, 2013). This is especially relevant in teacher professional development that aims to assist 'disengaged and disadvantaged students' (Martin and Dowson, 2009, p. 347).

Third, I argue that research on teacher-student relationships should include focus on detecting and addressing relational inequity in classrooms. For example, Hattie (2009) states teacher education would be more effective if demonstrating 'how teachers can build positive relationships with *all* (original emphasis) students' (p. 127). Likewise, Newberry (2010) claims that despite 30 years of research showing that teachers treat students differently in the classroom, literature has not explained why. My study contributes to each of these three research gaps through an exploration of the dynamics of six teachers' relationships with their students. I specifically addressed the knowledge gap highlighted by Martin and Dowson (2009) by sampling teachers teaching disengaged and/or disadvantaged students.

The research question guiding my study was: How can teachers develop good teacher-student relationships? The structure of this thesis follows the chronological process of seeking an answer to this question. Chapter 2

presents a review of existing research on teacher-student relationships; providing a basis for studying teacher relational strategies. I start by summarising the first generation of research on teacher-student relationships measuring the association between the quality of relationships and student outcomes. Next, to be clear about what is meant by a good teacher-student relationship, I examined the terminology used to describe the nature and quality of teacher-student relations. This is followed by a review of literature on teacher relational strategies.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and design of my study: a multiple-case study in which I conducted a series of three semi-structured qualitative interviews with six teachers over a six-month period. Findings are presented in Chapter 4 as six individual case studies, as well as a cross-case analysis in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, I summarise and discuss relational strategies used by the teachers, connecting findings to my research question and to literature previously critiqued. Finally, in Chapter 7, I conclude how this study contributes to the field of educational research and teacher education. I acknowledge limitations of the study and canvass directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE NEED FOR BELONGING

This chapter explores existing research about teacher-student relationships providing a basis for studying teacher relational strategies. First, I consider research documenting the importance of good teacher-student relationships for student outcomes. This research indicates that good teacher-student relationships increase students' motivation for learning, which in turn increases achievement levels. Good relationships with teachers might therefore be a protective factor for students at-risk of school failure. Further, I consider the language used to describe teacher-student relationship quality, and explain how I define a good teacher-student relationship. I consider research on teacher-student relationships that investigates how student and teacher characteristics influence relations. Finally, I review literature that includes descriptions of teacher relational strategies. Literature presented in this chapter, based on a review of over 350 sources, provided a framework for guiding my methodology and data analysis. I identified literature on the topic of teacher-student relationships and related concepts through a systematic search of the internet and UCL's accessible databases, such as Taylor & Francis, Elseviers, and SAGE. Subsequent searches were conducted based on reference lists from studies first identified. Only publications in English were reviewed.

The importance of teacher-student relationships

The first generation of research on teacher-student relationships encompasses numerous quantitative studies measuring the effects of relationship quality on student outcomes (Hughes, 2012). The volume of this effectiveness research is illustrated in meta-analyses by Cornelius-White (2007) and Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, and Oort (2011). A majority of studies in both reviews were conducted in the USA. Cornelius-White (2007) comprises 119 studies from 1948 to 2004, involving 355,325 students and 14,851 teachers in Brazil, Canada, Germany, the UK, and the USA. The review by Roorda et al (2011) synthesises 99 studies from 1990 to 2011, including 129,423 students in Africa, Asia, Australia, Canada, Europe, and the USA. Both reviews indicate a strong association between good teacher-student relationships and student engagement and achievement.

Teacher-student relationship quality is linked to learning achievement

It is useful to view this synthesised research on teacher-student relationships in the context of wider educational effectiveness research. Hattie's (2009) comprehensive synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses of research on what works in education, including 52,637 quantitative studies counting 236 million students, sets out the effect of teacher-student relationships on learning compared with other factors in education. Most of this research was conducted in developed countries, mainly in the USA (Hattie, 2009). Hattie (2009) concludes that 95 percent of education interventions have a positive influence on achievement. It is therefore not a question of what works in education, because most initiatives do, but what interventions have greater than average effect on learning. Averaging effect sizes across factors in categories of student, home, school, teacher, curricula, and teaching approaches, Hattie (2009) demonstrates that factors related to teachers have the highest effect on learning achievement.

In terms of the importance of teacher-student relationship quality, Hattie's (2009) discussion is based on the meta-analysis of Cornelius-White (2007). Cornelius-White (2007) found that learner-centred education, which emphasises the role of teacher-student relationships, has significant association with learning achievement, as well as reducing disruptive behaviour, absences, and dropout. Roorda et al (2011) reconfirm this strong association between good teacher-student relationships and student engagement and achievement. Hattie (2009) concludes that Cornelius-White's meta-analysis illustrates that in classrooms with teachers focused on developing good relationships with students, 'there was more engagement, more respect of self and others, fewer resistant behaviours, greater student-initiated activities, and higher learning outcomes' (p. 119).

Nevertheless, meta-analysis as a method is criticised for combining and comparing studies that are different to each other; that it is like comparing 'apples and oranges' (Hattie, 2009). A meta-analysis is a systematic literature review that 'uses a specific statistical technique for synthesising the results of several studies into a single quantitative estimate' (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006, p. 19). However, Hattie (2009) rejects the argument that you cannot compare two studies that are not exactly the same. He stresses that no two

studies will ever be the same, instead the 'only question of interest is how they vary across the factors' (p.10) that are being investigated in the respective synthesis. Likewise, Petticrew and Roberts (2006) liken a systematic review to 'a survey of single studies' (p. 15), in which one single study is the equivalent of one survey respondent. Although respondents are different, the answer to a research question is better answered by data from all respondents rather than the answers of one respondent (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006). Thus, the findings of the meta-analyses by Cornelius-White (2007), Hattie (2009) and Roorda et al (2011) provide strong overall evidence of the importance of the quality of teacher-student relationships for students' success, even though findings vary in individual studies.

The influence of relationship quality on learning goes through motivation

Cornelius-White (2007) and Roorda et al (2011) demonstrate that in addition to being linked to learning achievement, the quality of teacher-student relationships is strongly related to students' motivation to learn. Similarly, a more recent meta-analysis of 19 studies on student characteristics (Nurmi, 2012) found teachers reported more closeness in relationships with highly engaged students. The association of teacher-student relationship quality is stronger with student engagement than with learning achievement (Cornelius-White, 2007; Roorda et al., 2011). In other words, the link between good teacher-student relationships and achievement is mediated by students' feelings of motivation (Hughes et al., 2008; Martin and Dowson, 2009; Roorda et al., 2011).

In motivational research, the importance of good teacher-student relationships is explained by self-determination theory, which argues that all individuals have three basic psychological needs: the need for relatedness, autonomy, and competence (Deci and Ryan, 2000). The need for relatedness, or belonging, refers to a human being's tendency towards wanting 'to feel connected to others; to love and care' (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p. 231). Osterman (2000) notes the concept of belonging is broad and is also referred to as a sense of community, support, or acceptance. Deci and Ryan (2000) depict the need for belonging as 'a deep design feature of social organisms' (p. 253). Likewise, Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that the need for belonging is so strong that individuals seek to develop relationships even in adverse situations. The need

to belong is a powerful motivation in itself (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Consequently, students who feel connected with and supported by their teacher are more likely to feel motivated to learn (Ryan and Patrick, 2001).

Positive teacher-student relationships are associated with students' intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2000; OECD, 2013); a genuine interest in learning, as opposed to extrinsic motivation that is driven by pressures from others or desire for rewards (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris' (2004) description of three types of school engagement; emotional, behavioural, and cognitive engagement, is useful for understanding why good relations promote intrinsic motivation. Emotional engagement refers to students' emotional reactions such as interest or boredom (Fredricks et al., 2004). Teacher warmth and attention can contribute to students liking school and feeling a sense of belonging. Such positive emotions drive student motivation (Skinner et al., 2008), and can therefore lead to behavioural engagement, which is when students cooperate by following rules and participating in learning activities (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Thus, student engagement might start with liking, leading to participation (Fredricks et al., 2004), maybe because students work harder for teachers they like (Davis, 2006). In this way, students' participation can be externally motivated by wanting to please teachers. For example, students might seek teacher approval and attention as a reward; being motivated by 'feeling special and important' (Furrer and Skinner, 2003, p. 149). Students being emotionally engaged can ultimately lead to cognitive engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004), which is when students are intrinsically motivated to learn because they genuinely enjoy learning.

Good teacher-student relationships protect students from school failure
Good relationships with teachers are especially important, and can be a protective factor, for students who are at-risk of school failure (Baker, 2006; Decker et al., 2007; Ladd and Burgess, 2001; O'Connor et al., 2011; O'Connor and McCartney, 2007; Spilt et al., 2012a), such as students with behavioural problems, learning difficulties; or students from low socio-economic background and ethnic minorities (Cornelius-White, 2007; Ladd et al., 1999; Ly et al., 2012; McCormick et al., 2013; Niehaus et al., 2012; O'Connor et al., 2011; Roorda et al., 2011). For example, following a sample of 910 American first-graders for

one year, Hamre and Pianta (2005) found that at-risk students in classrooms with strong teacher support had same achievement levels as their low-risk peers, while at-risk students in less supportive classrooms had lower achievement and more conflict with teachers.

Negative teacher-student relationships, marked by conflict, are particularly damaging to students; more damaging than simply lack of close teacher-student relationships (Hamre and Pianta, 2005; Murray and Murray, 2004; Rudasill et al., 2013). Spilt, Hughes, Wu, and Kwok (2012a) argue that this is because conflictual relationships with teachers cause 'feelings of distress and insecurity' (p. 1880) in students, restricting their ability to concentrate on learning. For example, Palestinian children in Affouneh and Hargreaves' (2015) study reported they could not learn when they were scared of the teacher, describing it as 'my brain stops' (p. 9). This argument is supported by the results of a German study (Ahnert et al., 2012) measuring first-graders' stress regulation through testing cortisol levels in saliva samples. Students with more conflictual teacher-student relationships had insufficient down-regulation of cortisol levels, meaning they were constantly more stressed than students with good teacher-student relationships (Ahnert et al., 2012).

In terms of the scale of the problem of students having poor teacher-student relationships, O'Connor and McCartney's (2007) study, investigating 880 American children, found that about 13 percent had a suboptimal relationship pattern. In comparison, Murray and Greenberg's (2000) study of 289 American elementary school students showed a higher figure with about 25 percent of students classified as having dysfunctional teacher-student relationships. Similarly, Pianta (1994) identified 25.5 percent of a sample of American pre-school children as having difficult relationships with their teacher.

Teacher-student relationship quality determines teachers' job satisfaction
Good relations with students are equally beneficial to teachers with research showing that good teacher-student relationships are positively related to teachers' job satisfaction and effectiveness (Day et al., 2006; Veldman et al., 2013). Teachers report that good teacher-student relationships are a main source of motivation (Day and Gu, 2009; Flores and Day, 2006; Hirschkorn, 2009), whereas negative teacher-student relationships are a common source of teacher stress and burnout (Chang, 2009; Clunies-Ross et al., 2008; Jennings

and Greenberg, 2009; Spilt et al., 2011), that can lead to teachers leaving the profession (Jepson and Forrest, 2006). Indeed, teaching has been found to be one of the most stressful professions (Veldman et al., 2013). This is understandable when one considers the emotional labour (e.g. suppressing anger) that is part of teachers' work, especially in relation to dealing with disruptive student behaviour (Chang, 2009; Flores and Day, 2006; Hargreaves, 2000). Chang (2009) examines a range of emotions teachers might feel while teaching. Negative emotions include anxiety, frustration, anger, guilt, disappointment, while positive emotions can be joy, pride, and excitement. Experiencing positive emotions evoked by successful relationships with students is important because it builds teachers' resilience and belief in themselves as effective teachers (Gu and Day, 2007).

The nature of teacher-student relationships

The emotional dimension of teaching is reflected in the definition of a relationship, defined as 'a state of connectedness between people, especially an emotional connection' (Webster Dictionary, 2014). Thus, a teacher-student relationship can be described as 'the emotional bond student and teacher share with each other' (Newberry and Davis, 2008, p. 1966), where the quality of the relationship is determined by how strong the bond is. Both student and teacher characteristics can shape and change the quality of relationships (Sabol and Pianta, 2012).

Defining a good teacher-student relationship

Research on teacher-student relationships defines high-quality, or good, teacher-student relationships as having low levels of conflict and high levels of closeness (Davis, 2003; McCormick et al., 2013; White, 2013). Such a relationship is characterised by 'affection, warmth, and open communication' between student and teacher (Pianta, 2001, p. 11). This definition is based on extended attachment theory from research on mother-child relationships (Korthagen et al., 2014). Attachment theory claims that children need to develop an affectionate bond with at least one main caregiver in order to feel safe (Bretherton, 1992). If caregivers are not sensitive and responsive in interactions with infants, children can develop insecure patterns of attachment that are negative for children's development (Bretherton, 1992). The quality of mother-child relationships in turn affects the quality of relationships that students form

with their teachers (Al-Yagon and Mikulincer, 2004; O'Connor and McCartney, 2006). While attachment theory was developed in research with young children, it has also been applied in research with older students and adults (Bretherton, 1992; Drugli and Hjemdal, 2013; Riley, 2009; Verschueren and Koomen, 2012).

Students can have one of three attachment patterns marked by conflict, dependency or closeness (Pianta, 2001), which are 'internal working models' that shape new relationships (Spilt et al., 2011, p. 463). The dimensions of conflict or dependency describe insecure relationship patterns, while a secure relationship pattern is close (Pianta, 2001; Sabol and Pianta, 2012). Students with insecure attachment patterns typically seek too much contact with teachers by either creating conflict or by being too dependent. An insecure attachment can also manifest itself in students avoiding interaction with teachers. Teachers are likely to find it challenging to develop good relationships with insecurely attached students and have lower levels of affection for them than more cooperative students (Al-Yagon and Mikulincer, 2004; O'Connor and McCartney, 2006; Toth and Cicchetti, 1996). This is a concern because attachment theory posits that good teacher-student relationships are necessary for students to feel safe and comfortable at school so they can concentrate on learning (DiLalla et al., 2004; White, 2013). In other words, good teacher-student relationships are a 'precondition for learning' (Korthagen et al., 2014, p. 23).

In addition to the description of a good teacher-student relationship as close (Newberry and Davis, 2008; Pianta, 2001), literature uses adjectives such as supportive (Baker, 2006; Newberry and Davis, 2008), positive (Liew et al., 2010; Newberry, 2010), and caring (Aultman et al., 2009; Noddings, 1995). In this study, I talked with teachers about what they perceive as a good teacher-student relationship in terms of levels of closeness.

Teacher-student relationships are bidirectional and dynamic
Teacher-student relationships are bidirectional (DiLalla et al., 2004), with both teacher and student characteristics influencing the quality of the relationship (Rudasill et al., 2006). Furthermore, teacher-student relationships are dynamic and change in quality over time (Davis, 2003; O'Connor, 2010; O'Connor et al., 2011). Research demonstrates that relationships between teachers and students are constantly evolving through different phases (Newberry, 2010),

and that teachers' own relationship pattern can change over their career (Brekelmans et al., 2005). Unfortunately, teacher-student relationship quality tends to decrease as students get older (Lynch and Cicchetti, 1997; Niehaus et al., 2012; O'Connor, 2010; O'Connor and McCartney, 2007), including over one school year in the context of new teacher-student relationships (Opdenakker et al., 2012). Equally, student motivation decreases across grade levels (Fredricks et al., 2004; Fredricks and Eccles, 2002; Opdenakker et al., 2012; Patrick et al., 2008).

This decrease in quality of relationships and motivation as students become teenagers coincides with the transition to larger schools and class sizes, as well as instruction by new and higher numbers of teachers (De Wit et al., 2010). Additionally, puberty can be a difficult age with a tendency for lower self-esteem, and students being more exposed to risk-taking activities (Niehaus et al., 2012). Students report decline in teacher support during this time, with a parallel decline in learning achievement and social adjustment (Barber and Olsen, 2004; Bear et al., 2014; De Wit et al., 2010). It is often highlighted that older students are more concerned with having better relationships with peers than teachers (Lynch and Cicchetti, 1997; O'Connor et al., 2011). However, this does not mean that adolescents need good relations with teachers less (Ang, 2005; Crosnoe et al., 2004; Osterman, 2000; Rudasill et al., 2010). Roorda et al (2011) conclude that adolescents need good teacher-student relationships more than younger children, contradicting findings from some previous individual studies. In fact, relatedness to teachers seems to be more important for learning than both relationships to peers and parents (Furrer and Skinner, 2003).

Instead, the type of relationship students need with teachers change as they get older. Younger children have relationships with teachers that are similar to the caring nature of parent-child relationships (Pianta, 1994; Valeski and Stipek, 2001), while older students prefer teachers who inspire and provide guidance (Ang, 2005; Scarlett et al., 2009). Scarlett et al (2009) explain this difference as younger children having security needs and older students having autonomy needs. This might explain why research has found that positive relationships with teachers have stronger impact on engagement and achievement of secondary students, while negative relationships affect primary students more (Roorda et al., 2011).

Student characteristics influencing the teacher relationship

Koles, O'Connor, and Collins (2013) suggest that student characteristics appear to determine the quality of teacher-student relationships more than teacher characteristics. In terms of gender, research has identified that boys at all grade levels have poorer and more conflictual relationships with teachers than girls (Baker, 2006; Koepke and Harkins, 2008; Koles et al., 2013). Next, that challenges with students such as disruptive behaviour prevent close teacher-student relationships from developing (Nurmi, 2012) might be the most obvious factor. Students with chronic behaviour problems tend to be on a trajectory of continuous poor teacher-student relationships throughout school (Hamre and Pianta, 2001; Spilt et al., 2012a).

Problem behaviour is not just externalising behaviour that is disruptive and harmful to others, but can also be withdrawn, internalising behaviour with symptoms such as anxiety and depression (Berry and O'Connor, 2010; Henricsson and Rydell, 2006). Students with conflictual relationships with teachers are more likely to have closeness in their relationships than students with internalising behaviours (Drugli et al., 2011). This might be because students who openly challenge teachers are at least seeking contact, while students with internalising behaviours avoid teacher contact (O'Connor and McCartney, 2006). Similarly, Newberry and Davis (2008) found that the close teacher-student relationships of three American primary school teachers depended to a large extent on students seeking contact; pressing the teacher to develop a more personal relationship. Unfortunately, withdrawn students seem to have the particular disadvantage of receiving less attention from their teachers than more extroverted students, resulting in lower levels of closeness (Rudasill and Rimm-Kaufman, 2009; Wu et al., 2015).

The polar characteristics of extrovert and introvert personalities can be defined respectively as being outgoing versus shy (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015a, 2015b). Extroversion has been found to be a personality trait typical of individualist cultures (Hofstede and McCrae, 2004). Thus, differences between extroverted and introverted student behaviours in multi-cultural classrooms might be influenced by students' background in individualist versus collectivist cultures. Hofstede (1986) describes individualist societies as expecting individuals to primarily look after their own and their family's interests, while collectivist

societies emphasise strong loyalty within a larger group. Another dimension of describing characteristics of a culture is by level of power distance, which Hofstede (1986) defines as 'the extent to which the less powerful persons in a society accept inequality in power' (p. 307). He claims that in societies with small power distance, teachers expect students to initiate communication, while students in large power distance societies expect teachers to initiate communication. Likewise, students from collectivist cultures may not speak in class unless 'called upon personally by the teacher' (Hofstede, 1986, p. 312).

Thus, students with a different cultural background to the teacher might be disadvantaged (Cornelius-White, 2007; Ho et al., 2012; Kesner, 2000; Roorda et al., 2011), especially if they are from collectivist cultures high in power distance, as they may be less likely to initiate contact with the teacher. If the teacher already has problems with a student from a different cultural background, the risk of a negative relationship is magnified (Ho et al., 2012; Howes and Shivers, 2006). Research demonstrates that good teacher-student relationships have stronger impact on student outcomes for ethnic minority students than non-minority students (Roorda et al., 2011). Thus, it is important that teachers working in multi-cultural schools are concerned about developing good relationships with students, because students with minority backgrounds depend more on good teacher relationships (Brok et al., 2010; Brok and Levy, 2005).

Withdrawn student personalities can include more average students who do not struggle academically or behaviourally (Newberry, 2008). Newberry (2008) refers to them as the 'forgotten middle' (p. 96). Seen through the lens of attachment theory, both confrontational and withdrawn student personalities reflect insecure relationship patterns (Davis, 2003; Hamre and Pianta, 2001). These types of students have also been found to be at-risk of lower self-esteem (Hamre and Pianta, 2001). Such behaviours can be indicators of disengagement (Osterman, 2000; Skinner et al., 2008). These students therefore depend on teachers taking responsibility for making contact with them, as research shows that supportive teacher-student relationships boost students' confidence in themselves as learners (Skinner et al., 2008; Verschueren et al., 2012). Research indicates that effective teachers focus on building students' self-esteem (Kington et al., 2012). This might partly explain the link between

good teacher-student relationships and students' levels of motivation (Crossman, 2007), consistent with the need for competence expressed in self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000). However, it requires extra effort from teachers to develop good relationships with these students; often having to control negative emotions such as frustration and anger (Chang, 2009).

Thus, while teachers are likely to feel distant to confrontational and withdrawn students, they easily feel close to students with friendly and polite personalities (Newberry and Davis, 2008). These students have a secure relationship pattern (Hamre and Pianta, 2001), and they seek contact with the teacher in a positive way. They typically have high levels of academic performance and engagement (Newberry and Davis, 2008; Nurmi, 2012; Patrick et al., 2008). Supporting this view is research showing that students with learning difficulties tend to have lower quality relationships with teachers (Al-Yagon and Mikulincer, 2004; Roorda et al., 2011). These findings indicate that it might be teachers' liking of high-achieving students that causes good relations with students, rather than good relationships causing higher student outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007).

This is a possibility, considering the limitation of a majority of research conducted on teacher-student relationships that has been non-experimental and cross-sectional in design; only establishing correlational, and not causal effect between the quality of relationships and learning outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007; Fredricks et al., 2004; McCormick et al., 2013; Roorda et al., 2011). However, studies which have explored the causal direction between teacher-student relationships and student outcomes reveal that the direction of effects is bidirectional (Hughes et al., 2008; Maldonado-Carreño and Votruba-Drzal, 2011; Skinner and Belmont, 1993). In other words, student achievement, engagement, and teacher-student relationship quality are part of a dynamic system of reciprocal influences (Hughes et al., 2008).

Teacher characteristics influencing the student relationship

Cornelius-White (2007) equates the area of teacher-student relationships to person-centred and learner-centred education models based on humanistic and constructivist theories. Both models emphasise teacher qualities such as empathy and warmth (Cornelius-White, 2007). Learner-centred education is influenced by client-centred therapy founded by Carl Rogers who claimed that positive teacher-student relationships are necessary for effective learning

(Cornelius-White, 2007). Rogers (1979) argued that in order to create a good learning environment, teachers need to foster three elements in their relationships with students: genuineness, caring, and empathic understanding. Students in classrooms with these teacher attitudes will develop more self-confidence and 'learn more significantly' (Rogers, 1979, p. 7).

Similarly, in literature exploring qualities of good, ideal, talented, or expert teachers, such teachers are described as caring (Arnon and Reichel, 2009; Gentry et al., 2011; Hattie, 2003; Uitto, 2011). For example, two studies conducted in Israel (Arnon and Reichel, 2009) and Finland (Uitto, 2012) asked the general public what a good teacher is. The Israeli study identified desirable teacher qualities as being empathetic, attentive, caring, and authoritative (Arnon and Reichel, 2009). The Finnish study analysed 141 people's written memories of their teachers in which good teachers were described as showing an active interest in students' thoughts and interests; making students feel that they were seen and appreciated (Uitto, 2012, 2011). Further, Gentry, Steenbergen-Hu, and Choi (2011) observed and interviewed 17 American teachers, identified as exemplary by their students, to establish what these teachers had in common. The study found four themes describing these teachers: they took a personal interest in their students and knew them well; they had high expectations; they made teaching meaningful and relevant; and they enjoyed being teachers (Gentry et al., 2011). Similarly, in Nurmi's (2012) meta-analysis of 19 studies, good teachers were seen as giving praise and having high expectations of their students.

Another quality that is highly valued by students is that teachers use humour to make learning more fun (Arnon and Reichel, 2007; Kington et al., 2012; Muller et al., 1999). Humour serves a social function, and can reduce individuals' stress levels (Stuart and Rosenfeld, 1994). Therefore, classroom relationships are strengthened when teachers and students laugh together (Cholewa et al., 2012; Uitto, 2012), for example, when funny stories or jokes are told (Gentry et al., 2011; Knoell, 2012). Likewise, teachers smiling at students is essential for students feeling that their teacher likes them (Cholewa et al., 2012; Newberry, 2010; Spilt et al., 2010; Worthy and Patterson, 2001). In addition to smiling, other types of body language mentioned in research are tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions, and frequent eye contact with students (Cholewa et al.,

2012; Daniels et al., 2001; Knoell, 2012; Pantić and Wubbels, 2012). Such positive use of humour and body language, making students feel that the teacher likes them, increases students' feelings of self-esteem and motivation (Crossman, 2007; Reschly et al., 2008).

However, both humour and body language can be used in a hostile way (Stuart and Rosenfeld, 1994; Uitto, 2011). Research demonstrates that memories of being laughed at and humiliated by teachers can be strong (Uitto, 2011). Students can be painfully aware of how teachers feel about them, which again affects their motivation, as demonstrated by an American first-grader in Daniels, Kalkman, and McCombs (2001) who had observed that 'she smiles at other kids, but not at me' (p. 268). Thus, an important foundational skill of teachers is emotional self-regulation; that teachers are calm and avoid showing anger and frustration (Aultman et al., 2009; Harvey et al., 2012). In particular, it is important that teachers treat all students fairly and avoid criticism, blame and ridicule (Cholewa et al., 2012; Knoell, 2012; Pomeroy, 1999; Sander et al., 2010). Instead, teachers should strive to have a non-judgemental and forgiving attitude (Arnon and Reichel, 2007; Cooper, 2010). In other words, teachers' socio-emotional competence, including being able to read students' emotions, is a prerequisite for good teacher-student relationships (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009).

The characteristics of good teachers described so far: being empathetic, warm, caring, and fair, can be interpreted as an ethics of care approach to teaching. Ethics of care theory posits that it is part of teachers' duty to be caring (Noddings, 1995). Noddings distinguishes between two types of caring. First, teachers can display ethical caring performed out of duty, or teachers can exhibit natural caring, which is a natural feeling of liking of a student (Newberry, 2010). Noddings' (1995) argument is that by practicing ethical caring, teachers can go through a process leading to feelings of natural caring for students. In other words, teachers' attitudes to students and the quality of teacher-student relationships can change as teachers develop empathy for students through getting to know them better (Cooper, 2010). Two in-depth American case studies by Worthy and Patterson (2001) and Newberry (2010) illustrate such a process. The studies reveal that moving from a level of ethical caring to natural

caring is made possible by the teacher actively taking the role of a reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983) of own behaviours and student responses.

However, developing good relations with students requires hard work on behalf of the teacher (Hattie, 2009), because teaching is emotional work (Chang, 2009). It is especially challenging when working with children who are either seeking conflict or avoiding contact, as outlined above. Noddings (2013) explains that for a good teacher-student relationship to develop there must be a response from the student to the teacher in some way, for example by 'asking questions', 'showing effort', or simply 'cooperating' (p. 68). Although asymmetrical, the teacher-student relationship is bidirectional and the two parties in the relationship both need to feel respected by each other (Noddings, 1992). Newberry (2008, 2006) theorises that teachers can feel rejected by students who avoid contact with them, and therefore it takes emotional work to overcome this rejection and make contact with unresponsive students. It can also be difficult for teachers to know how to respond to avoidant students (O'Connor and McCartney, 2006).

However, as an adult in a more powerful position, the teacher is the main driver of the quality of the relationship (Davis, 2003). This highlights the importance of awareness-raising of teacher interpersonal behaviour in teacher education programmes. One tool that might help increase awareness of teacher behaviour is the Model of Interpersonal Teacher Behaviour (MITB), which was first developed in the Netherlands in the 1980s (Wubbels, 2013). The model categorises eight types of teacher behaviour: steering, friendly, understanding, accommodating, uncertain, dissatisfied, reprimanding, and enforcing (Wubbels, 2013). Research stretching over a period of three decades using the MITB model shows that teachers who foster high learning achievement among students have a combination of steering (high in control) and friendly (high in closeness) characteristics (Wubbels, 2013). Such teachers are supportive of students, but at the same time take control of the classroom (Wubbels and Brekelmans, 2005), reflecting an ethics of care approach towards students (Noddings, 1995).

Effectiveness research has also examined the influence of teacher experience on teacher-student relationships (Roorda et al., 2011). Roorda et al (2011), although not Cornelius-White (2007), established a significant effect between

positive teacher-student relationships and achievement among teachers with more years of teaching experience. In contrast, other studies have shown that teachers with more experience form lower quality relationships with students (Mashburn et al., 2006; Stuhlman and Pianta, 2002); possibly an indication of teacher burnout (Day et al., 2005). It appears teachers become gradually more effective during their initial five years of teaching, but then the effect on student learning levels off (Boonen et al., 2014). Towards the end of a teacher's career, typically after 20 years in the profession, increased distance in relationships occurs, probably because of an increasing age gap, with older teachers feeling less connected with students (Brekelmans et al., 2005).

Critics of an emphasis on emotions and caring relationships in schools see a danger of teachers being taken down a path of social work and therapy (Ecclestone et al., 2005; Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009). For example, Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) argue that a preoccupation with affective education outcomes offers a 'diminished view of the human subject' as emotionally fragile and lacking in self-esteem (p. 372). They also argue that it undermines the cognitive learning goal of traditional education by no longer considering personal and social outcomes as simply by-products of schooling (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009). However, in view of the theoretical and empirical evidence for the importance of good teacher-student relationships for both cognitive and behavioural outcomes, outlined in this chapter, an over-focus on academic performance at the cost of emotional well-being can be just as negative for students (Fielding, 2007; Hargreaves and Preece, 2014).

Relational strategies

This section explores how caring teacher characteristics can be implemented in practice as relational strategies. In other words, how teachers can show care in the classroom. I have adopted the term 'relational strategies' used in Jones and Deutsch (2011) and Pantić and Wubbels' (2012) work to describe how teachers develop good teacher-student relationships. Jones and Deutsch (2011) define relational strategies as 'specific actions' an adult makes to build relationships with young people to motivate them (p. 1390). A strategy is 'a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim' (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015c). Thus, for the purpose of this study, teacher relational strategies refer to planned actions that teachers take to improve their relational connections with students.

Teachers' long-term aim would be to motivate students to cooperate better in the learning process.

Talking with students and getting to know them

Students describe teachers they value as teachers who know them, who talk and explain, and who listen (Pomeroy, 1999). A starting point for developing good relationships with students is getting to know them in terms of their academic and personal needs, as well as their interests and talents (Arnon and Reichel, 2009; Aultman et al., 2009; Cholewa et al., 2012; Gentry et al., 2011; Harvey et al., 2012; Isenbarger and Zembylas, 2006; Muller et al., 1999; Nijveldt et al., 2005; Smith and Strahan, 2004; Uitto, 2012; Worthy and Patterson, 2001), through talking with them.

Getting to know students is important in enabling teachers to move beyond labelling students by superficial characteristics. According to labelling theory, labels can affect learning achievement by students performing to teachers' expectations, whether negative or positive (Ercole, 2009). For example, Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) well-known study *Pygmalion in the Classroom* demonstrated that teachers' expectations of their students' capacities, whether real or not, determine teachers' interactions with students. As a result, students for whom teachers had high expectations performed better, like a self-fulfilling prophecy (Jong et al., 2012). Equally, if teachers have misleading and low expectations, the danger is that this will negatively affect students' learning (Hattie, 2009), especially if students internalise negative labelling (Ercole, 2009). This is because students who are negatively labelled tend to feel that they do not belong at school, and respond by disengaging further (Ercole, 2009). Labelling theory is supported by syntheses of effectiveness research showing a strong influence of teacher expectations and labelling of students on academic performance (Hattie, 2009). The evidence indicates that the less teachers know about their students, the stronger the effect of labelling and stereotyping on learning (Hattie, 2009).

This explains why good teacher-student relationships are a protective factor for students at-risk of school failure (Roorda et al., 2011), such as students with behaviour problems or learning difficulties. For example, if teachers know about the difficult home situation of a disruptive student, they are more likely to develop empathy for the student (O'Connor and McCartney, 2006).

Consequently, teachers become more patient and 'frustration tolerant' (Driscoll and Pianta, 2010, p. 38), and are less likely to refer such students to special education arrangements (Pianta et al., 1995). However, getting to know students and developing empathy for them is a process (Cooper, 2010), and finding time to talk with students individually can be challenging with large class sizes, although synthesised research has only detected a small effect of class size on learning achievement (Hattie, 2009)[1]. On the other hand, other studies have found increased teacher-student interactions in smaller sized classes, positively influencing student engagement (Blatchford et al., 2011; Hollo and Hirn, 2015).

While initiating interaction with students, it is important for teachers to be aware of the distinction between one-way communication and two-way communication; or between talking-to versus talking-with students (Tauber, 2007). In other words, teachers need to practice active listening when talking with students (Cholewa et al., 2012; Pantić and Wubbels, 2012; Pomeroy, 1999), because students equate being listened to as a sign of respect (Johnson, 2008). In Davis' (2006) study on the contexts of relationship quality between American middle-school students and teachers, students described talking-with as a 'kind of informal, personal and meaningful form of talk' (p. 214). When teachers talked-to them on the other hand, they felt that this was more impersonal and that they were treated as 'just another member of the class' (p. 214). Students interpreted the latter as 'damaging to the teacher-student relationship because it made them feel like the teacher did not know them or understand their needs' (p. 214).

Thus, the type of talk teachers engages students in, which can be either academic or personal/non-academic (Fredricks et al., 2004; Newberry, 2008), makes a difference. For example, Gee (2010) observed that British teachers and students on a residential fieldtrip benefitted from opportunities to participate in 'off-task discussions' and 'more informal interactions', including 'sharing a joke' (pp.129-130). Engaging with teachers in non-academic conversations can lead to closer relationships (Newberry, 2008). Therefore, students who do not get to engage in personal, informal talk with teachers are likely to be

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[1] One explanation for this small effect might be that teachers use the same teaching methods in both large and small classes (Hattie, 2009).

disadvantaged. For instance, Hargreaves (2014) observed that a British Grade 5 teacher never used humour with her low-achieving students. This might be because teachers tend to focus on being more on-task in interactions with students who struggle academically, as they worry about the students' progress (Hargreaves, 2014; Newberry, 2008).

Further, teachers are to some extent in a position to use space in engineering encounters and interactions in the teaching environment (Gee, 2015, 2010). However, teacher-student relationships can also evolve as a result of encounters outside of the formal school setting (Gee, 2010; Gentry et al., 2011; Uitto, 2012). Experiencing teachers in less formal situations can help humanise teachers for students (Gee, 2012, 2010; Uitto, 2012). This might be because teachers are more likely to share personal information about themselves in informal settings (Gee, 2010). Yet, while some teachers actively use sharing of personal information as a strategy for connecting with students, other teachers feel that too much self-disclosure can compromise their professional role as a teacher, and the necessary level of authority needed to keep students' respect (Aultman et al., 2009). A dilemma for teachers is how much information to share about their own personal lives (Uitto, 2012).

Finally, teachers can relate to students through engaging with their cultural background or their generation's popular culture. Research demonstrates that teachers who are able to make such cultural connections with their students reduce the relational distance between themselves and the students (Jones and Deutsch, 2011). The African-American teacher studied in Cholewa, Amatea, West-Olatunji, and Wright (2012) is an example of a culturally responsive teacher, who used instructional methods that recognised the communication styles and cultural identities of students, such as the use of dance and storytelling (Cholewa et al., 2012).

Managing student behaviour

Scarlett et al (2009) claim the increased focus in literature on teacher-student relationships during the last decades is a reaction to an obedience-oriented approach to school discipline dominant in the 1960s and 1970s. As outlined previously, student misbehaviour is a common source of teacher stress and burnout (Spilt et al., 2011). Similarly, interviews with students expelled from school reveal that relationships with teachers were a prominent feature of these

students' school experience (Pomeroy, 1999). Some theorists argue that developing good relationships with students is the best approach to reducing problem behaviour (Driscoll and Pianta, 2010): 'If you solve the relationship problem, you solve the misbehaviour problem' (Tauber, 2007, p. 199). Indeed, evidence suggests that students' 'lack of belongingness is a primary cause' of behaviour problems (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p. 511), consistent with the need for belonging outlined in self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000). For example, Marzano, Marzano, and Pickering (2003, cited in Jennings and Greenberg, 2009) found that teachers with good relationships with students had 31 percent less misbehaviour during one school year than teachers with lower quality relationships.

Ultimately, classroom management is about power: who has it, the teacher or students, or both? Relationship-based discipline to some extent opens up the power relationship between teachers and students (Macleod et al., 2012). Tauber's (2007) book on theories and models of discipline in education over the last 40 years presents Wolfgang and Glickman's (Tauber, 2007) theoretical framework of interventionist, non-interventionist, and interactionalist approaches as a way of seeing discipline according to ideas of who should have power in the classroom. The traditional obedience-oriented approach that Scarlett et al (2009) refer to is an interventionist idea of discipline: the teacher has all power and control of the classroom. The opposite idea is a non-interventionist teacher behaviour in which students are given high levels of freedom with the teacher functioning as a facilitator. Between these two extremes is an interactionalist approach in which the teacher and students share responsibility for managing conflicts (Tauber, 2007).

Tauber (2007) says that teachers' choice of discipline approach is an expression of whether teachers believe in democracy in the classroom. Non-interventionist and interactionalist teachers believe students should have some level of influence on decision-making. This reflects the argument of self-determination theory that students have a need for autonomy (Deci and Ryan, 2000). According to this theory, providing students with choice and responsibilities increase motivation, while interventionist strategies such as threats of punishment or rewards undermine feelings of autonomy and motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Lewis, Romi, Katz, and Qui (2008) describe

three similar approaches to classroom discipline as: 1) rewards and punishments, 2) group participation and decision-making, and 3) student self-regulation.

Relevant to teacher relational strategies, Tauber (2007) outlines a second framework, French and Raven's social bases of power that is useful in understanding teachers' effort to manage student behaviour. This framework presents the idea of five different types of power (Figure 2.1): coercive, legitimate, reward, expert, or referent power. Coercive power would be used by an interventionist teacher. Students will 'allow the teacher to dictate their behaviour' because they 'perceive the teacher to be in a position to give punishment' (Tauber, 2007, p. 41). Thus, this authoritarian approach controls student behaviour through fear (Affouneh and Hargreaves, 2015), which hinders students' ability to concentrate on learning (Spilt et al., 2012a). Further, legitimate power is when students do as the teacher says because they respect the position of the teacher (Tauber, 2007). With reward power, the teacher can influence student behaviour by giving or withholding rewards. Expert power is when students respect the teacher because of his or her professional expertise (Tauber, 2007).

Figure 2.1: French and Raven's social bases of power

| Coercive Power | Legitimate Power | Reward Power | Expert Power | Referent Power |
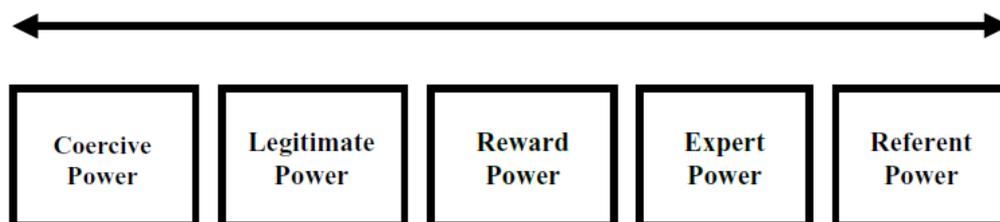
Source: Tauber 2007, p. 40

Finally, a non-interventionist or interactionalist teacher builds referent power through communication and showing care for students. Students cooperate with this teacher because they like and identify with the teacher (Tauber, 2007). The concept of referent power can also be referred to as 'relationship power' (Lewis et al., 2005, p. 739). When a teacher has referent or relationship power, it can be said that he or she has personal authority in that students' cooperation is based on the personal qualities of the teacher (Macleod et al., 2012). Thus, approaches to discipline which recognise the importance of good teacher-

student relationships, are likely to be based on interactionalist or non-interventionist behaviour strategies emphasising communication. This perspective sees good schools as places where communication is practiced by people 'talking with each other' as opposed to preaching 'to each other' (Tauber, 2007, p. 175). Thus, two-way communication between teacher and students is an important foundation for mutual respect (Tauber, 2007).

However, basing discipline on developing good relationships with students does not mean that teachers should not set and enforce rules. Students report that they want caring and friendly teachers, but also teachers who are strict; providing clear rules and routines (Muller et al., 1999; Newberry, 2010; Pomeroy, 1999). However, if enforced discipline is not fair in the eyes of the students, the authority of the teacher crumbles (Pomeroy, 1999; Uitto, 2011). Thus, finding a balance between care and control in the classroom is a recurrent dilemma for teachers (Aultman et al., 2009; Harvey et al., 2012; Jong et al., 2012). Getting to know students better can enable teachers to find such a balance by preventing and managing student behaviour (Flores and Day, 2006) better through the use of relationship power.

Lewis, Romi, and Roache (2012) list relationship-based discipline techniques that have been found effective as having conversations with misbehaving students; recognising students' appropriate behaviour; and involving students in decision-making. Good teacher-student relationships, in which the teacher and students know each other well, are likely to lead to students agreeing with the teacher's rules of behaviour because they have internalised the teacher's values about schoolwork (Martin and Dowson, 2009). Coercive discipline strategies on the other hand, can cause harm by disrupting students from their work, not promoting responsibility in students for their behaviour, and increasing angry student responses (Lewis et al., 2008), as well as teacher stress (Clunies-Ross et al., 2008). The difference between relationship-based and coercive discipline strategies can be categorised as proactive versus reactive strategies (Clunies-Ross et al., 2008; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009).

Proactive classroom management strategies aim to prevent disruptive behaviour from occurring, mainly by helping students with behaviour problems self-regulate their emotions (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009; Pomeroy, 1999). In Pomeroy (1999), a student described how a teacher could read his mood and

help him control his anger through one-on-one conversations and adapted working tasks. Such a proactive approach requires that teachers know students well (Pomeroy, 1999). A reactive approach that can be said to be a long-term proactive strategy is restorative discipline; where the offender and others involved in an incident come together to talk about how they were affected by it (Gregory et al., 2014). Together they decide how the harm can be repaired and relationships restored (Gregory et al., 2014). A key element to the success of this approach is that all parties to the incident get to present their side of the story, which contributes to students', including the perpetrator's, sense of fairness (Pomeroy, 1999). Gregory, Clawson, Davis, and Gerewitz (2014) found that use of a restorative practice approach to problem behaviour was linked to higher quality teacher-student relationships.

Conceptual framework

Figure 2.2 displays a model of the different areas of research on teacher-student relationships addressed in this study. This chapter has outlined existing knowledge about the importance of good teacher-student relationships for student motivation and learning achievement, in contrast to poor relationships which place an extra burden on students who are already struggling. Chapter 4 and 5 add to a greater understanding of student characteristics influencing relations with teachers. Chapter 6 contributes towards the research gap on teacher relational strategies; answering the overall research question of this study. The next chapter outlines the methodology and design of my study.

Figure 2.2: Framework for studying teacher relational strategies
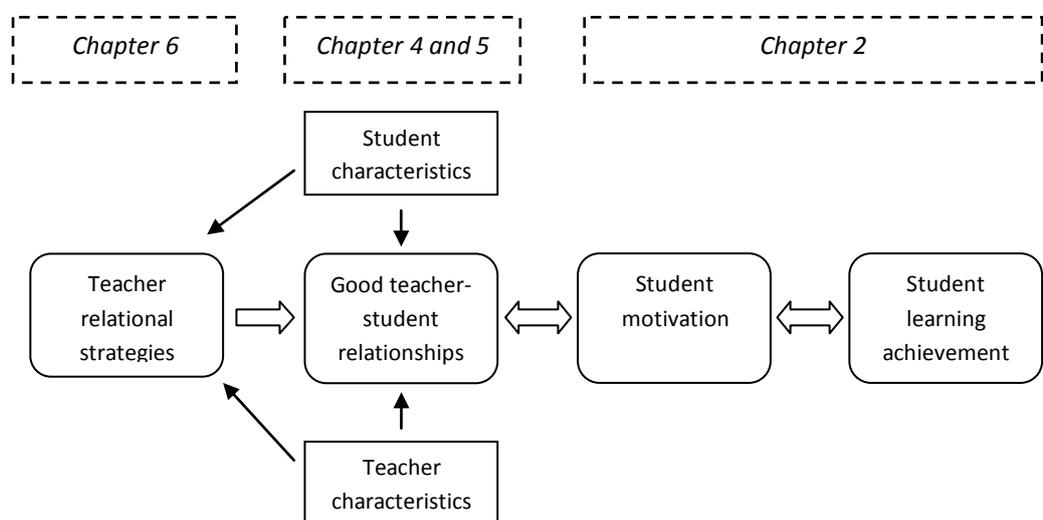
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY DESIGN

As a pragmatic researcher (Robson, 2011), I chose methodology for this study based on the approach I believed would work best for gaining insight into my research problem: how teachers develop good teacher-student relationships. Thus, I first considered the nature of teacher-student relationships and what this meant for how I could research this topic. Reviewed literature described relationships as emotional connections between people. Consequently, a teacher-student relationship is a phenomenon felt by the respective teacher and student. Similarly, teacher relational strategies are shaped by teachers' experiences of what works with different students in different contexts. Therefore, for the purpose of studying a phenomenon involving teachers' personal emotions and experiences, I concluded that knowledge about their relational strategies would best be accessed through listening to teacher accounts. In the following sections I explain my methodological decisions, methods used, and the process of data collection and analysis.

Case study approach

The study was exploratory (Gray, 2009) in that I sought to discover how teachers develop good relationships with students. Gray (2009) claims that an exploratory study is useful 'when not enough is known about a phenomenon' (p. 35), which is the current situation of knowledge about teacher relational strategies (Lewis et al., 2012; Newberry, 2010; Wu et al., 2010). I wanted to gain insight into the complexity of teacher-student relationships, including teachers' thinking (Day, 1991) behind their relational strategies. To achieve this, a case study approach would allow me inside the 'lived experiences of the research participants' (Newberry, 2008, p. 44), to gather thick description of the phenomenon of how specific relationships are formed and maintained in real-time (Yin, 2009). In other words, I expected the case study approach could help me generate data creating 'a picture of a case for others to see' (Stake, 2006, p. 3).

Further, my research question: How can teachers develop good teacher-student relationships? - can be categorised as a process question (Maxwell, 2005); asking about how good teacher-student relationships are formed over time.

Thus, I added a longitudinal dimension (Robson, 2011; Yin, 2009); interviewing teachers multiple times over a six-month period, to capture the dynamic nature of relationships. The longitudinal aspect of the study allowed teachers to engage in a 'cyclical reflection process' (Larrivee, 2000, p. 304) on real-time teacher-student relationships. This enriched the data collection by capturing information about the teachers' re-interpretation of some relationships, and whether their relational strategies were successful.

Following from my pragmatic approach to social research, which endorses an instrumental use of multiple theories (Robson, 2011), a social constructivist perspective helps explain my decision to use a multiple-case study (Yin, 2009); including several teacher accounts. Consistent with this view, as described by Heylighten (1993), I regard knowledge useful to solving problems in society to be found in common experiences between people. In other words, knowledge is a social construction of reality (Mertens, 2005, cited in Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006) that relies on the perspectives of multiple research participants (Creswell, 2003, cited in Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). Thus, I consider common themes of relational strategies across the case studies to offer useful guidance to teachers about how good relations with students can be developed. My sampling strategy is explained below.

Selection of sample

As noted in Chapter 2, literature highlights the bidirectional nature of teacher-student relationships. I contemplated collecting data from students to explore whether their perspective corresponded with their teachers'. I decided that this was outside the scope of my study since my research focus was on the perceptions of teachers and the rationale behind their relational strategies. Thus, I decided to draw the 'boundaries of my case' (Punch, 2009, p. 120) around teachers' lived experiences of teacher-student relationships; excluding students' perspective on the same relationships.

My rationale for including only teachers' perspective was twofold. First, I approached this study as a practitioner; with the intention of generating knowledge that can be used to improve student learning achievement through improving the quality of teacher-student relationships. Even though literature indicates that student characteristics influence relationship quality more than teacher characteristics (Koles et al., 2013), from a practical viewpoint, it is more

efficient to improve teacher-student relationships through changing one teacher instead of a whole class of students. Second, despite the bidirectional nature of teacher-student relationships, it is important to remember that they are also asymmetrical (Noddings, 1992), with the teacher being an adult in a more powerful position (Davis, 2003). Thus, I see the teacher as the main driver of the relationship who must take responsibility for its quality.

I chose a sample of six teachers, because this number allowed detailed case studies to be included within the length of this report, whilst still providing sufficiently rich data for cross-case analysis. This is consistent with Stake's (2006) view that 'the benefits of a multi-case study will be limited if fewer than say four cases are chosen or more than 10' (p. 22). Further, I considered the sample size appropriate for the explorative, qualitative purpose of the study, in contrast to a study that aims for statistical generalisation and therefore requires a large sample (Robson, 2011; Yin, 2009). Indeed, the advantage of using a case study approach is the depth of information collected from a small number of cases, as opposed to statistical methods that generate a breadth of data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

My sampling of research participants was purposive in that I sought a specific type of teacher profile that I believed would give me 'the best opportunities to learn' (Stake, 2006, p. 25) about teacher relational strategies. Robson (2011) defines purposive sampling as selecting a sample 'which enables the researcher to satisfy their specific needs in a project' (p. 275). I purposively wanted to recruit teachers of students with behavioural and learning problems. Based on my conversations with teachers about their teacher-student relationships and relational strategies during my previous research (Fosen, 2013a, 2013b), I had formed the view that the best opportunity to access knowledge about effective relational strategies would be to study teachers who had been forced to reflect on how they form good teacher-student relationships through working with challenging students. Importantly, research literature shows that students with behaviour or other problems are more likely to have poor relationships with teachers, while they at the same time benefit most from supportive relationships (Cornelius-White, 2007; Roorda et al., 2011).

The recruitment of research participants happened by convenience of access (Punch, 2009) to teachers of whom I was aware through work connections as a

former teacher in Norway and as an education consultant in Australia. I first contacted three teachers in Australia who were teaching special classes for disengaged students at secondary school level. These teachers' contexts represented what Yin (2009) refers to as extreme or unique cases, because on a daily basis they dealt with challenging student behaviours most teachers would find difficult. The three cases replicated each other in exploring teacher relational strategies in the context of disengaged adolescents, but at the same time, each context added different student characteristics to the study.

Mindy, the teacher in the first case study was 39 years old, and had been teaching for 10 years. She taught an engagement class for disengaged students who were otherwise academically high-achieving in an inner-city school. The class encouraged students to identify a personal interest that they developed into a research project.

Christine was also 39 years old and had been teaching for 15 years. Her teaching context was similar to Mindy's, except her students were low-achieving school-leavers participating in Christine's class in an effort to return to the mainstream school system. Most of these students were Aboriginal-Australians from a low socio-economic background. Some of them were repeat juvenile offenders.

While Mindy was teaching urban Aboriginal students, *Paul* taught a re-engagement class for disengaged Aboriginal students in an isolated rural area of Australia. He was in his late 30s like Mindy and Christine, but he had just started a new career in teaching, and therefore represents the perspective of an inexperienced teacher.

In contrast to the three extreme/unique cases, I wanted to add three typical (Yin, 2009) cases of teachers working in more representative school situations, without a majority of students with behavioural issues. I invited two teachers in Norway to participate in the study, because I thought that adding a second country context would contribute to a variety of findings in the cross-analysis of cases. Since I am a product of Norwegian society and education system, including having been a teacher in Norway, I had an advantage in understanding this teaching context.

Idun was a secondary teacher, the same age as the three Australian secondary teachers, and she had been a teacher for almost 10 years. I expected Idun to represent a typical case of mainstream schooling, but during my first interview with her, I realised that she represented another extreme case. Although she mainly taught mainstream classes, Idun also taught Social Science classes for vocational students. These classes tended to have a high percentage of students with learning difficulties and challenging behaviour, as well as a lack of motivation for studying non-vocational subjects.

The fifth teacher, *Agnes*, was also Norwegian. She represents a typical case of a teacher in a small mainstream school in a rural area. Unlike the first four teachers, she worked at primary school level. I wanted to compare the four cases of secondary school teachers with a teacher working with primary school children, because literature indicated that the type and quality of relationships that older and younger students develop with teachers differ (Scarlett et al., 2009). Agnes was also older and more experienced than the other teachers, having taught for 20 years.

Finally, I decided to add a second primary teacher for comparison with Agnes. I knew of an Arabic language teacher, *Hanah*, at a large private school in a sub-urban area of Australia. I found her profile interesting compared with the other five teachers who were all teaching relatively small class sizes. Hanah's case can be classified as a typical case because she was not teaching students with challenging behaviours, but she also represents a different cultural perspective by working in a large Islamic private school.

In summary, the six cases replicate each other in some respects, while they complement each other in exploring teacher responses to different student characteristics in different teaching contexts. Together, the cases comprise a stronger and richer case study for cross-analysis of findings on teacher relational strategies (Yin, 2009). The cases include contexts of both primary and secondary school settings; special versus mainstream classes; and a mix of urban, rural, and sub-urban schools. The teachers varied in experience from novice to 20 years in the profession. Their classes ranged from five to 30 students. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the main characteristics of the six research participants. The names are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the teachers and their students.

Table 3.1: Characteristics of research participants

	Mindy	**Christine**	**Paul**	**Idun**	**Agnes**	**Hanah**
Gender	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female	Female
Age	39	39	38	37	50	38
Country	Australia	Australia	Australia	Norway	Norway	Australia
Teaching level	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Primary	Primary
Type school	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Private
No years teaching experience	10	15	0-1	9	20	6
Subject/s taught in class	Independent project work	Arts, project work	Science, PE, Geography	Social Science	Social Science, Languages, Arts, PE	Arabic language

There are also cultural differences across the contexts. The national cultures of Australia and Norway are both high in individualism (the level of prioritisation of the interests of the individual versus a group), and low in power distance (the level of individuals' acceptance of inequality in power), although Australia is higher in individualism than Norway (Hofstede, 1986). This can be said to be reflected in the Norwegian egalitarian system of state schools, while Australia has a large percentage of students enrolled in private school education. Translated to behaviour in the classroom, Hofstede (1986) argues that students from individualist societies, who are also typically low in power distance, are less shy to speak in class.

In contrast, Hanah has an Arab country background, like most of her students, which is a collectivist culture high in power distance. Her Pakistani students' culture is even lower in individualism than Arab cultures (Hofstede, 1986). However, the largest cultural difference is between Christine and Paul's European-Australian background and their Aboriginal-Australian students. These secondary teachers typically carry values high in individualism and low in power distance. Aboriginal culture on the other hand, is collectivist with members conforming and identifying with their traditional community (Fogarty and White, 1994), but also low in power distance (Hofstede, 1986) with Aboriginal students likely to act with a high degree of autonomy (Malin, 1990).

This is a rare combination, because collectivist cultures are most often high in power distance (Hofstede, 1986).

Methods

I used a semi-structured interview format as the overall data collection method, seeking answers to my research question through conversations with research participants. As part of the interviews, I used three standardised tools to help generate a rich contextual description of each case. The study is qualitative with findings reported as individual case studies, with some quantitative data used to expand upon the qualitative data to deepen the cross-case analysis (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006).

Semi-structured interview

Corresponding with my view that knowledge about teacher relational strategies involves understanding teachers' emotions and thoughts, I sought this insight through interviews with teachers; listening to them about how they interpreted their realities. A semi-structured interview format allowed me to explore a list of key questions I wanted to discuss with the teachers, whilst being flexible to be guided by their responses (Robson, 2011). I interviewed each teacher three times over a period of six months, so that I could study relational strategies reported at different points in time (Yin, 2009). Thus, the sequence of interviews provided several opportunities to document how teachers' relationships with students evolved, and teachers' strategies for connecting with students. Existing longitudinal studies on teacher-student relationships vary by examining data over different time periods, for example, over several years (e.g. Hamre and Pianta, 2001), one year (e.g. Newberry, 2008), or six months (e.g. Gest et al., 2005). I chose to interview teachers over six months to limit the likelihood that teachers would forget their reflections between interviews. I also wanted to reduce the risk of sample attrition (Robson, 2011) of students, which was likely in the classes with disengaged students.

Interviews were conducted once per term at a time convenient for participants. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, except for the second interviews with Paul, Idun, and Agnes, which were conducted over the phone because we were unable to meet in person at

that appropriate time. Interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed for analysis.

The initial interview consisted of three components: 1) information about the teacher's background and understanding of a good teacher-student relationship; 2) discussion about student characteristics affecting relationship quality and the teacher's choice of relational strategies; and 3) identification of the teacher's interpersonal behaviour. The first component included asking each teacher to briefly talk about their teaching career, and to explain how they defined a good teacher-student relationship. The purpose of gathering this information was to provide contextual knowledge for understanding teachers' thinking behind their relational strategies. The teachers' reflection on what a good teacher-student relationship meant to them served as an introduction to discuss their relational strategies.

The second component was a practical exercise in which teachers mapped their perceived level of closeness in relationships with students in a current, self-identified class. The tool used for this exercise was an adaptation of the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) scale by Aron, Aron, and Smollan (1992), presented in Figure 3.1, which I refer to as the IOS map (Appendix C). I used the IOS map as a visual reflection tool through which teachers could see differences in level of closeness to individual students in their class. This visualisation of differences in relationship quality prompted a discussion about patterns in student characteristics that teachers felt explained the differences. Building on this reflection, I then asked the teachers to talk about their relational strategies. As the last component of the interview, I administered the Questionnaire of Teacher Interaction (QTI) (Appendix B) (Wubbels and Brekelmans, 2005). I used the QTI responses to generate the teachers' profile in the Model of Interpersonal Teacher Behaviour (MITB) (Figure 3.2). The background and procedures of the IOS map and the QTI/MITB are discussed below.

I considered including classroom observation to complement interview data. Classroom observation could have explored whether teachers' perceptions of their relational strategies were consistent with what they actually did in the classroom. However, as already noted, the focus of this study was seeking to understand teacher-student relationships from the perspective of teachers. In

addition, I believed that classroom observation would not have captured sufficient relevant information in terms of relational strategies. For example, the literature review and my pilot studies (Fosen, 2013a, 2013b) indicated that teacher-student relationships often develop during private conversations between teacher and student, sometimes outside the classroom or school (Gee, 2010; Gentry et al., 2011; Uitto, 2012).

I also did not include observation or data collection from students due to ethical concerns. A key consideration was that many of the students taught by my selected teachers were vulnerable (Robson, 2011). For example, the Aboriginal students attending Paul and Christine's re-engagement classes were distrustful of new people entering their classroom, and my presence may have caused disruption to their learning and possibly their attendance levels. Additionally, my presence in the classroom may have affected student behaviour, a phenomenon referred to as reactivity (Robson, 2011), and thus possibly affecting data reliability.

Inclusion of Other in the Self scale

A problem I encountered during my pilot studies of interviewing teachers about their teacher-student relationships (Fosen, 2013a, 2013b), was that teachers found it difficult to talk about their relational strategies without being given examples. I saw the risk of potentially leading teacher responses by presenting them with examples of relational strategies I had read about in my literature review. Thus, my data could become a search for data confirmatory of existing research; to 'substantiate a preconceived position' (Yin, 2009, p. 72). To safeguard against such bias, I listened to the advice of teachers in my previous research (Fosen, 2013b), who stressed that effective discussion about relational strategies need to engage teachers in practical reflective exercises on the quality of relationships with current students. Similarly, Mason (2002) states that: 'If you are interested in a social process which operates situationally you need to ask situational rather than abstract questions' (p. 62).

Consequently, I wanted a tool that could engage teachers in conversation about the quality of relationships to students in one class they were currently teaching; generating rich description of teacher strategies in the teachers' own words. I also wanted to explore differences in the quality of relationships enjoyed by students in relation to other students in the same classroom. As noted in

Chapter 1, despite 30 years of research showing that teachers treat students differently, often unintentionally, literature has not explained why (Newberry, 2010). In this study, I use the term 'relational equity/inequity' to describe how students in one classroom enjoy different levels of closeness in their relationship with the same teacher. Similarly, I use the term 'equity lens' referring to a focus on fairness of opportunity given to students in one classroom to form a personal relationship with the teacher.

While searching for a tool that could help me generate a rich discussion with teachers about their teacher-student relationships, including relational equity, I came across Newberry's (2008, 2006) adaption of the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) scale as a reflective tool. The IOS scale was originally created by Aron et al (1992) to visually represent perceived closeness in relationships. The scale is a single-item pictorial measure of a person's sense of connectedness with another person (Aron et al., 1992), consisting of seven pairs of circles overlapping to various degrees as illustrated in Figure 3.1. Research participants select the pair of circles that best describes their relationship depending on how close or distant the circles are (Aron et al., 1992). Studies have used the IOS scale to explore diverse types of personal relationships successfully, including cross-culturally (Simpson and Campbell, 2013). The validity and reliability of the scale has been established in multiple studies (Aron et al., 1992).

Figure 3.1: The Inclusion of Other in the Self tool
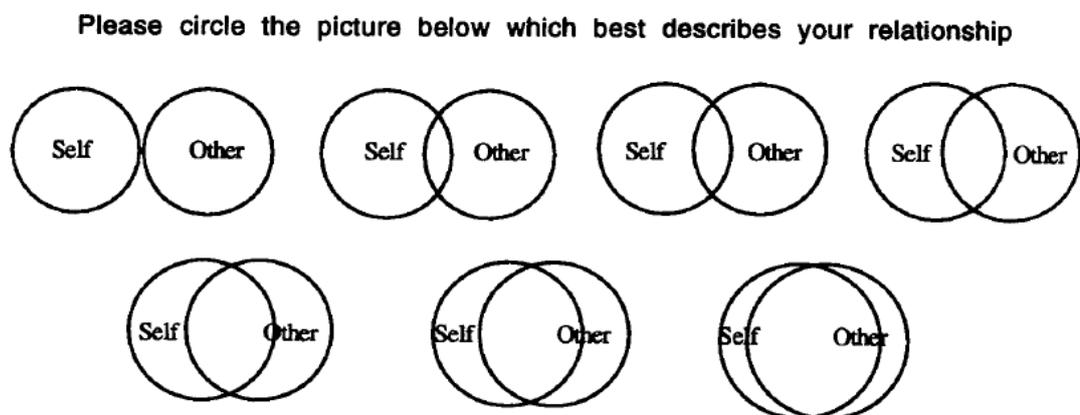
Source: Aron et al, 1992

Instead of using Aron et al's (1992) static form of the scale, with a set choice of seven pairs of circles, Newberry (2008, 2006) gave the teacher two

independent paper circles with instructions to place them on a line representing the teacher's perceived closeness in a relationship with a student. After the teacher rated all the teacher-student relationships in her class, Newberry (2008) spread the individual student ratings out in front of the teacher, grouping students 'in order of circle distance' (p. 60). In this way, the teacher was given a visual overview of differences in closeness to students in relation to each other, enabling the teacher to better reflect on reasons of relational inequity in her classroom.

In my adaptation of the IOS scale, I went back to using the static form of Aron et al's (1992) seven pairs of circles (Appendix A). However, I adopted Newberry's (2008) idea of forming a visual overview of relational equity in a teacher's classroom by organising the IOS-ratings of individual students on a table or floor from most distant (circle number 1) to closest (circle number 7). Next, after my first interview with teachers, I transferred the individual IOS-ratings of teacher-student relationships to a one-page table, which I refer to as the IOS map (e.g. Figure 4.1). Thus, the distinctive element of my adaptation of the IOS scale is the development of the IOS map (Appendix C), which provides teachers with a 'holistic visual display of the class' (Newberry, 2008, p. 1968).

I used the IOS map in each interview as a visual prompt for reflection (Newberry, 2008). For example, what did students rated as having a close relationship with the teacher have in common, and how did they differ from students identified as having a distant relationship with the teacher? What did the teacher feel explained why some relationships were distant and some were close? The IOS map was reviewed in the second and third interviews, with the teacher describing any change in relationships by moving the rating of relationships up or down the scale with the mark of a pen.

The strength of the IOS map was indeed the spontaneous and engaged conversations it generated between the research participant and me as the researcher. I believe the strength of the tool is apparent when compared with the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS), developed by Pianta (2001), which is currently the most widely used instrument to measure teachers' perception of teacher-student relationship quality. The STRS is a standardised questionnaire based on attachment theory that measures relationship quality along the three dimensions of conflict, closeness, and dependency, using a 5-

point Likert-scale (Pianta, 2001). I used the STRS in a pilot study (Fosen, 2013a) with two teachers. However, I found that the STRS did not allow for teachers to immediately reflect on the quality of their relationships with students, because their survey responses had to be transformed into a graph post-interview (Newberry, 2006). Thus, while the STRS measured teacher-student relationship quality, it did not generate data that contributed to explaining why teachers felt different levels of closeness to students. I could have explored this in subsequent interviews discussing STRS-generated graphs with teachers. However, during my pilot study I also found the STRS limiting by teachers only managing to fill in three STRS questionnaires in 30 minutes (Fosen, 2013a), making it impracticable to use the STRS in a study where I wanted to explore teacher-student relationships in a whole classroom.

Therefore, the strength of the IOS map is that it can be used as an instant reflective practice tool to help teachers re-capture and talk about their experience and interactions with students in the classroom; what Schön (1983) categorised as reflection-on-action. Thus, reflective practice; 'observing, analysing and reflecting on teacher performance in order to improve professional practice' (Belvis et al., 2013, p. 279), using the IOS map, can challenge teachers to re-interpret their perceptions of individual teacher-student relationships. In this way, teachers engage in a learning process corresponding with constructivist learning theory positing that knowledge is actively constructed by the learner, in this case the teacher, and not passively received (Bailey et al., 2010), such as during a teacher-training course based on lecturing.

The potential power of reflective practice is that the quality of teacher-student relationships can change simply through teachers revisiting their perceptions and emotions related to specific students (Newberry, 2013; Spilt et al., 2012c; Stuhlman and Pianta, 2002), without the behaviour of a respective student having to change first. A Dutch study (Spilt et al., 2012c) evaluating the effectiveness of a six-month relationship-based reflection programme, found that in a sample of 32 kindergarten teachers, each reflecting on their relationships with two behaviourally at-risk students, the teachers' perceptions of closeness increased in half of the relationships. Consequently, teacher reflective practice in the context of teacher-student relations becomes vital if

teacher perceptions are based on an artificial label; a stereotype of a student. For example, Phoenix's (2009) study demonstrates how one group of immigrant students in the UK were automatically labelled as inadequate learners by teachers. As noted in Chapter 2, labelling theory highlights the danger of students internalising negative labelling and low teacher expectations, leading to expectations of low learning achievement becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy (Ercole, 2009; Hattie, 2009; Jong et al., 2012).

Teachers can use the IOS map on their own, according to a constructivist approach to learning that considers learning as an individual matter (Murphy, 2011), or through a social constructivist view of learning where a person is seen to learn through interactions with others. This latter approach is advocated by Day (1999) as a more effective form of reflective practice. He argues that successful reflective practice requires a partnership of discussion with others in order for change to happen. In this study, I was the other person, the coach (Day, 1999), who asked questions and helped the teachers reflect on their teacher-student relationships.

Finally, Bibby (2009) calls for a language about the nature and quality of teacher-student relationships that can make it visible for consideration. The IOS map is a tool that gives teachers such a language – by describing perceived closeness in the teacher-student relationship along the scale of circles from 1-7. The language of the IOS map makes teachers aware of students they need to know more about to be able to move towards a feeling of natural caring for them (Noddings, 1995). However, a potential weakness of the tool is that teachers are likely to have different perceptions about how close, and subsequently where on the scale, a good relationship with a student should be. Therefore, when comparing IOS results across a sample of teachers, the researcher will to some extent be comparing 'apples and oranges'. Still, this is the case with the use of any Likert-scale seeking to measure opinions and attitudes quantitatively (Boone and Boone, 2012).

Academic Functioning scale

Literature reviewed indicated that students' level of learning achievement is not just a result of good teacher-student relationships, but it is also a student characteristic that influences how teachers feel about students (Hughes et al., 2008). I wanted to explore with the teachers whether they believed there was a

pattern of close teacher-student relationships being with students who performed well academically. To discuss this issue, I included a single Likert-item from Al-Yagon and Mikulincer (2004) on the same sheet as the IOS scale (Appendix A): 'Compared to other students in my class, the overall academic performance of this child is …' (Al-Yagon and Mikulincer, 2004, p. 115). Teachers were asked to rate each student on a 5-point scale from 1 = very low functioning to 5 = very high functioning. The Likert-item is from the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) instrument (Gresham and Elliott, 1990), which has been extensively tested for reliability and validity (Salkind, 2007), including in the USA and Norway (Klaussen and Rasmussen, 2013). In this study, I refer to this Likert-item as the Academic Functioning (AF) scale.

This way of measuring academic performance was practical in this study as opposed to using students' test grades, because of the different age groups and country contexts. Also, some classes did not use test grades. However, a limitation of the AF tool was that some of the teachers were teaching their group of students in several subjects in which students' performance differed. For example, some of Agnes' students were not doing well in reading and writing, but excelled in Arts and Sports. Therefore, I asked the teachers to rate students according to their performance in literacy only. Another limitation was that scale ratings are expressions of the teachers' subjective judgement, and therefore not an objective measure of achievement (Roorda et al., 2011). For example, teachers' perception of a high level of academic functioning may be more a reflection of cooperative student behaviour, such as working hard and initiating contact with the teacher, rather than actual high academic performance (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Further, I had initially planned to re-administer the AF scale during the final interview, but it became apparent through my conversations with the teachers that it was not realistic to capture change in their students' academic functioning over a period of only six months, especially in regard to students in Christine and Paul's re-engagement classes. Christine made the point that she did not measure her students' progress in academic achievement, but rather in *"students' progress in life"*, such as one student having stopped stealing cars. However, the AF scale served as an important prompt for discussion of the IOS map and student characteristics, as well as allowing for cross-tabulation of IOS

and AF data from the first series of interviews in a quantitative analysis presented in Chapter 5.

Questionnaire of Teacher Interaction

To add to the contextual information of each case, I used the Model of Interpersonal Teacher Behaviour (MITB) (Wubbels, 2013) to explore teachers' characteristics. The purpose was to gauge whether the teachers perceived themselves to have the qualities of the MITB profile that is most beneficial for fostering good teacher-student relationships; as noted in Chapter 2, a combination of steering (high in control) and friendly (high in closeness) (Wubbels, 2013). Data were collected through the administration of the standardised Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) (Wubbels and Levy, 1991) (Appendix B). The QTI has been tested for reliability and validity, both for primary and secondary education level across 20 countries (Wubbels, 2013), and have been found reliable in multiple cultural contexts (e.g. Brok et al., 2010; Fraser, 2002).

Figure 3.2: Model of interpersonal teacher behaviour
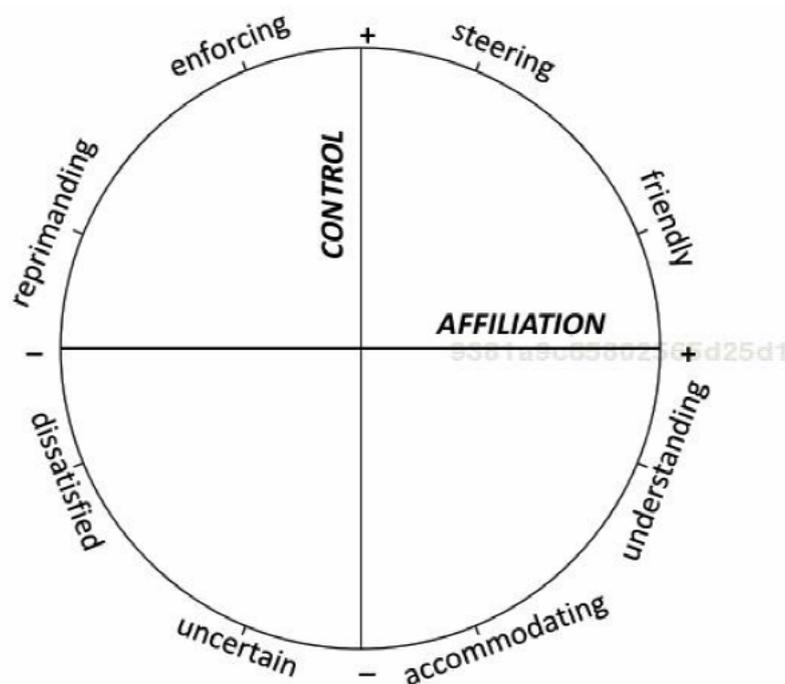
Source: Wubbels, 2013, p. 233

The QTI asks the teacher to rate 48 statements along a scale from 0 (never) to 4 (always). Examples of statements are 'I am friendly', 'I get angry quickly', and 'I am a good leader' (Wubbels and Levy, 1991). QTI scores are tabulated to

identify a teacher along eight interpersonal patterns in the MITB. The eight behaviours in the model are steering, friendly, understanding, accommodating, uncertain, dissatisfied, reprimanding, and enforcing (Wubbels, 2013). These eight teacher behaviours sit along two dimensions: control (dominance) and affiliation (closeness) (Figure 3.2). Each of the behaviours in the MITB is represented by six items in the QTI. The QTI scores can be illustrated in a spider graph (e.g. Figure 5.2).

I administered the QTI to the teachers during the first interview. All six teachers completed the QTI in English, including the two Norwegian teachers. Both Agnes and Idun are fluent in English and did not encounter any difficulties in completing the questionnaire. The generated MITB graph produced from the QTI was subsequently discussed in our second conversation in terms of whether the generated profile reflected how they saw their own characteristics and behaviour. All the teachers felt that their profile reflected them well except that most of them perceived themselves to be stricter (more enforcing) than what the graph illustrated. I re-administered the QTI during the third interview to explore whether the teachers' perceptions of their interpersonal behaviour had changed, by asking them to revisit their ratings of the statements in the QTI made during the first interview.

Data analysis

Data were analysed thematically by identifying possible patterns and themes (Robson, 2011) in the three interview transcripts per teacher, and across case studies.

Construction of individual case studies

Interviews with the four Australian teachers were conducted in English, while interviews with the two Norwegian teachers were conducted in Norwegian, the most natural language to use since Norwegian is also my mother tongue. I fully transcribed the audio-recorded interviews verbatim (Robson, 2011), in their respective languages through multiple listenings of the recordings. Before each interview, I read the transcript of the previous interview with each respective teacher carefully, and noted relational strategies they had mentioned that I wanted to follow-up on. I also reminded teachers of specific teacher-student relationships they had previously described as problematic, and asked how their

relationships with these students were developing. In this way, I collaborated in creating the teachers' reflection on their practice and encouraged them to 'generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers' to my questions (Riessman, 2007, p. 23).

Once data collection was completed, I prepared two versions of the IOS map per teacher: one IOS map reflecting the teachers' perceived closeness to students at the time of the first interview, and a second IOS map presenting the change in closeness in teacher-student relationships over the six-month period. The latter map included arrows indicating the movement of ratings of students along the IOS scale: a dotted arrow indicating change between the first to the second interview, and a full-lined arrow indicating change between the second and third interviews (e.g. Figure 4.2). The two IOS maps per teacher formed the basis of each case study. I used the same structure for all cases: a brief introduction of the teaching context; information about the teacher's class with the first IOS map; description of the teacher's relational strategies; the story of changes in teacher-student relationships over six months presented with the second IOS map; and finally a short case summary. I wanted to keep the same structure across cases to make it easier for the reader to independently identify patterns across the featured relationships and use of relational strategies (Yin, 2009).

The case studies are my interpretation of the interview transcripts and represent what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe as the researcher's reconstruction of field text into research text. I used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo to organise the transcribed field text into the overall structure of the case study, by grouping text across the three transcripts of each teacher into the following main codes: 1) teacher background, 2) context of teacher's class, 3) relationships with individual students, and 4) relational strategies. The codes functioned as 'passages of text that exemplify the same theoretical or descriptive idea' (Gibbs, 2008, p. 38). The sub-codes or themes of relational strategies were first and foremost drawn inductively from the field texts, but I also matched examples against pre-determined themes of relational strategies identified in literature (Robson, 2011). In this way, NVivo allowed me to sort the field text into streams of text relevant for each section I wanted to compose. I printed each code of text and used this as a reference while writing the case

study. During this stage, I transformed the Norwegian field text into an English research text.

For transparency about the 'relationship between me as a researcher and the researched' (Clandinin, 2007, p. 9), I have claimed the main voice as a storyteller in the case studies by making my 'signature' as a writer visible (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 138). I describe teachers from the outside by name and pronoun, and I remind the reader of my presence by sometimes disclosing how I prompt the conversation with teachers by asking questions, for example: *"When I ask Christine what strategies she uses to develop good teacher-student relationships, she responds that …"* I included the voice of the teachers by weaving their quotes, marked in italics and double quotation marks, into the story. In contrast, single quotation marks are used throughout for verbatim quotes from reviewed literature, so to differentiate between references to literature and my verbatim comments from interviews.

Thus, by including verbatim quotes from the teachers, I kept part of the field text intact, while the research text, which is my interpretation, is separate. This approach to reporting case studies strengthened the validity of the stories as originally told by the teachers and the validity of their stories as reconstructed by me (Riessman, 2007). I also shared the case studies with the teachers for member-checking (Robson, 2011) to ensure that they felt that their case study reflected their realities.

Interpretation across cases

I present the individual case studies in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 documents findings across cases, including analysis of quantitative data produced by the IOS scale, the AF scale, and the QTI. The standardised tools first and foremost functioned as prompts for generating richer qualitative interview data. Secondly, the quantitative data contributed to triangulating (Robson, 2011) the qualitative data from what teachers said about student characteristics influencing teacher-student relationship quality, such as gender and learning achievement. The quantitative data also served the purpose of matching findings with trends in existing research, for example, getting an understanding of whether the percentage of distant relationships in this study was high or low compared with other studies. Further, a quantitative analysis of the IOS data made it possible to explore how the collective group of teacher-student relationships across the

six teachers changed over the six-month period, and compare this change with reviewed literature. Finally, the MITB data provided a context of assessing whether the teachers in this study had the characteristics found to be conducive to developing good relationships with students. Therefore, the triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative data helped strengthen the validity of the data by comparing patterns between the two types of data, and with existing literature (Robson, 2011).

I analysed the data generated by the IOS scale by creating a database in Microsoft Excel featuring 'IOS score', 'AF score', 'student gender', and 'student school level' as column headers. I coded the data of each IOS sheet completed by the teachers in the database, in addition to any changes in their IOS-ratings in the two subsequent interviews. After I had entered all the data, I cleaned it by manually going through all the documents checking that it corresponded with the database entries. Next, I used Excel's COUNTIF formula function to analyse frequencies and percentages of students rated at the different pairs of IOS circles from 1-7. For the longitudinal analysis of IOS scores across the series of three interviews, I removed eight students who discontinued classes between the first and second interviews. Also, I did not include Christine's two new students, Ella and Caleb, who joined her re-engagement class at a later stage. Thus, the total sample compared over six months was 73 students.

The examination of patterns of student characteristics affecting teachers' perceptions of closeness in relationships drew mainly on the qualitative interview data. In addition, for comparing closeness in relationships and students' learning performance, I cross-tabulated the AF data with the IOS data using the PivotTable Wizard function in Excel. Further, I cross-tabulated data between IOS scores and students' gender and school level, to assess patterns of closeness in teacher-student relationships by gender and age. Finally, I processed data from the QTI questionnaire to examine the interpersonal behaviour profile of each teacher. I tabulated these data in Excel and generated radar graphs representing the MITB profile of each teacher (Figure 5.2). The guide to coding of the 48-item questionnaire is included in Appendix B.

The case studies presented in Chapter 4, and the cross-case analysis in Chapter 5, formed the basis of my further analysis of common thematic elements across cases. With the thematic coding approach; also referred to as

a 'pattern-matching' technique (Yin, 2009, p. 136), I systematically looked for 'similarities and differences' (Robson, 2011, p. 469) in teacher relational strategies, and student characteristics influencing relationship quality. I also examined whether common themes followed the theoretical propositions in existing research literature (Yin, 2009). The cross-case discussion of relational strategies is presented in Chapter 6.

Ethical considerations

This study was guided by the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research formulated by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011). The research proposal was processed for approval by the ethics procedures at the UCL Institute of Education. My main concern was that I could potentially cause harm to the students of my research participants, if they are identified in the research report by themselves or people they know. The teachers who are the direct research participants can also be harmed if information about them that is too personal is published. To manage this risk, I made the following ethical considerations.

Voluntary informed consent

To ensure participants fully understood why their participation was necessary; how the information would be used; and to whom it would be reported (BERA, 2011), I provided the research participants with an information leaflet prior to them agreeing to participate. At the commencement of the first interview, I again explained this information to each teacher in person, and we discussed their expectations about confidentiality, and how we could jointly protect the anonymity of their students. I informed them that they had the right to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time (BERA, 2011). The teachers signed a consent form to confirm this understanding.

Confidentiality and anonymity

The main ethical concern I had around asking teachers about their students, was the potential harmful consequences of teachers' unfavourable descriptions of students, should the students be identified by themselves or others. As noted in Chapter 2, labelling of students can affect students' motivation and learning negatively (Ercole, 2009; Hattie, 2009). Since this study focused on learning more about how teachers relate to challenging students in terms of behaviour

and learning difficulties, language that can be interpreted as stigmatising is used. For example, by characterising students as dropouts and misbehaved, this study can contribute to stereotyping students. However, more knowledge is needed about characteristics of students at-risk of poor relationships with teachers (Nurmi, 2012; Rudasill et al., 2013), so use of some negative terminology is unavoidable. I have tried to mitigate this by using terminology already established in existing research, which thus might be more neutral than the descriptors used by teachers as reported in the case studies. For example, previous research has used terms such as dropout (e.g. Cornelius-White, 2007; Hattie, 2009), behaviour problems (e.g. Roorda et al., 2011; Tauber, 2007), student misbehaviour (e.g. Lewis, 2001; Tauber, 2007), and disruptive behaviour (e.g. Cornelius-White, 2007), while the teachers used more colloquial words like *"badly behaved"*.

After discussing my ethical concerns with the teachers, we agreed on using multiple safeguards to protect the anonymity of both the teachers and their students. First, I have only used broad geographical area descriptions when referring to the school context, such as *"a school in an urban area of Australia"*. Second, the teachers and students have been given pseudonyms. However, I am aware that using pseudonyms does not guarantee anonymity (Robson, 2011). As Yin (2009) points out, 'confidentiality should extend beyond not naming participants to not revealing personal details which might reveal participants' identity' (p. 208). It is not possible for me to keep the research participants' anonymity in all contexts (Malone, 2003), because their identities are still known by the gatekeepers to the study (Robson, 2011); people providing me with access to the teachers, and others who know me and the teachers. Therefore, a third safeguard was that I chose to limit the personal information I provided in the case studies about the teachers' background, to make them less identifiable. Additionally, I decided to not report the details of school term and year each interview was conducted, since this information could be used to identify students more easily.

Finally, I discussed the issue of confidentiality and anonymity with the teachers again at the end of our third and last interview. We reviewed the safeguards to be applied to the research report, and I invited the teachers to review the draft of their respective case study; member-checking (Yin, 2009), so that they could

highlight any information they believed could pose a risk. I agree with Yin (2009) who argues that offering research participants to peer review the study is not just a matter of professional courtesy, but that this process will also 'enhance the accuracy of the case study', and hence 'increase the construct validity of the study' (p. 183).

My relationship with the research participants

I did not have prior working relationships with any of the research participants. Nevertheless, I was aware of possible perceived power relations since some of the participants were recruited through my connections. In this situation, my employer at the time was the gatekeeper of my access to some of these participants, and as a result they might have felt pressured to participate in the study, and not exercised their right to withdraw if they wished to. This problem is described in Malone's (2003) account of insider research of a group of one teacher and his students. I felt that this risk was not present in my study since the organisation I worked for did not hold direct influence on the teachers' employment situation. Thus, the teachers saw me as an outsider to their workplace, which I believe made them feel more comfortable sharing critical reflections of themselves.

However, at the same time, the teachers also perceived me as an insider in terms of me being a former teacher. This part of my identity made it easier to establish good rapport with them, and I believe they opened up more about their experiences with students, because they felt that I could understand. For example, they frequently asked for my opinion and experience as a teacher. Thus, my dual outsider/insider status contributed to interviews taking the shape of genuine conversations in which both the research participant and the researcher shared stories. In fact, I was surprised at the level of trust the teachers gave me in revealing difficult aspects of their teacher-student relationships. At times, I felt they gave me the role of being their therapist. One of the teachers even exclaimed after one of our interviews that it was just like *"a free therapy session"*. Glesne (1999, cited in Malone, 2003) warns that sometimes the relationship between researcher and research participant can transform into a therapist-client relation, because 'when others trust you, you invariably receive the privilege and burden of learning things that are problematic at best and dangerous at worst' (p. 807).

As a result of the trust the teachers developed in me, facilitated by meeting multiple times, the teachers at various points forgot to censor themselves. They disclosed unfavourable personal information, such as admitting to carrying prejudice towards students, and practices that could be considered unprofessional by others. Additionally, they trusted me with sensitive descriptions of students, for example, student sexual orientation, drug use, crime, and family violence. Thus, as a researcher, I realised that I would have to take full responsibility for the censorship of sensitive information in the research report. This I have done by erring on the side of caution in regard to details included in the case studies, maybe at the expense of making the stories less interesting and authentic.

Another ethical dilemma posed by the teachers' uncritical openness in what they shared with me, was that they sometimes sought my opinion and advice on how to deal with challenging situations. In this way, the teachers engaged me actively in our discussions, increasing the risk of my values and opinions influencing the data; in other words, potential researcher bias (Robson, 2011). With my pragmatic approach to research, I believe my own values as a researcher is a natural part of guiding the direction of my research (Robson, 2011). However, I consciously chose to not respond to teachers with prescriptive answers, but rather guided the teachers to find their own answers through reflection on their experiences. In other words, I took the role of a coach of reflective practice (Day, 1991), as described in this chapter. Nevertheless, I felt obliged to respond to the research participants with empathy, especially since I was responsible for stirring their emotions about sensitive issues. I followed the advice of Carl Rogers; that whether as a therapist, teacher, or researcher, the most helpful act is to listen attentively to the other person (Rogers, 1973). Thus, I also took the role of listener, and when asked directly for my opinions, I showed empathy through sharing stories from my own teaching experience that reflected similar situations of emotional labour (Chang, 2009) portrayed by the teachers.

I believe that the good rapport I established with the teachers helped reduce the risk of social desirability bias (Spector, 2004); that the teachers knowingly or unknowingly wanted to present favourable information about themselves (Mortel, 2008). Some teachers might feel that it is not socially acceptable for

teachers to have poor relations with students, instead blaming students or the school system if that is the case. For example, a criticism of Hattie (2009) is that he places full responsibility for students' learning outcomes on effectiveness of teachers; inferring that 'there are no limits to what teachers can do to overcome (student) disadvantage and improve learning achievement' (Skourdoumbis, 2014, p. 113).

However, Spector (2004) states that there 'is little evidence to suggest that social desirability is a universal problem in research that relies on self-reports' (p. 3), but in a sample of 31 health-related studies testing for social desirability bias Mortel (2008) found that 43 percent had data influenced by social desirability responses. I do not believe the data in my study is affected by social desirability bias, because as outlined, I observed the teachers in my study to be highly self-critical during our conversations, frequently disclosing unfavourable information about themselves. Similarly, I did not perceive a reflexivity bias with the teachers telling me what they might think I wanted to hear (Yin, 2009); that their teacher-student relationships were improving. I found the teachers to be confident in their practice, maybe because of their mature age and experience as teachers. Paul was the only inexperienced teacher, but he had previously worked in another stressful occupation.

In my next chapter, I present my interpretation of the interviews I had with each research participant as a stand-alone case study.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDIES: MAPPING TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

In this chapter, I present the individual cases following the same structure. First, the teaching context is briefly introduced prior to the presentation of the results of the adapted Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) mapping exercise, in which each teacher reflected on the characteristics of students they had close versus distant relationships with. Next, I describe teachers' self-reported relational strategies. Finally, changes in teacher-student relationships over the six-month period are presented, illustrated by the IOS map, revisited with the teachers during the series of interviews. Case studies are written in the present tense to make the reader feel present as the story is told.

Mindy: a case of an engagement class for high-achieving students

Mindy has agreed to talk with me during her lunch break. I get off the bus and walk along a pleasant street with nice cafes and shops. I am visiting a public secondary school with 600 students in an urban area of Australia. The school offers three learning streams based on academic achievement level, categorised as enrichment, mainstream, and support classes. I meet Mindy in the school reception, and we start our conversation in a small meeting room. During her 10-year career, Mindy has taught at the secondary level at schools with a high percentage of students from immigrant and low socio-economic backgrounds. She has primarily worked as a History and Arts teacher, but she has also had the role of guidance counsellor.

Mindy's engagement class

Mindy teaches 165 students across seven classes. I am interested in learning about an elective class Mindy teaches for disengaged students. In this class students identify a personal interest and develop it into a project that is presented at an end-of-term exhibition. The class includes 13 students in Year 9 (14-15 years old). All students are male except one. Mindy teaches the class five hours every two weeks. She has been teaching this specific class for about seven months at the time of the first interview, but she has known the students for three years.

Mindy rates the closeness in her relationship with each of the students on the IOS scale from 1-7 on sheets of paper that I give her. We lay the individual

sheets out on a table to form the map shown in Figure 4.1. Mindy is surprised that a large number of her students appear under number 3 on the scale, which represents a relationship below average in closeness. When reflecting on the common characteristics of these students, she realises these students are all *"withdrawn"* or *"introverted"*. In contrast, the students at numbers 5-6 are generally more extroverted. Mindy describes the latter students as *"very outgoing, well-spoken students; easy to relate to, and they give me a lot of insider information about themselves".* They initiate contact with her and share information about what bothers them. For example, one student has revealed that he has never known his father, and another student struggles with being short for his age.

Figure 4.1: Mindy's first IOS map

1 Distant	2	3	4 Average	5	6	7 Close
	Nate	Jake	Owen	George	Riley	
	Josh	Ethan		James		
		Ryan		Zoe		
		Connor		Tyler		
		Matt				

Mindy explains that the two students rated at number 2 on the scale, Nate and Josh, are both disengaged and struggle with relating socially to peers. Nate also has periods of absence from school. Again, these two students have introverted personalities, while Riley, who Mindy has the closest relationship with, is *"very outspoken".* Mindy sees no pattern in terms of level of closeness and students' academic performance. She rates all the students, except Nate, as being high in academic functioning; explaining that they all do well academically at school.

Mindy's relational strategies

Mindy defines a good teacher-student relationship as *"an honest and open relationship that is fair on both sides and where both the student and teacher*

feel safe". Translated to the 7-point scale of closeness, she feels that good relationships with students are in the range of 4-6.

Talking with students

The *"one-on-one chat"* is one strategy through which Mindy connects with students: *"even those that are withdrawn will open up a little bit when I have a one-on-one chat with them"*. After our first interview she makes an extra effort to spend more time talking with Nate and Josh, who she has the most distant relationships with. Mindy explains that Nate has poor mental health. He displays threatening behaviour towards other students, saying things like: *"You suck; I hate you; and you should all die"*, and he is therefore sometimes ostracised by the class. Additionally, he is disengaged from learning. Mindy suspects that he might be *"on the autistic spectrum"*, and that he is suffering from depression. He can get enthusiastic about a topic, but he gives up easily: *"He might do an initial search on the internet, but if information is not flocking on to his lap, he loses interest"*.

Mindy starts sitting near Nate during class, giving him an opportunity to talk to her: *"I think that he picked up on that I wanted to talk with him"*. Nate responds and tells her about worries he has for sick family members. Mindy suspects that he is stepping up as the main carer at home in the evenings and therefore finds it difficult to keep up with homework. He has been notified by the school that he is in danger of being dropped from the school's enrichment stream. Mindy talks to other teachers on Nate's behalf, facilitating extensions on his assignments. Nate starts coming more often to school and seems happier.

Mindy also initiates conversation with Josh on a more regular basis. She describes him as finding it hard to open up to anyone, but despite this, due to her extra efforts, *"he opened up a little bit"*. Josh is doing a project together with Riley, the student that Mindy has the closest relationship with. A reoccurring problem is that while Riley is leading the research and working diligently, Josh walks off, goes on the computer or reads a book, and does not contribute. Mindy talks with both Josh and his father about why Josh is not interested in the project. She discovers that the two boys have been doing an extra-curricular activity together outside of school, and they have had a fight that has affected how they work together in class.

These two examples illustrate how Mindy talks with students to get to know them better. She seeks to understand why they behave like they do, especially why they are disengaged from learning. When she knows about their problems, she tries to help. Several of her students have conflictual relationships with other teachers, and Mindy mediates on their behalf, like with Nate, and counsels students on how to behave in a more constructive way. For example, Riley had a tense relationship with his English teacher, because he was criticising her teaching style. This changed after Mindy talked with him about phrasing his criticism differently. She told him that instead of saying *"Hey, this lesson sucked!"* he can try to say something like: *"Oh Miss, I really liked the lesson you did a week ago, can we do something similar again?"*

Sharing personal information

Mindy explains that one of the best ways for her to connect with students is sharing personal information about her own worries and struggles. This in turn allows students to share information about themselves; talking with her in a group or individually. Riley is an example of a student Mindy has developed a particularly close relationship with. Mindy notes that he has seen her struggle with a personal issue: *"We both had a similar problem, so we talked about it openly"*. I ask her what information she would share. She says she is open about what she talks about, but when it comes to sensitive topics such as alcohol, drugs, sex, or religion, she does not talk with her students about her own experiences.

Meeting outside school

Mindy notes that factors affecting the quality of teacher-student relationships might not all be happening at school. She has herself experienced that chance meetings with students outside of school have *"changed some of her relationships dramatically"*. The reason for this, she believes, is that she stops and talks with students. If they are with their parents, she makes sure to say something nice about them. Mindy thinks it makes a difference that she lives in the students' community. They might feel closer to her when they see her around: *"Maybe because they see me as a human being. They have met me with my husband and my dog and it seems to make the relationship deeper".* She characterises the relationships with students she has not had these chance meetings with as more casual. However, living in the same community as her

students also makes Mindy careful to always behave as a good role model: *"I can't be smoking and drinking"*. She even stops her husband from smoking in places where she thinks students can see him.

Changes in Mindy's relations with students over six months

During our first interview Mindy explains that she is at varying degrees of her relationships with students. Over the next six months, the relationships are dynamic, and move both forwards and backwards in closeness and distance as illustrated in Figure 4.2. Relationships increase in closeness when students open up in response to Mindy talking with them. The distance in the relationships increases when students do not respond to her; when they are not interested in learning; and they act in a disruptive and *"immature"* manner.

Two months after our first meeting Mindy feels that her relationships with Ryan and Matt have become closer and now reflect a number 4 on the scale. Both Ryan and Matt have chosen to work on the topic of rugby. Mindy describes them as *"sporty students"* who tend to challenge her. They are making good progress on their projects and are publishing sports commentary on blogs. Mindy has made other teachers, including the Principal, aware of their blog entries. She often meets Ryan and his mother outside of school when walking her dog in the park. She praises Ryan for becoming more mature during the last year. However, four months later, Mindy moves Ryan back to number 3 on the scale. She reports that lately he acts less mature, and he *"likes to interrupt other people"*.

Owen and Tyler are two students Mindy initially reported having relatively close relationships with, placed at number 4 and 5 on the scale. Gradually, she feels that they become more distant. Tyler has an *"outgoing"* personality. He is well-spoken and shares information about himself. However, he goes on an overseas trip that Mindy is not informed about in advance. Initially being placed at number 5 in closeness, he drops to number 2 on the scale. He acts *"silly"* and *"immature"* at school, *"listening to music, interrupting others, and wasting time"*. Owen is an academically high-achieving, but withdrawn student. Before the first interview Mindy had a good one-on-one conversation with him, where he opened up to her about why he did not like school: *"And it was very much why I don't like teaching sometimes, so we were able to relate to each other very well"*. She discovered that he was in conflict with other teachers, and she

helped mediate these relationships. However, two months later, Owen has got a new girlfriend, and Mindy has had to *"tell him off for French-kissing in front of other people"*. He is also *"procrastinating about his project"*. Mindy feels that their relationship has dropped to a 2. At the time of the third interview, the same issues are on-going, but she moves him up to 3.

Figure 4.2: Changes in Mindy's teacher-student relationships over 6 months

1 Distant	2	3	4 Average	5	6	7 Close
		Jake		George	Riley	
		Ethan		James		
		Connor			→ Zoe	
		Ryan - - - →				
		- - - → Matt				
← - - -	→ Owen					
	Tyler ←	← - - -				
		→ Josh				
Nate ←		- - - - →				

After 2 months - - - - →   After 6 months ⟶
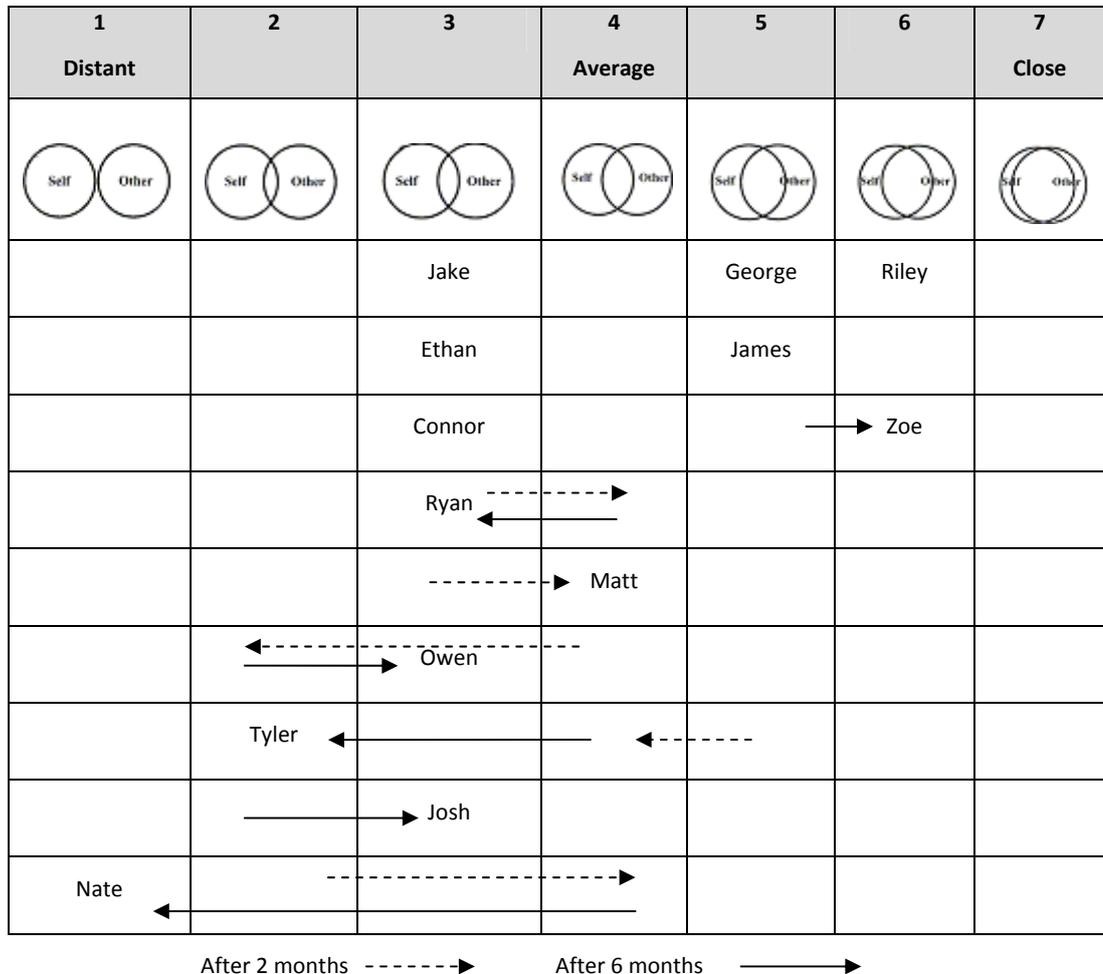
Mindy's best teacher-student relationship, with Riley, is at number 6 during the whole six-month period. She describes his personality as *"very outspoken, sarcastic, and funny"*. She identifies strongly with him, because *"he is a dreamer"* like herself. He is a high-achiever academically, and he works hard on his project. He talks a lot with Mindy about his problems. Nonetheless, Riley is not an easy student. He is regularly in conflict with other teachers, and Mindy invests a lot of energy in maintaining her own relationship with him.

Finally, Mindy's two most distant relationships, with Josh and Nate, also change. Mindy moves Josh from a distant relationship at number 2 up to a 3 on

the scale. She finds that talking more with Josh, as well as letting him work independently and giving him a bit of space when he gets angry, has helped their relationship. Mindy confesses that she uses considerable time during class trying to motivate Nate and Josh. Mindy's relationship with Nate on the other hand, has broken down completely. She feels that their relationship is now represented by number 1 on the scale, the position indicating the most distance in a relationship. Mindy explains with sadness and disappointment that Nate started being absent from school; he dropped out of the enrichment stream; and he stopped speaking to Mindy. *"He stopped functioning and started having lots of fights with teachers and students".* An attack on a student in Mindy's class got Nate suspended from school for 10 days. She reveals that: *"He was in a rage. I had to put him in a headlock. Otherwise he would have bashed this poor kid's head into the concrete wall".* She is determined that *"my primary concern is now the safety of my other students".*

Case summary

Mindy teaches a group of disengaged 15-year-olds who are otherwise high-achieving students. The students respond to Mindy when she reaches out to them, but sometimes she feels that external factors in the students' lives affect their behaviour at school and create distance in their relationships with her. The situation with Nate comes to a point where the Principal takes over, with Mindy deciding to prioritise guarding the safety of her other students rather than continuing her efforts to help Nate.

Christine: a case of a re-engagement class for school 'dropouts'

Christine is a secondary Arts teacher with 15 years experience. She has worked in a number of sub-urban public schools with immigrant and Aboriginal students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Christine recalls that she consciously sought working with *"rougher kids",* because she was herself a private school student, and she wanted a contrast to her own experience. She is interested in Aboriginal-Australian culture, and she is an active participant in the local Aboriginal community. For the last four years, Christine has been the teacher of an alternative education programme for disengaged teenagers in an urban area of Australia. The programme takes place in an out-of-school setting and the goal is to reconnect the youth with learning and facilitate a return to mainstream schooling. Christine has maximum seven students at any time, but she points

out that it is not only the students that she needs to build and manage relationships with. It is also *"their families, their community, their school, their juvenile justice officers, and their Court"*.

Christine's re-engagement class

When I first interview Christine, she has five students in her class, who she has been teaching for six months. They are *"inner city kids"* aged 14-16 years, most of them Aboriginal. Classes are held in an off-campus classroom 15 hours a week. The curriculum is based on exploration of the students' interests in a process aimed at motivating and *"teaching them how to learn"*. Their work is displayed at various exhibitions throughout the school year.

Figure 4.3: Christine's first IOS map

1 Distant	2	3	4 Average	5	6	7 Close
	Leo	Poppy	Jayden	Zac		
				Holly		

Christine rates the closeness in her relationship with each of the students on the IOS scale from 1-7 on sheets of paper that I give her. We lay the sheets out forming the map shown in Figure 4.3. Christine is not surprised by the location of students in relation to each other. She sees a pattern of students with more distance in their relationship with her having more introverted personalities. This is the case with Leo and Poppy who are quite shy and *"reclusive"*, but it is also that some of the extroverted students have more in common with Christine: *"They are more visual learners so we can relate similarly, because I am a visual learner as well"*.

In terms of academic performance, Christine categorises the two girls, Holly and Poppy, as being high in academic functioning, and Jayden and Zac as good functioning. Only Leo is rated as being low functioning, but Christine stresses that *"he has ability; he is just lazy, that's all"*. Leo and Jayden's attendance tends to slacken off at times.

Christine's relational strategies

Christine's students have a history of low school attendance and sometimes violent behaviour. She needs to know the students well to plan how to engage them in learning and manage their behaviour towards other students and herself.

Knowledge about students

When I ask Christine what strategies she uses to develop good teacher-student relationships, she responds that as a teacher you have to get interested in what the students find interesting: *"It is talking about something and what they did"*. This is also a key component in the learning approach of the re-engagement class, where the students are engaged in learning activities around their interests. Christine believes that *"it is the only thing that works!"* in terms of motivating them – *"that you help a student follow their interest, like dance for example"*. For many of her students, one big interest is football. She makes sure to know the students' team, and whether they win or lose. Christine adds: *"Music is another big one. Music and fashion"*. She explains how the students are *"very fashion conscious"*. It is important that you notice when they have new shoes for example.

Christine recalls one day one of the girls said to her: *"You know Christine, you should get yourself some decent clothes"*. Christine laughs and says that she finds herself to be *"quite suitably dressed"*, but she asked the girl where she thought she should be shopping. Christine checked out the stores she was recommended. She actually liked the style and came to class wearing her new branded clothes. I ask her how the students responded. They told her the brand was not cool anymore. *"I could not believe it! I go, no, I know it is cool alright! Because I like it"*. Christine adds in a serious tone that she does not mean that a teacher should dress like the students, but she thinks that it is important to understand popular culture. A practical exercise that Christine does with new students is to get to know students through a 'visual collage'. The exercise involves students going through magazines or printing off their Facebook photos. She asks them to print pictures of anyone and anything that is special to them: *"print, print, print, and collage"*. It becomes a mapping of their interests and who are important to them.

Understanding and managing student behaviour

Christine thinks it is vital for teachers to be able to manage their soft skills; being able to listen to students and communicate well with them. She gives the example of being able to observe students when they come into the classroom and read their mood: *"Don't pounce on them straight away, you know, just allow them to be …"* In other words, Christine gives her students some leeway and makes sure she does not *"intrude on their space"*. She tries to match a student's energy. She is aware that she is an outgoing and enthusiastic person, but that these traits do not necessarily match well with an introverted student. In her experience, if she behaves in a more calm way with a quiet student, the student is more likely to open up and connect with her.

When problem behaviour occurs, Christine uses what she calls a restorative justice approach to discipline. The student who has done something upsetting to another person is taken aside, maybe not straight away, but at the end of class, for a discussion about why what they did was not okay, and how it upset other people. Christine says that the students in her current class have *"really been open to managing it like that"*. However, Christine also has another tool for managing students' behaviour – her communication with their parents. She notes that a teacher can risk *"killing"* some teacher-student relationships by talking with parents, but if parents want to be involved, she sees that as a positive for this group of students, especially in regard to managing students' low attendance.

Christine *"makes it her business to know the parents"*. In addition to arranging a meeting with parents for all new students, she knows parents through being active in the local community. She confesses that she strategically goes to one particular supermarket where she knows that she will meet parents. Most of the time, she is communicating with parents by phone and text messages. Text messaging is a convenient tool for keeping parents informed. Christine makes sure that she gives positive feedback to parents and that she does not just contact them when there is negative news: *"Letting parents know that their child is doing well can sometimes really break the ice at home"*. She pulls out her mobile phone and reads an example of an exchange of text messages with Zac's father. The first message was sent on a day that Zac did not come to school. Christine wrote: *"Just to let you know that Zac was not at school today. I*

understand that it is a hot day, but at a time when we are considering his transition it is important that Zac makes choices that won't set him back". The father thanked her for letting him know. Two days later Christine sent another message, this time to convey praise: *"Zac did very well today".* At the end of the term, Zac's father sent her this message: *"Thank you for your support this term, Zac's success has to do with your constant communication".*

Christine does not pretend that managing students' behaviour and developing good relationships with them is easy. In her experience, it can take years before students respond to her. To illustrate this, she tells me a story about the most challenging student she has had: *"The hardest kid; really aggressive and temperamental … especially when she could not get her marijuana".* Christine laughs when thinking about the day the girl graduated*: "We gave her the certificate and her attitude was still like, fuck off …"* Since then this student stayed out of jail; she had a baby, although *"she is not even 18".* Suddenly the other day, she approached Christine in the street and asked if Christine could help her with her résumé, and show her which training courses could be available to her. For Christine this was the completion of their journey of developing a good teacher-student relationship, arriving years after they first started, even after the student stopped being her student: *"Finally, we got there!"* It is this process that Christine feels makes teaching so rewarding.

Changes in Christine's relations with students over six months

Two months later when I meet Christine again, two new students have joined her class, Ella and Caleb. Ella is extrovert in nature, *"quite a social character",* but she has taken some time to settle in. Christine explains that when Ella first started she would come to class only once a week and every night Christine would receive *"105 text messages"* saying she did not want to come to school the next day. Ella's attendance improves as she gets to know Christine and the class. Christine feels that their relationship is gradually getting closer, although Ella is *"still hard work".* Caleb, on the other hand, is a student Christine immediately feels close to, and she places him at number 6 on the scale. He is a *"pleasure to have at school; bright and committed".* He continues to do well, but his engagement lags off because he gets tired after working in a café at weekends. He is starting a work placement doing lighting and music at a

theatre. Christine hopes that being able to pursue his talent and interest in this area will give him something to *"plug into"*.

Zac is a younger student. He has a consistently close relationship with Christine. He transfers back into mainstream school, but at the time of the third interview he is returning to Christine's class. Christine thinks that Zac realised that he preferred the individual learning style and relationships he had developed in her class. She explains that mainstream schooling is not able to give Zac the attention he needs: *"If you are one of 700 students in the mainstream school system, you don't get a lot of attention unless you are really good academically or you are really bad. Zac is neither"*.

Figure 4.4: Changes in Christine's teacher-student relationships over 6 months

After 2 months ------► After 6 months ————►
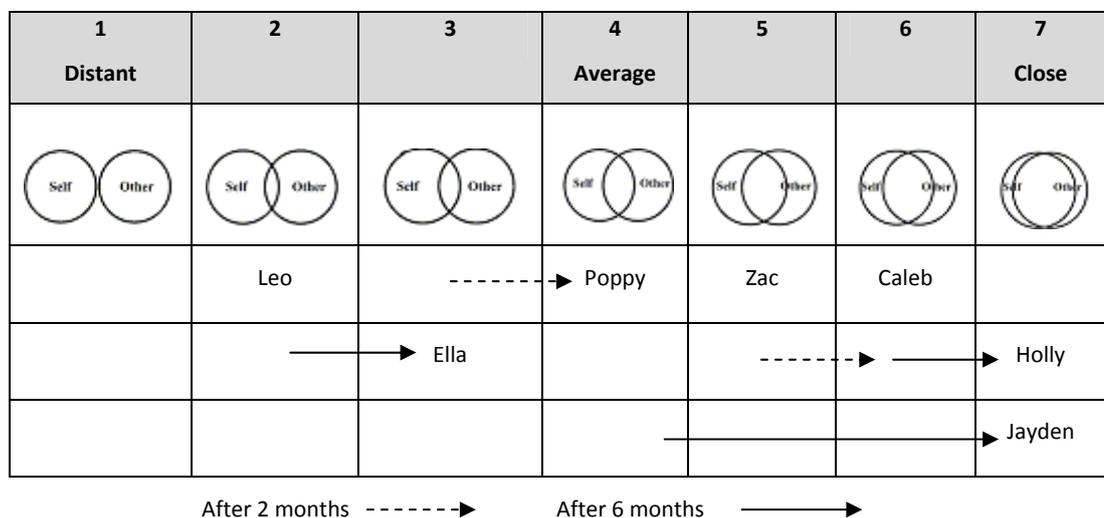
Leo is the student that Christine has the most distant relationship with. He stays at number 2 during the whole six months. Christine stresses that they still have a good relationship. It is just that it is so difficult to engage him. She thinks that Leo might *"be on the autistic spectrum"*. Christine constantly encourages him to make an effort, but he always responds in a bored voice: *"Do I have to?"* Christine admits that sometimes she gives up: *"I get so frustrated sometimes that I leave Leo and go work with Zac, because Zac is fun"*. Leo's attendance improves, but Christine is worried that he is losing weight. He has no energy. Christine tries talking with his mother about getting him help, but nothing happens. According to his mother, he plays computer games at night. Leo returns to mainstream school. Christine says that he is doing well in school socially, but he only attends three times a week and often does not have a school bag or books when he does show up.

Christine always had a good relationship with Holly, but she was quite rude and rebellious at times: *"She pushes everyone away"*. At first, Christine rates their relationship at number 5 in closeness. Holly suddenly has a change in attitude, and Christine gradually moves their relationship up to 7. Christine describes the *"new Holly"* with enthusiasm and pride: *"She is on fire! She is fit, she is beautiful, and she is present"*. Poppy on the other hand, stays in her *"shy shell"*, and despite Christine's persistent encouragement for arrangements for transitioning her back into Year 11 in a mainstream school of Poppy's choice, she leaves school altogether.

Like with Holly, the relationship with Jayden moves up to number 7, representing the highest level of closeness. Jayden is an *"outgoing and chatty"* student. When I ask Christine whether she believes that the students improved their academic functioning during the time in her class, she highlights other ways of measuring progress. She concludes that they have definitely improved their attendance, as well as their confidence as learners. Christine uses Jayden as an example. At the beginning of the year he was always in *"trouble with the law"*. Now he is not, and he has been going regularly to meetings with his Juvenile Justice worker. Christine stresses that it is important to acknowledge the different ways in which Jayden has excelled: *"Just the fact that he is out of crime. He could still be stealing cars"*.

Case summary

Christine teaches a small group of students with big challenges in their lives. They are disengaged from schooling with a history of low academic achievement. Some of the students have themselves been involved in drugs and crime, while others are affected by family members who are. As a teacher, Christine has to manage confronting behaviour, as well as lack of motivation for learning and low literacy levels. Christine's relationships with students gradually evolve towards greater closeness as the students get to know and trust her. Only Leo, although polite, does not respond to her efforts to engage him. He returns to mainstream school, where he seems happy socially, but with him only coming to school three times a week, he is on a trajectory to not completing high school. Poppy leaves school altogether, but Christine hopes that she will with time be able to persuade her to return.

Paul: a case of managing truancy and classroom disruption

When I first meet Paul, he is in his sixth week of teaching in his first position as a teacher. He is employed at a public primary and secondary school in an isolated rural area of Australia. About 100 students are enrolled at the school of which 97 percent are Aboriginal. The average attendance rate is just above 60 percent. As I enter the school, I pass a friendly teacher in the hallway. *"Welcome to our school!"* he exclaims warmly, and adds in an exhausted voice, *"but you have to bring your own Valium".* Teaching is Paul's second career after having been a bus driver. As part of his practical teacher training, Paul worked in a *"behaviour school"*, which inspired him to enter the area of Special Education. When I sit down and talk to Paul in his classroom, he comes across as happy in his new position. Paul explains that he did not know what the school would be like until he arrived here, but since he had experience in a behaviour school, *"it can't really get any worse than that": "It is not like I came here and the kids started swearing and I was not used to that".*

Paul's re-engagement class

Paul is teaching a small group of secondary students in a class designed to increase their attendance and re-engage them in learning. The class is a re-engagement class and not a *"behaviour class"*. Paul stresses this point: *"The kids are not in this class because they are badly behaved, they are just not coming to school. They have fallen a long way behind and they need a lot of extra help".* Paul has spent two weeks overlapping with the previous teacher. Paul says that if a new teacher just walks into the classroom, the students get defensive: *"They will tell you to get out, and that you have no right to be there. They will have to get to know you first".*

Although 10 students are enrolled in the class, only five of them attend regularly. I introduce Paul to the mapping tool we are using to help us illustrate the level of closeness Paul has with students. Paul places two students, Jack and Nathan, at number 6 on the IOS scale indicating a close relationship. Paul describes these two students as *"responsive".* They attend school regularly and they *"want to learn".* Harry, who is placed at number 5, needs prompting before agreeing to work. Paul explains that Ben, at number 4, is placed there because he never shows up. Paul is confident that they can develop a closer relationship if Ben comes to school more often and they have the opportunity to get to know

each other better. Sean, the student Paul feels he has the most distance to, at number 3, is attending school *"a fair bit"*, but Paul finds him quiet and reserved.

Figure 4.5: Paul's first IOS map

1 Distant	2	3	4 Average	5	6	7 Close
		Sean	Ben	Harry	Jack	
					Nathan	

While looking at the map of the class, Paul and I talk about the issues of attendance, and introverted versus extroverted personalities that Paul has described. He admits that it is easier to form a bond with a student who is more open, in other words, a student who has an extroverted personality. However, even though the students Paul identifies as his most distant relationships are introverts, he stresses that one of the students he has the closest relationship with, Nathan, is also introverted. Paul explains that even though Nathan is shy, *"you can connect with Nathan". "He is respectful, so you form a bond with him more easily even though he is not outgoing"*. Unlike the other students who are shy and reserved, Nathan still initiates conversation with Paul: "*He will come in to the classroom when he does not need to be here and have a conversation. I was talking to him outside at the gate earlier about an argument he had had with his girlfriend. I was giving him a bit of guidance"*.

Some of the other students also share personal information about themselves, but only if Paul is the one to initiate a conversation. Rather than the students' personalities, Paul feels that the main obstacle to developing closer teacher-student relationships is the students' low school attendance. The more they are absent, the less opportunity he has to get to know them.

There is no difference between the students in terms of academic functioning. They are all in the re-engagement class due to poor academic performance and lack of motivation for school. Their previous teacher marked them all as *"unsatisfactory"*. Paul says that they have only basic understanding in all

subjects. Three of them can only read at an elementary level, while the other two are good readers and writers, but their comprehension suffers when they are presented with material at their own age level. Paul is quick to add that *"they can still understand what is going on in the world; they are not silly"*.

Paul's relational strategies

Paul defines a good teacher-student relationship as having mutual respect: *"You respect the students. You understand that they are people. And from the students' perspective, they have to respect you enough to do what you say"*.

Giving leeway

Part of Paul's way of showing respect is to be patient. For example, he does not get angry straight away when students take time to respond to his instructions. In this way, Paul manages the relationships with students by giving them a bit of *"leeway"*. This is the main strategy that Paul uses in his teaching to deal with behaviour such as swearing. He says *"when they swear at you, you got to have resilience. You don't take it to heart"*. According to Paul, teachers have to be willing to ignore some misbehaviour. In his experience, some leeway must be given in order to build up relationships with students in the first place. When good relationships are developed this in turn leads to better student behaviour: *"If you come in and they don't know you, they are going to give you lots of language. If you don't understand that then you are going to either leave or throw them out. The next time they come in they are going to give you the same and they get expelled"*.

During our second interview, Paul reports that this is the strategy he has been trying with the students together with other teachers since we spoke two months earlier: to be more flexible with the rules. *"We are trying to not be so hard on them when they do something wrong"*. Rather than talking harshly to a student straight away when there is an incident, the teachers talk to the student later on when emotions have calmed down: *"If you are too hard on some of these kids, you see, you lose them"*.

Emotional self-regulation

When Paul is using the strategy of giving leeway to students, he consciously controls his own emotions. Paul believes that showing anger is counterproductive: *"Once you get angry they know that they can press your*

button". However, even though he is willing to show flexibility, he is still firm when enforcing rules. He gives detentions, but he says he does not get angry. He believes that it is important to establish ground rules, but at the same time *"getting students to realise that you are not unreasonable".* Paul takes care to explain to students the reason for why a rule is enforced. He believes this is fair and it fosters respect from the students. Just as important as not showing anger, Paul stresses that *"you have to have a laugh with them and not take yourself too seriously".* Using humour creates common jokes and stories that help build a feeling of community in the classroom.

Rewards

In a corner of the classroom there is a table with a kettle, cups and Milo[2]. When the students *"put in a fair amount of work"*, Paul lets them make themselves a cup of Milo as a reward. He admits that the older students do not care about the Milo, rather they are motivated by being allowed to take a break *"kicking the ball"*. At the time of our second interview, Paul has stopped using the Milo treat. He realised that *"we had four weeks where we did not have any and that seemed to not make a difference"* in the students' motivation to work.

Changes in Paul's relations with students over six months

After two months, Paul reports that the students' attendance has been very low except for Nathan. Several of them are now 17 years old and as a result will be *"taken off the roll".* Paul feels that the relationships with the few students who have been coming to school are improving as he gets to know them and they get used to him. Revisiting his IOS map of the class, Paul decides that the ratings of the closeness in the teacher-student relationships are still the same. He reiterates that the main barrier to improving the relationships is the limited time he gets to spend with students because of their low attendance. The only student that is coming regularly is Nathan, who as a result is making slow but steady improvements with his reading.

When I talk with Paul again for the third time, six months after the first interview, he reveals that the separate re-engagement class was discontinued due to lack of funding, and the students are now back in their respective mainstream classes. However, only Nathan and Sean have been coming to school. He

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[2] Milo is a chocolate and malt barley powder which is mixed with water or milk. It contains added nutrients such as iron and calcium.

estimates that they have had a 50 percent attendance rate. Paul reckons that the cancellation of the re-engagement class that the boys had attended for two years has been hard for them. He notes that even when Nathan and Sean, and sometimes Ben, show up to school *"they might not go into the classroom they are supposed to be in"*. For example, Nathan will come into Paul's classroom even though he is meant to be next door: *"He will come in and write down what we do"*. Paul points out that to him this is proof that Nathan wants to learn and that he is making some progress: *"He is getting words that he did not get before. He is capable, but he has missed out on so much that it is very hard for him"*.

Figure 4.6: Changes in Paul's teacher-student relationships over 6 months

1 Distant	2	3	4 Average	5	6	7 Close
			Ben	Harry	Jack	
					Nathan	
					→ Sean	

After 2 months - - - - - →   After 6 months ⟶
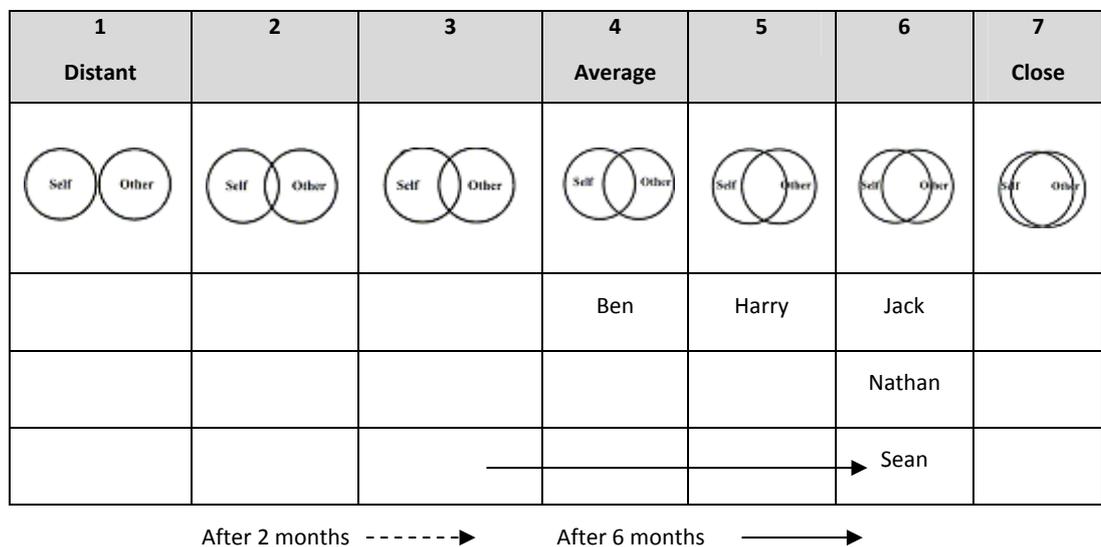
Sean's attendance has improved, but he also tends to not go into the classroom he is supposed to attend. Instead, he often sits outside Paul's classroom and asks Paul to give him some work. Ben's attendance on the other hand, is *"really random"*. Paul explains that they are 25 days into the current semester and Ben has only showed up to school three days so far. He is *"good when he comes"*, but unfortunately there is no improvement in his learning because of his low attendance.

Since the re-engagement class was cancelled, Paul has been teaching a new class of six Grade 7/8 students. I meet him for our third interview just after he has had a lesson with them. Paul looks quite disheartened. He reveals that the lesson ended in a riot: *"It was completely out of control. They refused to do work, they just walked in and out; slamming the door, throwing stuff all over the*

floor … they punched and threw things at each other. Three of them called me a motherf… c… to my face". Paul is not angry, but he admits that *"I was really disappointed today"*. He feels disappointed because he *"spends all this time preparing lessons, a lot of time outside of school hours",* but he does not get to teach the students because of the *"mayhem"* they create.

The behaviour strategy Paul was using with the older students in the re-engagement class does not work with these younger students. For example, Paul finds that it is not possible to give them some leeway when they do something wrong: *"It is a different thing with the Grade 7/8 students. I have to get to them straight away when they misbehave otherwise it spirals out of control"*. Paul feels that the only strategy left for managing the class when they get out of control is to lock them out of the classroom. Additionally, the school has a routine where the Head Teacher will talk to disruptive students one-on-one, and teachers will visit parents to explain that their children's behaviour at school has been unacceptable. However, Paul says that these strategies only give short-term improvements in the students' behaviour.

The Grade 7/8 class is worse than Paul's experience at the behaviour school where he had part of his practical teacher-training. He holds no hope that the behaviour of these students will improve. Compared to the older students, the Grade 7/8 students *"have no respect"*: *"No matter how well you treat them, they will call you a motherf… c… in a flash. That is the way they talk to you, and that is how much respect you get"*. Paul places all six of the students at number 1 on the scale measuring closeness, representing the most distance in a relationship.

Case summary

Paul's main challenge with the re-engagement class he is teaching when I first meet him is the students' high truancy rates. They come to school so irregularly that he has limited time for developing relationships with them. The other challenge is the students' low literacy. In the end, only two out of 10 students keep coming to school, but they are still so far behind academically that they have the odds stacked against them. When Paul starts teaching the class of Grade 7/8 students, he is confronted with not just disengaged students, but also confrontational behaviour. He feels that the only strategy he has at his disposal is locking the disruptive students out of the classroom.

Idun: a case of the Social Science teacher of vocational students

Idun is a teacher at an upper secondary school in a sub-urban area of Norway. She has been teaching for nine years. The school has about 300 students and provides a choice of a main education stream and a vocational stream. Idun is often assigned to teaching vocational classes in Social Science. These classes tend to have a high percentage of students with learning difficulties and challenging behaviour, as well as lack of motivation for studying the required non-vocational subjects. Idun is quick to confess that she loves her job: *"I think teaching is incredible fun. I have not had one day, even during difficult personal times in my life that I didn't want to go to work".*

Idun's vocational class

Idun teaches over 120 students across different classes. She chooses one of her vocational classes for the exercise in which we map the closeness in her relationships with students. The class consists of all male students aged 16-24 years. The class is challenging both in terms of behaviour and low academic performance. The students are motivated for their vocational subjects such as Mechanics, but they express that they do not see the relevance of the additional academic subjects, such as Idun's Social Science class. Idun has been teaching the class for 2.5 months. She explains that a majority of the students have *"histories of negative learning experiences and learning difficulties".* They are restless and find it difficult to concentrate.

Idun rates the closeness in her relationship with each of the students on the IOS scale on sheets of paper that I give her. We lay the individual sheets out on a table according to the assigned number forming the map shown in Figure 4.7. Idun's students are spread across the scale from 1, symbolising the most distant relationship, to 7 which illustrates the highest level of closeness. Idun notices that students she has close relationships with, are students she knows outside of school, or students who are contact-seeking. Tor and Einar are her neighbours, and she knows both them and their parents well. David and Dag also come from her local area. She notes that students placed high in closeness on the scale talk with her a lot. For example, David and Ricardo are *"outgoing and talkative".* Students she has distant relationships with on the other hand, tend to be *"quiet and introverted".* These students often lack motivation for learning, and they are *"difficult to engage in conversation".* Jonas is an

exception. He is shy, but because he sits at the front IOS of the class, he takes the opportunity to talk with Idun regularly.

Figure 4.7: Idun's first IOS map

1 Distant	2	3	4 Average	5	6	7 Close
Per	Anders	Rune	Hans	Dag	Geir	David
Roy	Ove	Jan		Arne	Bjarte	Tor
					Kjetil	Einar
						Ricardo
						Jonas

Relationships are especially distant with students with low attendance. At the time of our first interview, Idun has only met Per and Roy once, so she places them that at number 1 on the scale. In fact, the class was supposed to consist of 21 students, but four students never turned up. She admits that she is lucky when it comes to the level of non-attendance in her class: *"I am aware that these students have relatively low absence from my lessons. They call me to let me know where they are if they don't come to class"*.

Although Idun thinks that it is difficult to have close relationships with students who are not motivated to learn, she believes there is no clear pattern between close teacher-student relationships and high academic performance. Ove, Hans, and Kjetil have severe learning difficulties, but they are spread across the scale. Idun explains that students with learning disabilities can still be motivated to learn. For example, for Kjetil who can *"hardly read"*: *"It is an enormous struggle for him, but he keeps trying and works very hard"*.

Idun's relational strategies

Idun defines a good teacher-student relationship as having good communication with a student. In terms of level of closeness, she describes such a relationship as number 5 or higher on the IOS scale. She says that

knowing her students is important to her, because she finds that it often changes the way she behaves towards them.

Knowledge about students

Idun invests a lot of time learning about her students' interests and hobbies. She systematically initiates interactions with all her students to find out about their interests: *"For example, I know that this student is into computer games, this one likes Volvo, and this one …"* She is also interested in how they are doing in general, and she listens to any problems they are struggling with, because *"how they are doing in their private lives affects how they are functioning at school"*. Some students come and ask if they can talk to her: *"This student will come and say hi and tell me what he has been up to lately, and he asks about how I'm doing. He tells me a lot about his frustrations in life"*. Idun admits that she naturally has closer relationships with students who seek contact with her. Still, reserved students share a lot about themselves when she approaches them. She laughs: *"It is surprising how little probing it takes before students are honest about how they are doing. You just need to say hi and ask"*.

Idun identifies students who need more attention from her than others. In her experience, some students are like *"bottomless pits"*; needing a good relationship with the teacher in order to function: *"They need to be seen"*. She makes eye contact with them and gives them a smile every lesson. I ask her who these students are, and she confirms that it is students who typically *"go under the radar"*, as opposed to *"outgoing, smiling, and laughing"* students. How does she identify them, I wonder? It is their body language, she says, *"the way their eyes move around the classroom; some look down into their desks with sunken shoulders. They are really introverted"*. Nevertheless, outgoing students can sometimes hide deep problems. She can tell, because *"they don't smile with their eyes"*.

Talking with students

Idun's main strategy for getting to know her students and developing good relationships is talking with them. She talks with them during class, in the hallway during recess, and she organises regular meetings with each student. The school encourages structured meetings between teachers and students to discuss each student's progress, but Idun says that not many of her colleagues are doing this. As a rule, Idun has a one-on-one chat with all students about

their progress in her subject at least twice each semester. Conversations with students are normally brief, and when it is not possible to get a meeting room, Idun takes the opportunity to talk with a student in the hallway during class.

Idun makes sure that she talks with all her students, and she strives to do so every lesson. In larger classes this is difficult, so she talks with students starting at the opposite end of the classroom alternate lessons to make sure she has a small chat with each regularly. With her vocational students she stays in the classroom during recess, not being bothered to return to her office at the opposite side of campus. She uses this time to talk with students who are seeking contact. Other times she pulls students aside when she meets them by chance in the hallway to ask how they are doing.

Understanding and managing student behaviour

Idun uses her conversations with students to understand their behaviour, especially challenging behaviours: *"I am concerned with finding out why they are so aggressive".* Idun concludes that *"I believe in communication. I have always talked with my students, because I think it is easier".* School management accredits her efficient class management to her active communication with students. This is reflected in Idun's consistently high scores in an annual school survey of students' satisfaction with teachers. In the most recent survey, she was rated at 5.62 on a scale of 1-6 in class management. In comparison, the average among Idun's colleagues at the school was 4.4, while the average regional teacher score was 3.9.

When teaching these students, who the school management labels as exhibiting *"externalising behaviour",* Idun finds them *"unproblematic".* She admits that *"in the beginning they test your boundaries. They can throw things. They swear a lot and use rude language towards you".* However, after 3-4 weeks with a new class, her classroom is normally *"peaceful",* although she is aware that the same students often continue to be described by other teachers as *"defiant and problematic".* Idun recalls a time when the students themselves commented that they were calmer in her class. They said that it was because *"I don't piss them off".* Her own explanation is that she has a *"light tone"* with them, and she tries to integrate students' interests in her teaching. Still, she claims to be a *"very strict"* teacher: *"I am strict, but I try to be 100% similar in my behaviour with all students".* Part of her classroom routine is to start the lesson

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with a *"row call"*. She reads out the names of the students, to be fair alternating from the beginning and end of the alphabet every second lesson, looking at each student along the way. This ritual makes her aware of absent students, and looking each student in the eye one-by-one helps her assess their mood for the day; she knows *"where there could be trouble"*.

How does she deal with the swearing? Idun explains that when it first happens, she makes a clear statement about what type of language is not acceptable in her class. She initiates a discussion about attitudes and behaviour. However, swearing is an ingrained habit for many students, so the swearing will not stop completely, but is gradually reduced. When students occasionally forget themselves, the culprit will normally look at her and say *"I'm sorry Idun, I didn't mean to"*. Idun stresses that with externalising behaviour students, it is important to recognise the achievement of reduced levels of swearing and small improvements in behaviour, rather than insisting on no swearing at all. They need praise and a bit of slack: *"Praise them for only swearing three times today as opposed to six times yesterday"*.

What about when students are being loud and disruptive? Idun says that she never raises her voice: *"I don't lose it. I don't scream at them"*. Instead, if need be she will sit down at the front of the classroom, fold her arms, and wait. She starts speaking in a calm voice, and after a while the students at the front will tell the ones at the back to be quiet. Doing the row call at the beginning of each lesson is her strategy for avoiding a classroom out of control, and she finds that it forces the students to concentrate, and the routine gradually *"lulls the students into calmness"*.

I ask Idun to tell me about the most challenging student she has encountered during her teaching career, and how she handled it. She thinks for a while and says *"I got death threats once"*. It was in her first few weeks with a new class and a student threatened to slash the tyres of her car and to kill her. What did she do? *"I walked over to the student, looked him in the eyes and said that if he slashed my tyres I would report him to the police and the other students were witnesses to his threats"*. After a while the student raised his hands and stepped backwards away from her. He apologised and said he did not mean it. Idun turned around and continued teaching. After the class she pulled him aside and she had what she laughingly refers to as the *"What-is-really-your-problem-talk?"*

I wonder how their relationship developed. She recalls how this student was restless and struggled with sitting still. Together they decided that when he needed to he could use some pressure balls in his hands or he could walk back and forth at the back of the classroom. Idun spent time talking with him about acceptable language and behaviour. She realised that his confronting language was commonly used at his home. Idun points out there are reasons why students are confrontational. Often they have experienced *"a negative socialisation process at home"*. In the end, Idun developed a good *"tone and dialogue"* with him. She reveals that this student was *"in contact with the police"*, and a police officer later came and thanked her for her positive influence on him.

Figure 4.8: Changes in Idun's teacher-student relationships over 6 months

1 Distant	2	3	4 Average	5	6	7 Close
		- - - - - -▶ Jan - - - -▶	Hans	Bjarte	David
		- - - - - -▶ Rune	Dag		Tor
	- - - - - -▶ ——▶	Anders	Geir ◀———		Einar
					Ricardo
					Jonas
				———▶	Kjetil
				———▶	Arne

After 2 months - - - - - -▶   After 6 months ———————▶
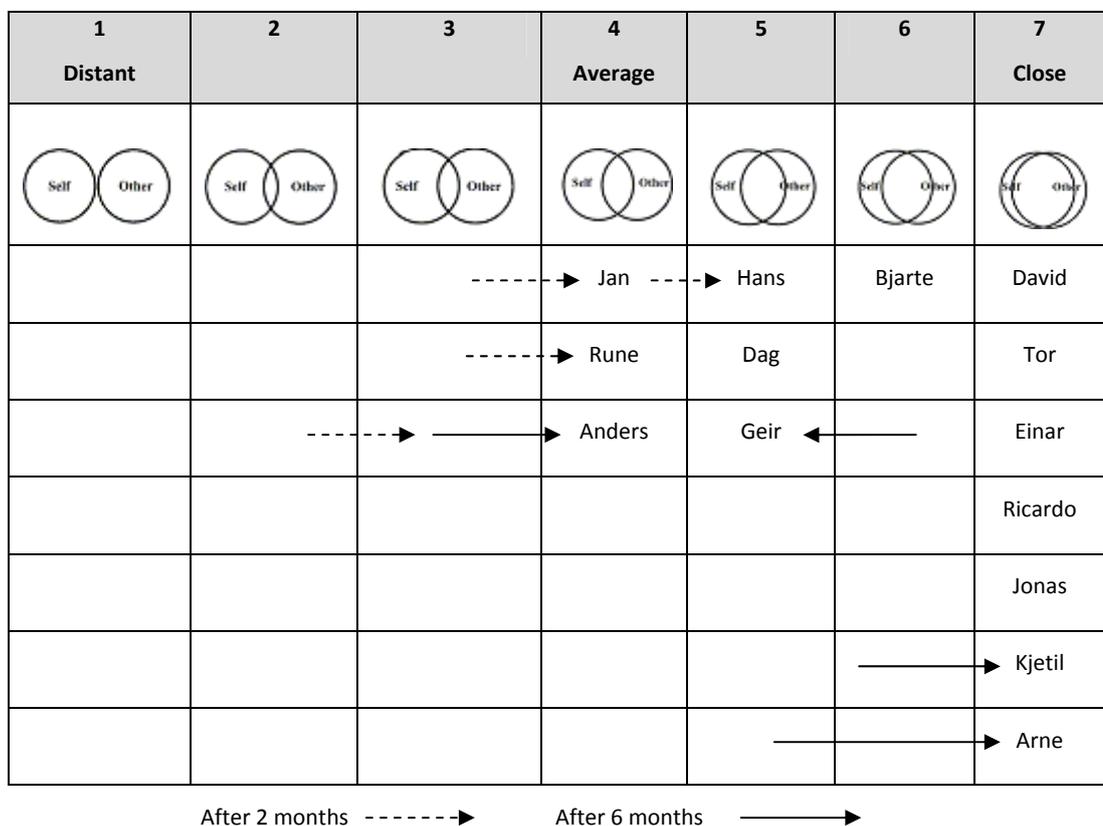
Changes in Idun's relations with students over six months

After two months, three of the students Idun had the most distant relations with owing to the students' minimal attendance - Per, Ove, and Roy - have discontinued their enrolment. Relationships with the remaining students continue to get closer as Idun is constantly seeking opportunities to talk with them and get to know them better. After six months, Idun feels that all the students in the class are at an average level of closeness or higher. For

example, Idun's relationships with Kjetil and Arne have moved up to number 7, illustrating the closest type of relationship. Idun contributes the increase in closeness in these relationships to having talked with and provided extra support to these students. Kjetil continues working hard despite his severe reading difficulties. Arne had a death in the family. Geir is the only student that Idun rates as having dropped in level of closeness. He is one of the students who struggles with reading. He has started being absent from school and when he is in class, he cannot concentrate.

Case summary

Idun is faced with teaching a group of students who are disengaged from learning, with several of them struggling with learning difficulties. Some of them can be confrontational. The students who dropped-out early in the school year only attended once or twice, giving Idun no opportunities to build rapport with them. Idun gradually develops closer relationships with the remaining students by striving to talk with, and have eye contact with, each individual student during every lesson. Idun is confident that all the students will pass her subject at the end of the year. Only one student, Geir, seems to be increasingly disengaged from school, distancing himself more from Idun, and could possibly be in danger of leaving school.

Agnes: a case of mainstream teaching in a small rural school

Agnes has worked as a teacher for 20 years. She teaches a range of subjects, but mainly Social Science, languages, music and drama. She loves doing projects with children in the area of sound and pictures. Agnes has just started a new teaching position at a rural primary school in Norway. When I first meet her, she has been at the school for two months. She is the teacher of a class of 11 fifth-graders. Even though her class size is small, a few students with immigrant background demand a lot of extra time.

Agnes' Grade 5 class

At her new school, Agnes teaches 45 students across several classes, a small number compared to what she has been used to in large city schools. She is the main teacher of Grade 5. Agnes rates the closeness in her relationship with each of the students in her class on the IOS scale from 1-7 on sheets of paper

that I give her. We lay the individual sheets out on a table to form the map shown in Figure 4.9.

Figure 4.9: Agnes' first IOS map

1 Distant	2	3	4 Average	5	6	7 Close
		Madison	Else	Kari	Aisha	
			Gunnar	Ingunn		
			Andreas			
			Fredrik			
			Eva			
			Morten			
			Falah			

Agnes' first observation is that she has placed most of the students at number 4 on the scale, which illustrates an average level of closeness. She notes that these are students who are *"not causing any trouble"* – they do not require extra attention in terms of struggling academically or in their behaviour, in fact, "*they take up very little space"*. Agnes announces that she wants to give this group of students more of her time, because she realises that she has so far dedicated a majority of her attention to a few students who struggle. She recognises that *"students who struggle are much more dependent on a close teacher-student relationship"*, but she still wishes to be more fair in the amount of time she gives to all students.

Agnes identifies students she has the closest relationships with as having more extroverted personalities than the others. She thinks that students' personality to a large degree determines the quality of teacher-student relationships. For example, Kari, Ingunn, and Aisha are more *"contact-seeking"*. Still, Agnes adds that the closeness she feels in these relationships are also due to having spent more time with them, because they have needed more support from her.

Aisha is the most demanding student in the class, taking a lot of Agnes' time. She is from an immigrant background and struggles academically due to the language barrier. She is not motivated to learn, but Agnes observes that she is very resourceful in practical subjects such as Arts and Crafts. Aisha often refuses to do any work and Agnes notes that *"she can cause a lot of problems if you push her"*. Agnes explains that in classes with other teachers who do not know Aisha well, she refuses to cooperate. Agnes, on the other hand, has experienced that Aisha can be *"an incredibly charming student when you get close to her"*.

Agnes' relational strategies

Agnes believes that teachers are not able to teach without establishing good relationships with students. In order to achieve this, teachers must find ways to *"build trust and make students feel safe"*. On the closeness scale used during interviews, Agnes would ideally like to have student relationships at number 5.

Knowledge about students

Agnes says it is important to discover the interests and talents of individual students. She wants to discover something they are good at, and to make them aware of it: *"I think that the road to get young people motivated and help them to learn is that they are shown that they are good at something"*. She tells me a story about how a Special Education teacher made her understand how important this is. It was at a time when Agnes was working at a school with many students with special education needs. A visiting teacher came to work with a boy who refused to learn Maths. The Special Education teacher heard that the boy was really good at bike tricks. He subsequently spent two weeks with the boy teaching him, the teacher, how to do tricks on a bike for two hours every day. When the boy saw how difficult it was for the teacher to learn something the boy could do effortlessly, and how long it took the teacher to get good at it, the boy started to understand that learning something you are not good at is not easy. Suddenly, to the surprise of his Maths teacher, the boy opened his Maths book.

Therefore, Agnes tries to find out what students do outside of school, their interests and hobbies. She likes to observe students during her PE classes, because sometimes students who are *"invisible"* and *"average"* in regular academic classes excel when she gives them responsibilities for planning and

leading PE activities. In this way, Agnes gradually learns to know students' skills and personalities. She feels that her knowledge about students makes it easier for her to understand her students' approach to learning; how they learn well.

Understanding and managing student behaviour

Agnes tells her students that she has high expectations of them, and she demands that they take responsibility for their work. This includes understanding that they have a responsibility to respond to her: *"I think it is very important that they understand that if we are going to have good contact then they also have to share. It is about giving and receiving"*. She says that part of teaching students to be responsive involves body language, such as meeting and keeping eye contact.

What if Agnes has a student that is disengaged and does not want to respond to her? Agnes says that first of all, she is aware of the *"power you have as a teacher when you come in conflict with a student; how you can let the problem grow for both yourself and the poor student"*. When Agnes has a student with challenging behaviour she spends time explaining to the student what work they will do during the lesson. For example, she says that: *"We will first begin with this exercise and we are going to do it in this way. You will need a pencil, a sheet of paper and a folder"*. In this way, she is able to calm the student down by giving him or her predictability about what will happen during class, and at the same time, she establishes eye contact with the student during a one-to-one conversation. As a result, the student feels that he or she has been seen and is less likely to resort to disruptive behaviour to get Agnes' attention later in class. Agnes stresses that *"the most important factor for students to learn and be motivated is that they feel that they are seen by the teacher"*.

In addition, Agnes uses the strategy of giving students tasks to help her during the lesson. Through giving them responsibilities in class she hopes that they will feel that they have a role in the group: *"The optimal with difficult students is that they find a role in the group so they feel that they belong - that they are included"*.

Changes in Agnes' relations with students over six months

The mapping exercise during the first interview made Agnes realise that she was spending all her time with the students who were struggling academically,

at the expense of the students *"who normally manage well on their own"*. The map made her aware that she was not really *"seeing"* the latter students, who were typically placed at number 4 on the closeness scale. Over the next six months, Agnes makes an effort to be more equal in the time and attention she gives to all the 11 students in her class. As a result, the relationships with most of the students become closer, and Agnes gradually moves them up on the scale to numbers 5 and 6.

Figure 4.10: Changes in Agnes' teacher-student relationships over 6 months

1 Distant	2	3	4 Average	5	6	7 Close
			Else		Aisha	
				⟶ Kari		
			⟶ Madison			
				- - -⟶ Ingunn		
			- - -⟶ ⟶ Gunnar			
			- - -⟶ Andreas			
			- - - - - - -⟶ Fredrik			
			⟶ Eva			
			⟶ Morten			
			⟶ Falah			

After 2 months - - - - - ⟶   After 6 months ⟶
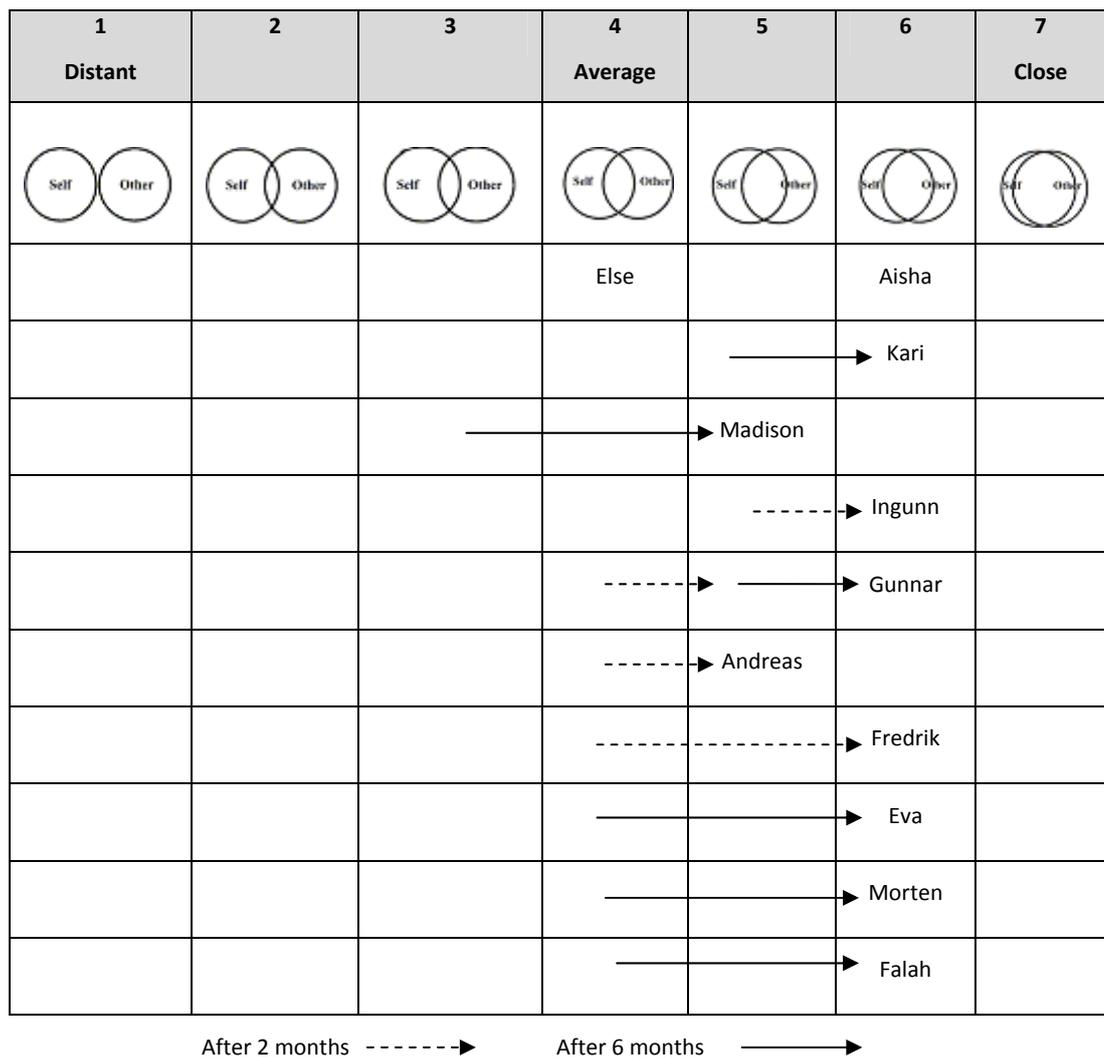
During this time, Agnes involves the students in a special activity: they learn to tango in preparation for a performance at a local music event. Agnes has herself been dancing tango for 20 years. Through dancing, Agnes and the students get to experience each other in different roles. Agnes explains that by teaching the students to tango, she is able to show them how to communicate and listen to each other through movement and body language, and not just through speech. I wonder whether the boys objected to the activity. Agnes

laughs, *"No, I told them that Messi is so good at football because he can dance tango"*.

In terms of individual students, Agnes continues to feel close with Aisha, her most difficult student, despite having had a *"crisis period"*. Aisha stopped participating in class and did not want to be part of group work. Agnes gives credit to the other children for never giving up on including her. What was difficult for Agnes was that Aisha made accusations against both her parents and teachers claiming that she was being beaten and abused. Agnes admits that it was a draining experience. However, she says that despite Aisha's behaviour, the girl was seeking more closeness and contact with adults: *"She needs stability and caring adults around her. I have tried to give her that"*. I ask Agnes how she has been able to not feel negative towards Aisha and wanting to distance herself from her. Agnes thinks for a while and explains that *"I am able to distinguish between what she says and that she is just a child. I hope most teachers would be able to"*.

Aisha is doing better, but she still needs a lot of support. Agnes has made sure that she better manages the time she spends supporting Aisha, so that she is able to give more attention to her other students. She does this by providing most of the support that Aisha needs outside of class time. Agnes has also allowed herself to prioritise the emotional support Aisha has needed, and not put too much stress on both Aisha and herself for Aisha's lack of academic progress.

Case summary

After a long career teaching classes of 30 students, Agnes has a class of only 11 students. She starts her new position looking forward to spending more time with each individual student. However, when doing the mapping exercise of closeness in her relationships with the students after an initial two months together, Agnes realises that she has not had conversations with a number of them. Instead, she has been focusing most of her energy and attention on one child, Aisha, who has needed a lot of help both academically and emotionally. Agnes' increased awareness of the need to divide her attention more fairly among students leads to an improvement in the relationships to her more *"average"* students, who were *"invisible"* to her before. Agnes' case demonstrates that it can be challenging for even an experienced teacher, with a

small group of children, to be aware of interacting equally with all students in one classroom.

Hanah: a case of the Arabic language teacher at a large private school

Hanah teaches at a large private school in a sub-urban area of Australia. The school has over 1,900 students of which 99 percent have a language background other than English. Hanah is teaching 240 primary students across classes. She has been a teacher for six years, first as a Biology teacher in Gaza before she emigrated to Australia, where she is now an Arabic language teacher.

Hanah's Grade 5 class

I am interested to find out how Hanah manages to form good relationships with students in large classes. For the exercise in which I ask Hanah to map the closeness in her relationships with a specific group of students, she chooses a class of 30 fifth-graders. The students come from both Arabic and non-Arabic language background, the latter typically from Pakistan, India, or Turkey. Hanah teaches them Arabic three times a week. She has known most of the students in the class for about a year.

Hanah rates the closeness in her relationship with each of the students on the IOS scale on sheets of paper that I give her. We lay the individual sheets out on the floor, forming the map shown in Figure 4.11. Hanah is first surprised to see that six of the students placed under numbers 1-2 are students with a non-Arabic language background. She notes that some of these students have more *"reserved and less open"* personalities. However, non-Arabic students are represented across the scale. On reflection, Hanah identifies the students she has most distance to as students who do not make contact with her or ask questions. She believes they might find it hard learning Arabic and therefore they are not motivated.

In contrast, Hanah describes students at numbers 5-6 on the scale as *"hard-working"*. They do not necessarily do well academically, but *"they keep asking questions and coming to me for help".* These students are more open and contact-seeking: *"They want to tell me everything. It makes me really comfortable and happy as a teacher"*. Thus, the main distinction that explains

whether Hanah feels close to students or not, is whether students are motivated to learn, and want to have a personal relationship with her.

Figure 4.11: Hanah's first IOS map

1 Distant	2	3	4 Average	5	6	7 Close
Fatima	Hiba	Reema	Ameena	Malika	Maja	
Khalid	Jenna	Caleb	Rafiq	Hadil	Said	
Amal	Kaela	Oma	Anwar	Yahir	Jamila	
	Shakila	Raja	Keila	RiHanah	Naja	
	Abdul		Latif	Asha	Lydia	
	Hamid				Azim	
	Yemena					

Hanah's relational strategies

To Hanah, a good teacher-student relationship is when the student is comfortable and motivated to ask questions in class. Hanah believes that it is important to make her students enjoy learning. She ideally wants to reach a level of closeness with her students illustrated by numbers 5-6 on the IOS scale.

Talking with students

Hanah's main relational strategy is to *"talk with students"*. She tells them that they must ask when they do not understand. If they do not want to ask questions in class, they can come and talk with her during recess, or before and after school. In one week, she has on average about five students coming to her office. Hanah seeks out students who she notices are not motivated to learn, or who she suspects have problems at home. She never asks students what is wrong, but simply makes students aware that whatever the problem is, they still have a responsibility to do their schoolwork. If they need to talk, teachers are there to listen and help. For example, Kaela was such a case: *"I*

told her that it is not my business to ask what is going on at her home, but that she is responsible for doing her work. I told her she could do much better". Two days later, Kaela came to Hanah and said she wanted to improve. She explained that her mother was busy with a new baby. Kaela started coming to Hanah for extra help. Hanah notes that *"I think she needed a bit more attention. She never came to me before this girl, but now she asks me a lot of questions"*.

Talking with students is a necessary activity for Hanah to help her remember each individual student: *"The first two weeks in class I have to really focus to learn to know students"*. Hanah memorises student names, but she must also learn to know their behaviour, the quality of their work, and class performance. She constantly tests herself that she knows all students, and if she realises she does not, she will *"go and find that student and talk with him or her about any topic that will make me remember this student in the future"*.

Giving students tasks

Hanah's strategy for engaging students who are not motivated is to give them tasks and responsibilities during class. Hanah notes that these students often lack confidence; not believing in themselves as learners. By giving them tasks as helpers, Hanah thinks it raises their confidence, because *"they feel special"*. Hadil and Latif are two students who have responded well to this strategy. However, during our first interview, Hanah is frustrated that the strategy has not worked equally well with a number of other students she places at numbers 1-2 on the closeness scale, indicating that she feels distant to them. Especially Khalid and Hamid are not responding to her efforts to engage them.

Making learning fun

Hanah says students need to enjoy learning to be successful: *"Without enjoying you don't learn. It is my job to make the students like it by being friendly, fun, and create laughter and excitement"*. She highlights that Arabic is a *"heavy"* language to learn, even for people with Arabic language background. Additionally, some students might be less motivated to learn Arabic because it is their parents who want them to learn it.

Hanah has different strategies for making her classes fun for different age groups. For younger students, she has her *"golden basket"*. This is a basket that she has painted in gold, containing stationary such as "*colourful pencils,*

different shapes of rubber, and things that kids like". Hanah brings the basket to her class the first four weeks of the school year. She enters the classroom with the basket on her arm. She then writes the names of five students on the board in Arabic, who will get surprises from the basket if they work well in class. *"You see"*, Hanah says, *"I don't want to be the boring teacher. I want students to look forward to coming to my class"*. She brings the basket again during the year if students ask for it, or she wants to encourage them to work harder. Hanah admits that this kind of reward system does not work with older students, especially after Grade 5. Instead, older students receive Student Award certificates.

As an alternative reward system, Hanah uses interactive games popular among both younger and older students. For example, she uses drama where she or students will act out words in Arabic in front of the class, with students guessing the meaning of the words. Another game that students want to play is called *"Simon-says"*. Hanah gives the students sentences in Arabic such as *"Simon says: open your book!"* The students have to understand what she says in Arabic and respond to her instruction. However, if an instruction is given without starting with *"Simon-says"*, the students who still act are out. The students love the game so much that Hanah has introduced a jar and balls of cotton in the classroom. Every time students have *"done a good job"*, Hanah adds a cotton ball to the jar. When the jar is full, the students are rewarded with playing the game. The games help Hanah engage the students when they are tired, especially towards the end of the day when they find it difficult to concentrate: *"I stop, we play, they laugh, and feel much better"*.

Communicating with parents

Meeting with parents and talking about their child's personality, behaviour, and sometimes cultural differences, gives Hanah a better understanding of how to help students. She finds that when parents have met her and feel comfortable with her, this in turn makes the student feel comfortable with her. As a result, the student is more likely to approach her and ask questions. The parents are also more likely to contact her asking how they can help with homework, although Hanah recognises that some parents are more involved than others. If there is a specific problem, Hanah might call them, or organise a face-to-face meeting with both the parents and the student. For example, in a meeting with

Abdul and his parents, Hanah discovered that the reason Abdul had been so reserved in his response to her was that he thought she was picking on him when she was asking him questions in class. After they cleared up this misunderstanding, Hanah encouraged Abdul to come and speak to her directly whenever there was something that he was not happy about. By the time I interview Hanah for the third time, her relationship with Abdul has become closer. Abdul is *"more confident, happy, and he asks for help"*.

Changes in Hanah's relations with students over six months

During the six months following my first interview with Hanah, Abdul moves from number 2, illustrating a distant relationship on the closeness scale, to a 5. Improvement in teacher-student relationships has also taken place with several other students in Hanah's class as illustrated in Figure 4.12.

Hanah thinks that the main explanation for the positive change in relationships is due to a natural process of maturing as the students are getting older. Since my first interview with Hanah, the students have transitioned to Grade 6. Next year they will be moving up to high school. Hanah keeps reminding them of this and how when they are older they need to take more responsibility for their own learning. In other words, Hanah is being more demanding: *"They are not children anymore and the way I am talking to them is different"*. As a result, several of the students have become more open and engaged. Hanah also feels that because she has now been teaching the class over a couple of years, she has finally reached a point where she knows the students well enough to better plan how to motivate them.

The three students Hanah initially placed at the lower end of the scale at number 1, all move up, Fatima as far as number 5. Hanah is struggling for a while trying to get Fatima to respond to her. She has an attitude of not caring about the subject and even refuses to read during individual reading tests. Slowly, Fatima begins to change her attitude. She starts asking questions in class and comes to Hanah when she needs help. Her performance in Arabic improves from being at the bottom of the class to matching the average performance level. I ask Hanah what finally made Fatima change her attitude? Hanah thinks that Fatima's problem was that she thought it was too hard for her to learn Arabic since she was from a non-Arabic language background. But with Hanah constantly telling her that: *"You can do it. I believe you can do it and I*

want to help you", Fatima's confidence grew and she decided that she wanted to work harder. Hanah is involving her in activities and giving her responsibilities in class.

Figure 4.12: Changes in Hanah's teacher-student relationships over 6 months[3]

1 Distant	2	3	4 Average	5	6	7 Close
Self Other	Self Other	Self Other	Self Other	Self Other	Self Other	Self Other
			Malika		Maja	
		Hiba	Ameena		Said	
			Rafiq	Yahir	Azim	
		Oma	Anwar	Jamila		
		Raja	Latif		Rihana	
			Jenna	Naja		
			Kaela			
			Hamid			
			Yemena			
			Abdul			
					Shakila	
					Keila	
			Amal			
		Khalid				
			Fatima			

After 2 months - - - - - -▸   After 6 months ⟶

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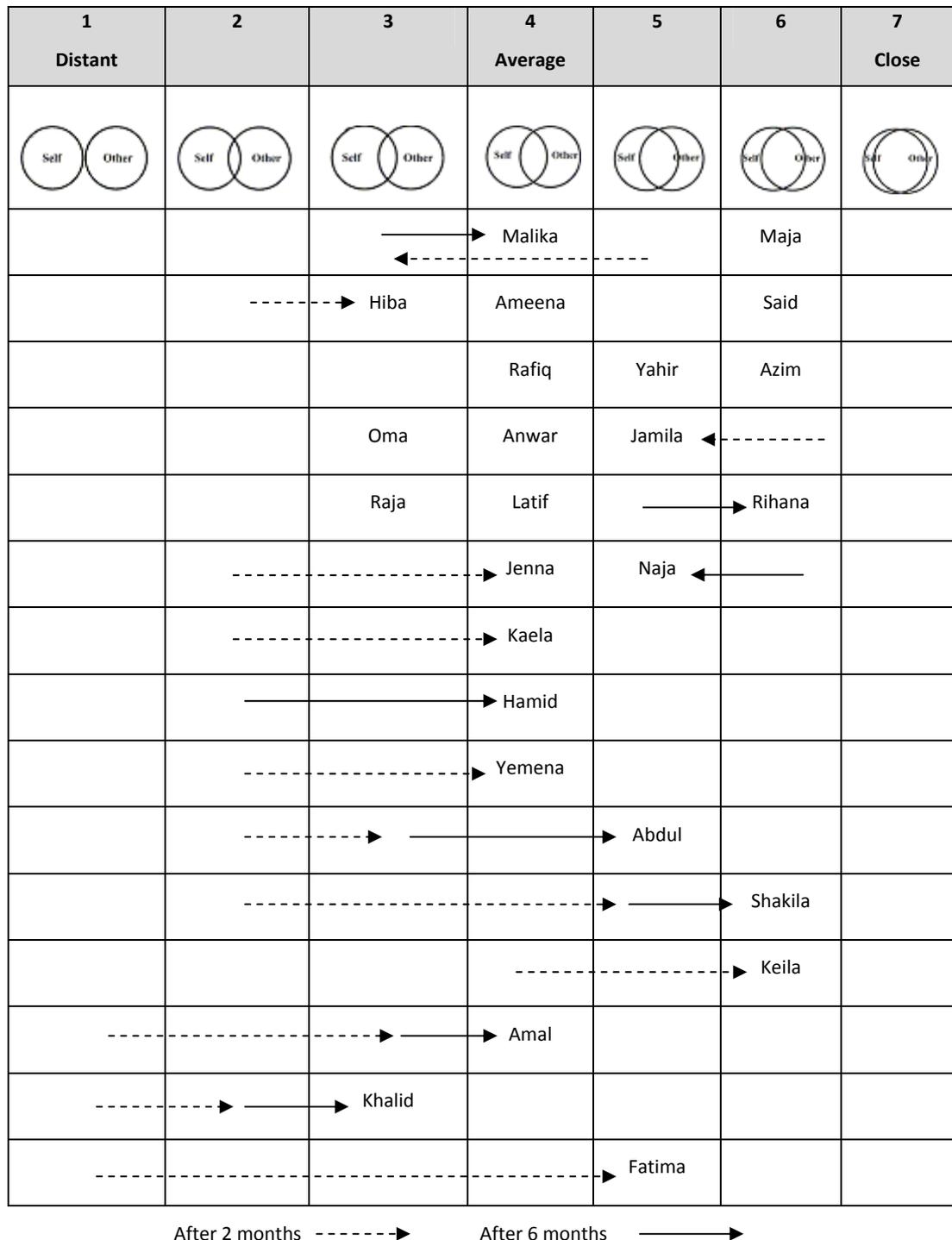
[3] During the six-month period five students, Reema, Caleb, Hadil, Asha, and Lydia have been shifted to other classes within the school due to the school's system of three different streams based on achievement levels.

Hanah finds that Fatima is becoming more respectful and seeking contact with her: *"Now she will come and talk to me during recess. She will say 'Miss, how are you?' Before she would pass me in the corridor without saying hi, or even looking at my face".* Hanah went through a similar process with Amal. Amal did not believe in herself and did not care to make an effort. She changes her attitude as a result of Hanah's constant encouragement and high expectations. Shakila and Abdul also respond well to Hanah's strategy of increasing their confidence through giving them responsibilities. Hamid and Khalid take longer to respond to this strategy, to Hanah's frustration, but at the time of the third interview Hanah has finally succeeded in making them more responsive.

One student whose relationship with Hanah has become strained is Naja: *"Last year she was an angel in class, but now she is not paying attention, she is not doing her work, and she answers back".* Hanah still feels that their relationship is close, but moves Naja from number 6 to 5 on the scale. Hanah talks with other teachers at the school to check whether they are experiencing the same change in Naja's behaviour, which they are. Hanah then talks with Naja's mother and discovers that Naja's grandmother is sick with cancer and Naja's mother has to spend a lot of time caring for her. As a result, Naja has had less supervision and help with her schoolwork. Hanah makes an effort to talk with Naja and show her that she cares. Hanah stresses that she thinks it is important that *"I make her understand that even though she behaves badly, I will still talk to her".*

Case summary

It is challenging for a teacher to develop close relationships with students when teaching as many as 240 students across classes. Hanah works hard to learn the names of all her students, and to learn something about them that helps her remember each individual. If she realises that she is not able to put a name to a face, she goes to find the student just to have a conversation that will make her remember. Hanah focuses her efforts on encouraging students who are disengaged. However, it is first when she has had a class for more than a year that Hanah knows her students well enough to know what each student needs in order to learn effectively.

Concluding comments

Each case study poses different challenges for how to develop good relationships with students. For example, in Idun's case, how do you as a Social Science teacher develop good relations with a group of disengaged young men in a vocational education stream? Mindy, Christine, and Paul are also teaching disengaged youth, but while Christine and Paul have students with low learning achievement, Mindy's students are academically high-achievers. Mindy has the particular challenge of managing and supporting a student with mental health problems. Unlike the other teachers, Hanah has to form relationships with a large number of students. Agnes, who is 20 years into her career, and now teaching small classes, realises that some of her students can still be invisible to her. A common understanding of successful relational strategies across multiple teacher stories might inform the design of teacher-training for improving teacher-student relations.

In my next chapter, I consider the characteristics of students that the teachers reported to have close versus distant relationships with. This information highlights the types of students that teachers need to make an extra effort to reach out to.

CHAPTER 5

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS: CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

In this chapter, I discuss how the teachers defined a good teacher-student relationship, and how their relationships with students changed over a period of six months. The teachers also identified student characteristics they felt explained differences in quality of relationships. Teacher characteristics were identified with the Model of Interpersonal Teacher Behaviour (MITB) (Wubbels, 2013).

Change in teacher-student relationships over six months

The use of the IOS scale as a tool for creating a visual map of the closeness in teacher-student relationships generated a discussion between the teachers and me around the question: How close is a good teacher-student relationship? The teachers had different perceptions about their positioning on the IOS scale. Idun, who spent a lot of time talking with her students and counselling them, described a good teacher-student relationship as a number 5 and above on the scale. Mindy preferred to be between 4-6, while Paul and Hanah wanted to reach a level of closeness with students illustrated by numbers 5 and 6. For Agnes, number 5 was the most ideal. Christine used the whole range of the scale, and saw it as natural for relationships to move up the scale to higher levels of closeness as teacher and student got to know each other. The teachers expressed that some distance in relationships with students was necessary, and that number 7 on the scale might represent a relationship that was too close, more like a family relationship. They explained that very close teacher-student relationships can put teachers in danger of too much self-disclosure that can compromise their professional role and authority in the classroom (Aultman et al., 2009).

The IOS maps illustrating the teachers' perceived closeness to students, presented in the individual case studies, confirm the dynamic nature of teacher-student relationships, as highlighted in existing research (Davis, 2003; O'Connor et al., 2011; Spilt et al., 2012a). Overall, the quantitative analysis of the teachers' IOS-ratings showed that the percentage of students who the teachers felt they had a distant relationship with, rated at number 1-3 on the IOS scale, was reduced by 17 percent, from 36 to 19 percent (26 to 14

students) (Figure 5.1). The percentage of close relationships, consistent with the teachers' perceptions of good teacher-student relationships, encompassing numbers 5-7 on the scale, similarly increased by 17 percent.

Figure 5.1: Close relationships increased by 17% over 6 months
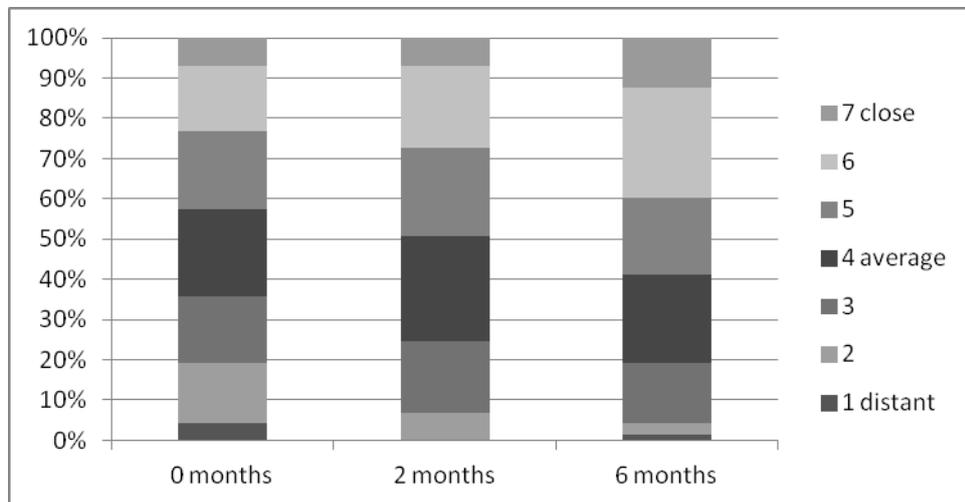
The percentage of students with a distant relationship with the teacher, at 36 percent at the time of the first interviews, was higher than in other studies. As noted in Chapter 2, three studies found that the percentage of students in their samples with sub-optimal relationships with teachers were between 13-25 percent (Murray and Greenberg, 2000; O'Connor and McCartney, 2007; Pianta, 1994). These studies had larger samples and included only kindergarten and primary school students. The 17 percent increase in close relationships in this study seems to be a large improvement over only six months, especially in the context of existing research indicating a decline in the quality of teacher-student relationships across one school year (Opdenakker et al., 2012), and across grade levels (Niehaus et al., 2012; O'Connor, 2010; O'Connor and McCartney, 2007). However, a Dutch study (Spilt et al., 2012c) evaluating the effectiveness of a relationship-based reflection programme, found that closeness increased in 50 percent of teacher-student relationships during the same time period of six months.

Christine and Idun attributed the improvement in relationship quality to a gradual process of a teacher getting to know students in a new class. In other words, an increase in closeness was a natural process of relationship-building with new students, because it takes time for the teacher and students to get to know each other. This explanation by the teachers contradicts existing research

reporting a trend of a decline in relationship quality between teachers and students new to each other across a school year (Opdenakker et al., 2012). Nevertheless, Hanah, who was in her second year of teaching the same class, also reported a noticeable shift towards more closeness, with all but two of her most distant relationships moving to number 4 or above on the IOS scale. It might be that with her large class size, the natural process of developing closeness in relationships to students, as posited by Christine and Idun, took longer than for the other teachers with small class sizes. Reviewed literature supports this view by indicating that there are less teacher-student interactions in larger classes (Blatchford et al., 2011; Hollo and Hirn, 2015).

Another explanation for the increase in the teachers' perceptions of closeness to students can be social desirability bias (Spector, 2004), as noted in Chapter 3. Maybe after the first IOS mapping, the teachers felt a certain failure as a teacher, seeing students rated low on the IOS scale. For example, when Christine and Mindy talked about how they failed to improve their relationships with Leo and Nate respectively, they partly blamed the students' mental health as a barrier to a closer connection. They also suspected the students had autism, although they were not diagnosed. Still, my observations of the teachers were that they were highly self-critical during interviews. For example, the teachers were frank in reporting relationships that they perceived as not close (numbers 1-4 on the IOS scale): 58 percent at the time of the first interviews, and 41 percent at the last interview. In my view, sometimes students have problems that are too complex for one teacher to handle on their own, instead needing a whole school approach (Weare, 2000), with the student being supported by adults across the school and health services. Also, as noted in Chapter 2, student characteristics, such as personality, influence teacher-student relationship quality, as explored in the following section.

Student characteristics influencing the teacher relationship

The six cases identify a number of student characteristics that the teachers believed affected the quality of their relationships. This section presents findings across the categories of students' school attendance, personality and behaviour, learning achievement and engagement, and age and gender.

School attendance

Good teacher-student relationships can be a protective factor for students at-risk of school failure (O'Connor et al., 2011; Spilt et al., 2012a) by increasing students' motivation and engagement levels (White, 2013). School attendance is one measurement of engagement (Sander et al., 2010). The secondary school teachers in this study, Idun, Mindy, Christine, and Paul, taught students with low levels of motivation and engagement with school. The teachers highlighted low attendance as the first barrier to developing close relationships with students. For example, Idun only met Per and Roy once. Paul was supposed to be teaching a class of 10 students, but only five students showed up. Mindy struggled with Nate, who had periods of absence, but also in her relationship with Tyler, which was relatively close, a feeling of distance emerged when he was away abroad.

Student personality and behaviour

All six teachers identified the students they had the most distant relationships with as being introverted by nature, while their close teacher-student relationships were typically with extroverted students. For example, Idun lamented how her student Jan seemed to have a *"wall around him",* and Christine's student Poppy kept inside *"her shy shell"*. The teachers used words like *"shy, quiet, withdrawn, reclusive, reserved"* and *"less open"* to describe their introverted students. In comparison, extroverted students were described as *"outgoing, talkative, responsive",* and *"open".* The former behaviour can be categorised as an insecure relationship pattern where the shy student is avoiding contact with the teacher (Davis, 2003; Pianta, 2001). Nevertheless, there were examples of students with a shy personality making contact with the teacher. For example, the student Paul had the closest relationship with, Nathan, was described as introverted, but he initiated conversation with Paul and shared information about himself.

Thus, introverted students can still seek contact with the teacher, but it might be more challenging for them to initiate contact in a classroom with a large number of students. They would depend on opportunities to approach the teacher, for example, like Idun's student Jonas, who was *"very quiet and reserved"*, but because he was sitting at the front of the class he regularly took the opportunity to talk with her. Thus, as already noted, teachers might take longer to get to

know introverted students in a large class, slowing down the suggested natural process of increased closeness when getting to know new students. For example, Hanah's relationships in a large class of students she had known for over a year were spread across the scale, still with several students rated as distant. In contrast, with a new group of only 11 students, Agnes' teacher-student relationships were initially clustered in the middle of the IOS scale at average closeness, but soon increased in closeness over six months.

Teachers of multicultural classrooms should be aware that there might be cultural elements to whether they perceive students as introverted or extroverted. Extroversion has been characterised as a personality trait more typical of individualist cultures (Hofstede and McCrae, 2004). This might explain some of the frustration Paul had trying to connect with his Aboriginal students, and Hanah connecting with her Pakistani students. Both student groups belonged to cultures with higher collectivist values than Paul and Hanah (Hofstede, 1986). Paul was aware of this cultural difference, which helped him be more patient with students.

Another group of students who are likely to be disadvantaged by poor teacher-student relationships is students with behavioural problems (Nurmi, 2012; Roorda et al., 2011). The teachers in this study chose to work with challenging students and therefore were likely to have had higher levels of patience. In particular, Idun and Agnes displayed a high level of understanding towards disruptive students. For example, Agnes maintained a close relationship with Aisha despite Aisha having directed accusations of abuse against her. Likewise, faced with threats of violence, Idun was not intimidated, and went on to form a supportive relationship with a student who threatened to kill her.

My findings lend some support to the hypothesis that teachers develop good relationships more easily with students who match their own personality (Davis, 2006; Newberry and Davis, 2008). For example, Christine found it easier to get along with students who had a similar outgoing personality and were *"visual learners"* like her. Mindy related strongly to Riley because, like her, he was *"a dreamer"*. Christine explained matching students' personalities as a matter of *"matching students' energy and mood"*. She said that she was aware that being an extroverted person, introverted students found it difficult to open up to her. She was more likely to succeed in building relationships with quiet students if

she behaved in a quiet manner. Similarly, Idun confessed to sometimes causing introverted students to withdraw, because they were alienated by her *"talkative"* personality.

Learning achievement and engagement

The teachers did not perceive a pattern between the closeness in relationships and students' academic performance. Instead, they stressed that it was not how well students performed academically that made them feel close, but whether students were engaged and willing to work hard. For example, both Mindy and Hanah felt increased distance in relationships to students who were *"careless with their work"*, especially Hanah who spent a lot of time explaining her expectations to students. She described how her relationship with Amal improved once the student started making an effort, putting up her hand and asking questions, even though she did not yet perform better academically.

Table 5.1: Students' academic functioning per closeness to teacher[4]

Academic functioning	Very low	Low	Good	High	Very high
IOS scale	1	2	3	4	5
Distant (1-3)	67%	50%	40%	29%	17%
Average (4)	0%	13%	33%	18%	8%
Close (5-7)	33%	38%	27%	53%	75%

When cross-tabulating the quantitative data collected with the IOS scale and the AF scale in the first set of interviews, the data showed that only 17 percent of the highest performing students had distant relationships with their teachers, rated at 1-3 on the scale (Table 5.1). In comparison, 67 percent of the lowest performing students had distant teacher-student relationships. The teachers explained this by saying that low-performing students, who also had distant teacher-student relationships, were not motivated to learn and difficult to engage. However, low-performing students who the teachers perceived as making an effort, still developed close relationships with the teachers; 33 percent of 'very low-performing' students, and 38 percent of 'low-performing' students respectively. Thus, it is likely as indicated by previous research that the direction of influence between teacher-student relationship quality and

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[4] To present closeness in teacher-student relationships better visually in tables 5.1-5.3, numbers 1-3 on the IOS scale are grouped as 'distant' relationships; number 4 as 'average' relationships; and numbers 5-7 as 'close' relationships.

learning achievement is indeed bidirectional and mitigated by student engagement levels (Hughes et al., 2008).

Age

Keeping in mind the relatively small sample, the quantitative analysis of the teachers' ratings of closeness to their students (Table 5.2) showed a higher percentage of close teacher-student relationships among secondary students than primary students. This is at odds with overall research evidence indicating that teacher-student relationship quality tends to decrease as students get older (Niehaus et al., 2012; O'Connor, 2010; O'Connor and McCartney, 2007). Hanah and Mindy highlighted the maturity of students as a factor positively affecting the quality of their teacher-student relationships. Hanah described how her students became more open to her demands for working hard as they became more aware of their own responsibility for learning while transitioning from Grade 5 to 6. However, that relationship quality increased among older students was encouraging since existing research demonstrates that older students need good teacher-student relationships more than younger students (Roorda et al., 2011).

Table 5.2: Closeness in relationships by primary and secondary level

IOS scale	Primary	Secondary
Distant (1-3)	37%	40%
Average (4)	29%	10%
Close (5-7)	34%	50%

Another possible reason for the higher portion of closer relationships among secondary students in my case sample was the small class sizes of the secondary teachers, which gave them more time with each individual student. The secondary students seemed to talk more with teachers about their problems; pressing teachers for a personal relationship (Newberry and Davis, 2008) more than younger students. Additionally, the secondary teachers were particularly motivated to work with challenging student behaviours.

Gender

The teachers rejected the suggestion that student gender affected the quality of their relations. The quantitative data showed a slightly higher percentage of girls than boys having close relationships to the teacher, which is consistent with existing research evidence (Cornelius-White, 2007; Roorda et al., 2011).

However, a higher percentage of girls also had distant relationships with the teachers (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3: Closeness in teacher-student relationships by gender

IOS scale	Boys	Girls
Distant (1-3)	37%	41%
Average (4)	23%	14%
Close (5-7)	40%	45%

Teacher characteristics influencing the student relationship

The small sample was also not conducive to draw conclusions about the influence of teachers' age and teaching experience on teacher-student relationships. Research indicates that teachers with more years of experience have more positive teacher-student relationships (Roorda et al., 2011), but that the effect on student achievement flattens out after the initial five years of teaching (Boonen et al., 2014). The teachers in this study had more than six years of experience, except Paul who was a new teacher. It is possible that his problems with his 7/8 graders were partly due to his lack of experience as a teacher.

In terms of interpersonal behaviour, all the six teachers demonstrated profiles that were high in control (steering) and friendliness (high in closeness) with the MITB tool (Wubbels, 2013). Three decades of research with the MITB identifies these teacher characteristics in teachers who have good ability to foster high quality relationships with their students (Wubbels, 2013). Such teachers are friendly and supportive, but at the same time take control of the classroom (Wubbels and Brekelmans, 2005). The teacher behaviour profiles of the six teachers in this study, as perceived by themselves, are presented in Figure 5.2.

The Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) that generates the MITB was administered to the teachers during the first and third interviews to gauge any change in the teachers' perception of their behaviour. The results of the questionnaire were consistent between the two interviews for most of the teachers, as indicated by the overlapping lines representing 0 and 6 months in the graphs in Figure 5.2. Research with the MITB shows that teachers' perceptions of their behaviour profile is quite stable throughout their career (Brekelmans et al., 2005). Therefore, it would be unlikely to register a marked

change in teacher behaviours even if the study had followed the teachers for a longer period.

Figure 5.2: Teachers' behaviour profiles at first interview and 6 months later
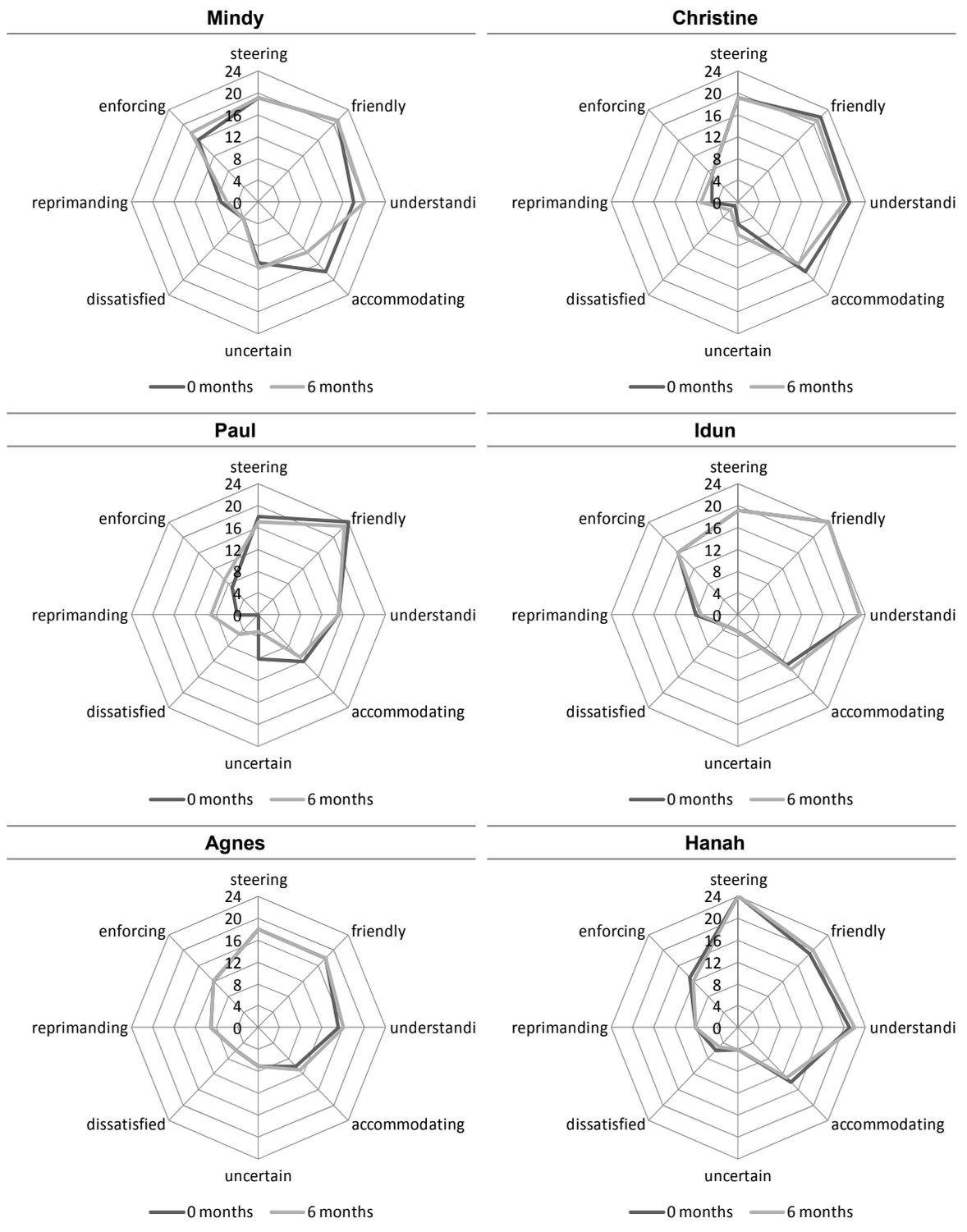
However, for Mindy and Paul, their six months were quite tumultuous with incidences of students being physically violent. Mindy struggled with Nate, who

had poor mental health, and she had to physically intervene when he attacked another student. At the time of the third interview, Mindy came across as sad and disappointed, and she said that because of the recent developments she did not feel *"quite so enthusiastic"*. Paul, who was a new teacher, was given a new group of Grade 7/8 students who refused to cooperate and were violently disruptive. The day Paul filled in the QTI during our last interview he had just had a riot in the classroom. This challenging student behaviour seemed to be reflected in Paul and Mindy's behaviour profiles showing a small reduction in their level of accommodating behaviour. Paul also seemed to become more reprimanding, while Mindy had become more enforcing (strict).

Concluding comments

The teachers became more aware of how they related to their students through participating in the interviews and seeing the closeness in their teacher-student relationships visually presented on the IOS map. Idun and Agnes both expressed that this was the case at the end of their last interview. For example, Idun said that the mapping exercise with the IOS scale *"made her more aware of why she felt closeness in the relationship to some students and not others"*, and that because of this increased awareness she had been making an extra effort to develop closer relationships with the students she did not initially have a close relationship with. Likewise, Agnes expressed that she had *"become more aware of why she felt close to some students"*, and that the IOS map had made her see students who had previously been *"invisible"* to her. The next chapter discusses patterns of relational strategies used across the six cases, and how the IOS map makes relational inequity in the classroom visible.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION: RELATIONAL STRATEGIES

I began this study with the question: How can teachers develop good teacher-student relationships? In this chapter, I discuss how the findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5 answer this question, and how the findings relate to existing research. Three main themes of relational strategies emerged across the six case studies: 1) gathering knowledge about students; 2) talking with students; and 3) managing student behaviour. The first theme considers how the teachers collected different knowledge about their students for various purposes. The second theme reflects approaches to how the teachers came to know their students through investing time in talking with them. Due to time constraints it might be difficult for teachers to be able to talk with all students regularly, but some of the teachers in this study managed well by being creative about when and where they found opportunities to talk with students. The third theme, behaviour management, examines specific strategies the teachers tried when dealing with student misbehaviour. In the last section of this chapter, I consider student and teacher characteristics that influenced the quality of teacher-student relationships. I argue that these findings show that it is not enough for teachers to know how to develop good teacher-student relationships; they must also be aware of relational inequity in their classroom.

Knowledge about students

In their descriptive case study of three expert teachers, Smith and Strahan (2004) found that one quality these teachers had in common was their 'impressive volume of knowledge about their students' (p. 185), but it might not be obvious what exactly teachers need to know about their students, and for what purpose. My case teachers knew about their students' academic performance, interests, and problems. They drew on this knowledge in efforts to motivate students and mediate barriers to learning.

Students' academic performance and personal interests

Research suggests that expert teachers constantly seek information about whether students are learning or not, and they use this knowledge to reflect on how to improve their teaching (Hattie, 2009, 2003). Hanah was monitoring students' performance so that she could detect when students did not

understand or engage. She would then ensure she provided these students with individual encouragement and support. In this way, her knowledge about students' weak academic performance was used constructively. However, research reveals that teachers tend to relate more easily to students with high academic performance (Newberry and Davis, 2008; Niehaus et al., 2012); providing motivated students with the most support (Patrick et al., 2008). Teachers might therefore inadvertently discriminate against students they perceive as low or average performers.

My case teachers rejected the suggestion that there was a pattern between closeness in their relationships to students and academic performance. Still, the quantitative data showed that 75 percent of the students the teachers rated as 'very high academic functioning' had a close relationship with the teacher, while 67 percent of the 'very low functioning' students had distant relationships (Table 5.1). However, the teachers explained that it was not how well students performed academically that made them feel close to students, but whether students were engaged and willing to work hard. For example, Hanah said that she hoped Amal *"will get a good mark, but as long as she is enjoying and learning that is enough for me".* This is consistent with Nurmi's (2012) finding that teachers reported 'less conflict and more closeness in relationships when interacting with students with high levels of engagement' (p. 16). As noted in Chapter 2, research indicates that the three factors of student learning achievement, engagement, and teacher-student relationship quality is part of a dynamic system of reciprocal influences (Hughes et al., 2008).

Idun, Mindy, and Christine knew a lot about their students' interests in cars, fashion, and sports. Gentry's (2011) study of 400 student-identified exemplary teachers found the same type of teacher knowledge, such as knowing about students' interests, hobbies, and finding 'something they do well' (p. 117). Agnes argued that having knowledge about students make them feel that *"they are seen by the teacher",* which in turn is essential for students' motivation to learn. Self-determination theory describes this need for being seen as an innate psychological need for belonging (Deci and Ryan, 2000). My case teachers specifically used their knowledge about students to find ways to engage them, for example through planning activities that could give students experiences of mastery; boosting students' belief in themselves as learners. This is consistent

with the second psychological need given in motivational theory; the need to feel competent (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Spilt et al., 2011). Agnes searched for a talent in each student to make them feel they were *"good at something"*. Likewise, Hanah used her strategy of giving students tasks during class; wanting them to *"feel special for being picked"*. She hoped that her encouragement would gradually awaken intrinsic motivation in her students through confidence-building. Thus, supportive teachers 'foster academic confidence' in students (Davidson et al., 2010, p. 503) which might increase their cognitive engagement, and subsequently their learning achievement.

Students' problems

For students at-risk of school failure, such as students with low engagement levels and externalising behaviour, it can be important for teachers to 'obtain knowledge of the home situation of students' (Fisher et al., 2005, p. 36). In my study, Idun in particular sought to know about her students' problems outside of school, because she explained that *"how students are doing in their private life also affects how they are functioning at school"*. Similarly, Aultman, Williams-Johnson, and Schutz (2009) described a veteran teacher as typically 'engaging in conversations with her students about their issues' (p. 638). These statements echo Tauber's (2007) warning to teachers, in his book about classroom management, that teachers cannot ignore that 'students' problems will accompany them to your classroom' (p. 11).

Idun found that she better understood students' challenging behaviour when she learnt more about their home behaviour. In her experience, students with behaviour problems had often experienced *"a negative socialisation process at home"*. When Idun understood why her students behaved the way they did, it changed the way she behaved towards them; making it easier not to feel angry. Similarly, Hanah discovered changes in students' home situation to be the cause triggering disengagement and challenging behaviour, like Kaela who got a new sibling, and Naja whose grandmother was sick with cancer. Similarly, Newberry (2008) found a pattern in her data showing that when the teacher understood the why of students' disruptive behaviour, the teacher felt that the student was deserving of patience and help. Thus, by getting to know students with challenging behaviour better, and understanding the underlying causes, teachers can move beyond labelling students as problematic, and are likely to

become more 'frustration tolerant' (Driscoll and Pianta, 2010, p. 38) towards such students. As demonstrated by both Idun and Mindy, they were able to respond with care and support, instead of anger.

Further, the teachers used their knowledge about students' problems to mediate in conflicts students had with other teachers, and to counsel students on appropriate behaviour and emotional control. Mindy also helped take some pressure off Nate by negotiating extensions to his assignments across subjects. Such interventions can reduce students' non-attendance by preventing suspensions and school dropout. Research shows that the quality of students' relationships with teachers is an important factor in students' decision to leave school (Fredricks et al., 2004). However, the teachers reported that they were conscious about boundaries around students' self-disclosure of personal information. They were careful not to push students to share personal information if they did not want to, but instead made themselves available if students wanted to talk.

Talking with students

Research characterises a good teacher-student relationship as open communication between teacher and student (Pianta, 2001). When my case teachers described how they defined a good relationship with a student, they emphasised the open communication they had with students they felt close to. Paul added that a teacher must respect students, and in return students need to *"respect you enough to do what you say"*. Thus, the teachers highlighted the bidirectional nature of teacher-student relationships, including mutual trust and respect.

Two-way communication

Idun said that a good teacher-student relationship is simply good communication between teacher and student. Several of the teachers stressed that good communication is a two-way conversation. Agnes pointed out that as a teacher you need to listen. Christine referred to this as the teacher's *"soft skills";* how well you are able to listen to students. This view is substantiated in research and theory of classroom management (Tauber, 2007). For example, teachers are advised to practice active listening (Cholewa et al., 2012; Pantić and Wubbels, 2012), and be aware of the distinction between one-way

communication; talking-to students versus two-way communication as in talking-with students. Research found that students perceive meaningful talk as informal and personal talking-with conversation, while interpreting being talked-to as damaging to the teacher-student relationship, because they feel that the teacher does not know them (Davis, 2006; Tauber, 2007). Being able to talk with the teacher about personal, non-academic issues can lead to closer relationships (Newberry, 2008). Therefore, students who do not engage in personal, informal talk with the teacher are disadvantaged.

It can be challenging for teachers with a large number of students in one class to find time to talk with each student individually. Studies have found more teacher-student interaction in smaller sized classes (Blatchford et al., 2011; Hollo and Hirn, 2015). However, the teachers' stories illustrate that finding time to talk with students was a matter of where and when you talk with them. Hanah and Idun, who taught larger classes, had creative ways to talk with students. During class time, Idun walked around the classroom to individual students' desks and talked with them one-on-one. She walked row-by-row, starting at the opposite row of students alternate lessons to make sure she was able to cover all students. Similarly, Mindy described how she invited conversation by sitting in close physical proximity to Nate during class. When it came to finding opportunities to talk with students outside the classroom, the teachers frequently used the hallways and their offices, encouraging students to talk to them at the beginning and end of the school day, as well as during recess. Idun also organised more formal progress discussions with each student at least twice per semester.

However, due to Hanah's large class size, as well as the total number of students she taught across classes, it took her longer to get to know students individually, putting demand on her time outside her formal teaching time in class. On the other hand, even Agnes with her small number of students, stressed that it was necessary to use time outside class for helping students with behaviour problems so that she could be fair with time dedicated to all students, safeguarding the efficiency of scheduled teaching time. Female teachers might be more likely to spend additional time outside the classroom helping students, as research indicates that female teachers tend to have better relationships with students than male teachers (Cornelius-White, 2007). It might

also depend on to what extent teachers have an ethics of care attitude (Noddings, 1995); a friendly and helping interpersonal behaviour profile (Wubbels and Brekelmans, 2005). As discussed in Chapter 5, my case teachers all identified with such an attitude.

In addition to teacher-student interactions taking place at school outside formal teaching time, encounters outside of school can, in Mindy's words, "*change teacher-student relationships dramatically*". Hanah and Mindy both felt that talking with students outside of school positively changed students' perceptions of them, maybe because meeting their teachers in an informal context helped students see them as *"human beings"*. The same explanation of how spending time with teachers outside of a formal school context can humanise the teacher for students is offered in Gee's (2012) study of how teacher-student relationships changed during a residential fieldtrip. In Gee's (2012) study, students explained that it was fun to see their teachers in an unfamiliar context. One student commented: 'We stop seeing them as teachers and their individual personality comes out more' (Gee, 2012, p. 212).

Getting students to talk

If good teacher-student relationships are to develop through two-way communication, students must respond and engage in conversation with teachers. Noddings (2013) highlights this bidirectional nature of teacher-student relationships. Teachers also have a need for belonging and can feel rejected by students who are not responding to them (Newberry, 2008). In my study, Agnes addressed this challenge by explicitly telling her students that they had a responsibility to respond to her, so that she could establish a relationship with them: *"I think it is very important that they understand that if we are going to have good contact then they also have to share. It is about giving and receiving"*. However, a common characteristic of students with poor teacher-student relationships across my study was an introverted personality, consistent with previous research (Rudasill and Rimm-Kaufman, 2009; Wu et al., 2015).

Thus, a practical question for teachers seeking to improve relationships is how to get students to open up and talk with them. One strategy is for teachers to share personal information so students can get to know them (Uitto, 2012). Mindy said that one of her best ways to connect with students was to share personal information about *"her own worries and struggles"*. Hanah told her

students about her own experience of coming to Australia and learning English. In this way, she used her own story as proof that it was possible for students to become fluent in Arabic, if they were willing to work hard. Students interviewed in Davis (2006) reported that their 'most motivating teacher-student relationships' (p. 216) were with teachers who talked about their own family life, school experiences, and learning difficulties.

Uitto's (2012) narrative study of students' written memories of their past teacher-student relationships illustrates that it is this information about teachers' personal lives that students remember decades later. These memories were typically of encounters students had had with teachers outside the formal school context. Likewise, Gee (2012) found that teachers seemed more willing to share information about their private lives in a more informal setting on a residential fieldtrip. Idun and Mindy in particular recognised the power of knowing students outside of school. Idun explained that many of her closest teacher-student relationships were with students who were her neighbours. Mindy thought that it was an advantage for teachers to live in the same community as their students. She characterised the relationships with students she did not meet outside of school as more casual than students who lived in her neighbourhood.

Nevertheless, the teachers were careful about how much personal information they shared with students. They mainly shared stories from their private life when it was relevant as illustrative examples in their teaching. Hanah and Agnes sometimes told funny stories about their children. Otherwise, the teachers generally shared information about themselves when students asked them directly. In Paul's experience, students were always curious to find out whether teachers had a family. While most of Idun's students did not know that she had lost several close family members in a short period of time, she shared this information with one student who suddenly lost a parent. Thus, the teachers actively shared personal information as a strategy for connecting with students, but they also guarded against too much self-disclosure that could compromise their professional role as a teacher (Aultman et al., 2009).

In addition to sharing personal information, humour can be another 'means by which students and teachers develop connections with each other' (Davis, 2006, p. 209). The case study by Cholewa et al (2012) examining the relational processes of an effective teacher of African-American students, demonstrates

that a teacher can share herself with her students by participating with students in activities and 'being playful and joking' (Cholewa et al., 2012, p. 265). Laughing together can strengthen classroom relationships (Cholewa et al., 2012; Uitto, 2012). In my study, Idun and Agnes described themselves as teachers who *"laugh a lot"*. Using humour was also one of Paul's strategies for connecting with students. He said that *"You have to have a laugh with them and not take yourself too seriously"*, although he admitted to losing some of his humour faced with the behaviour problems in his new class.

Yet another way to get students to open up and connect with them is to make cultural connections (Jones and Deutsch, 2011), such as sharing common experiences, interests, or style of language. Idun connected with her vocational students through the students' interests in cars, because she happened to know a lot about machinery. Youth workers in Jones and Deutsch's (2011) study of relational strategies in after-school settings connected with youth through dress code and using young people's 'slang and culturally resonant language' (p. 1391). Similarly, Christine connected with her students by taking an interest in fashion. She said that a teacher should not have to dress like students, but she thought it important that teachers understand the popular culture that children and young people are part of.

Managing student behaviour

The relational strategies of knowing students well and talking with them are one approach to behaviour management. According to such a relationship-based discipline model, you solve the problem of misbehaviour if you solve the relationship problem (Tauber, 2007). Idun's account can illustrate this assertion: in her experience, a classroom of unruly secondary students settled down after four weeks, but the same students continued to be disruptive in other teachers' classes. Unlike her colleagues, Idun invested considerable time talking with individual students. In addition to the pre-emptive strategies of gathering knowledge about students and open communication, my case teachers talked about specific strategies they used when they were faced with challenging behaviour from students. I discuss four strategies here: 1) the teachers tried not to be too prescriptive of secondary students' behaviour and gave them some leeway; 2) they tried to pre-empt and prevent disruptive behaviour; 3) they tried

to motivate students with rewards or giving them responsibilities; and 4) when all efforts failed, they involved parents.

Giving leeway

The four teachers of secondary students were regularly confronted with non-cooperative and confrontational student behaviour. They tried to balance the pressure they put on students to conform to appropriate behaviour with giving them some freedom, or *"leeway"* as Paul called it. Paul explained that instead of reprimanding a student straight away when there was an incident, he would talk to the student later when emotions had calmed down, because if not he risked *"losing them"*. In other words, Paul recognised students' need for autonomy, one of the three basic psychological needs in self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Spilt et al., 2012a), that is increasingly important as students get older (Scarlett et al., 2009). In addition to acknowledging teenagers' dislike for being forced into compliance, Paul attributed students' delay in responding to instructions to the cultural context of Aboriginal-Australian culture. Aboriginal culture is low in power distance (Hofstede, 1986), with Aboriginal families treating children as equal to adults; nurturing the autonomy of the child (Malin, 1990). Thus, Aboriginal students are unlikely to comply with demands they do not want to follow (Malin, 1990).

Like Paul, Christine taught mostly Aboriginal students, but she extended the principle of giving leeway to all her students. Christine's class used a restorative justice approach to discipline (Gregory et al., 2014): a student who had behaved inappropriately would take part in a meeting with the person or persons they had upset, discussing why their actions had hurt others. Mindy and Idun also counselled students on appropriate behaviour, such as taking a student aside in the classroom at the end of the lesson. Through these processes of engaging students in discussions about their own behaviour, the teachers built agreement on rules of behaviour together with students. Idun explained that when agreed rules were adhered to, she would acknowledge appropriate behaviour, but also give some leeway when inappropriate behaviour occurred, for example swearing. She believed that it was more effective to recognise reduced levels of swearing, and small improvements in behaviour, than insisting on no swearing at all, saying that *"You should praise a student for only swearing three times today compared to six times yesterday"*.

Engaging misbehaving students in conversation about their behaviour, as observed by Christine, Mindy, and Idun, is demonstrated by Lewis et al (2012) to be one of the most effective behaviour management techniques. In comparison, coercive approaches to discipline are found to increase students' aggression and disrupt their learning (Lewis et al., 2012). Idun summed up her approach by stressing that a teacher in her situation must be consistent and aware that students with behaviour problems need more dialogue with the teacher than other students. She said that the teacher must talk with students about what behaviours are not acceptable and why, and remember that they react negatively to being told off: *"Don't use the word 'don't'. They will respond with defiance and anger".* Thus, teacher strategies of *"giving students some leeway"*, and to involve them in discussions about the appropriateness of their behaviour, reflect an interactionalist approach to discipline (Tauber, 2007), in which teachers and students come together and share responsibility for solving conflicts.

Preventing misbehaviour

All my case teachers actively tried preventing student misbehaviour happening in the first place through a proactive use of their own body language, and by reading students' body language. Displaying positive body language in the classroom such as smiling at students (Cholewa et al., 2012; Newberry, 2010; Spilt et al., 2010; Worthy and Patterson, 2001), and laughing together with students (Cholewa et al., 2012; Uitto, 2012), can prevent misbehaviour by creating a climate where students feel included and liked by the teacher. It is equally important that teachers control their emotions, and not inadvertently display negative behaviour such as criticism, blame and ridicule (Cholewa et al., 2012; Knoell, 2012). For example, Agnes and Idun used eye contact to keep student behaviour in check, and to identify students having *"a bad day"*; needing extra attention. Idun did a row-call at the beginning of all her lessons, a mechanism for monitoring of attendance, but which Idun used with the specific purpose of seeking eye contact with each individual student. It was her main strategy for avoiding a classroom out of control. However, in the context of use of non-verbal communication, it is important for teachers to have knowledge about students' cultural backgrounds. For example, Paul and Christine could not use eye contact with their students for cultural reasons. In Aboriginal

culture, it is considered rude for children to have direct eye contact with adults (Board of Education NSW, 2008), and Aboriginal students typically avoid eye contact with teachers as a sign of respect.

My overall observation was that the attitude of the teachers was one of acceptance of conflict as a natural part of teacher-student relationships, and therefore not necessarily preventing them from developing close relationships with challenging students. In particular, Christine who was working with students with a history of violence and juvenile crime, stressed that good teacher-student relationships can have times of conflict, and they often start as a conflictual relationship. In her experience, *"a good relationship is managed. It can't be always positive, positive, positive. It can't be roses all the time"*. She equalled the development of a teacher-student relationship to a journey along the IOS scale, reflecting Newberry's (2010) description of a teacher-student relationship constantly evolving through different phases.

Christine noted that teachers can be lucky and get a student like Caleb that they immediately feel close to, but building a relationship with a student might in other cases be a long journey, because it takes time to build trust. Christine explained that with most students, she started the relationship at number 2 on the IOS scale, like with Ella, and gradually the relationship would improve as the student became more trustful. Christine said: *"Look, even though you have a student that you have a distant relationship with"*, it is not necessarily negative, because *"it is about understanding that distance"* at that specific point in time. According to Christine, it is natural to start with a distant relationship, and you have to give students *"space to warm up"*. Comparatively, Mindy's case illustrated that a good teacher-student relationship with high levels of closeness does not necessarily mean that it is an easy relationship. Her best teacher-student relationship was with Riley, who was often in conflict with teachers, and Mindy explained how she needed to invest considerable energy into maintaining their close relationship.

Christine and Mindy's cases highlighted that sometimes, despite a teacher's best efforts, some students will not respond and engage in a close relationship with the teacher, because they have problems that require more assistance than one teacher can provide. For example, Christine's student Leo, who displayed internalising behaviour such as signs of depression and apathy, did

not engage with Christine, and their relationship stayed stagnant at a low level of closeness throughout the period of this study. Mindy's student Nate initially responded positively to Mindy's increased engagement with him, but then relapsed into disengagement and violent confrontation which Mindy attributed to deterioration of his mental health. The relationships with these students demonstrated how difficult it can be for teachers to build good relationships with students in situations where students do not respond; making the teacher feel rejected (Newberry and Davis, 2008; Noddings, 2013). When Christine and Mindy's efforts to better connect with these students failed, they both expressed disappointment and sadness, demonstrating the emotional labour teachers experience as part of their work (Chang, 2009). Thus, some situations, such as Nate's seemingly poor mental health, would require a whole school approach (Weare, 2000); with support provided by a range of adults and services across the school.

Rewards and responsibilities

An interventionist approach to discipline, in which all power in the classroom lies with the teacher, is based on a belief that students learn appropriate behaviours through reinforcements such as rewards (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Tauber, 2007). A non-interventionist discipline approach on the other hand, which promotes democracy in the classroom, would argue that trying to manage students' behaviour through a rewards system is counterproductive to fostering intrinsic motivation in students (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Tauber, 2007). Hanah used rewards for encouraging students to work hard. She had her golden basket of surprises for her younger students, and certificates of achievement for older students. However, the reward that worked best for motivating her Grade 5 students was to play the Simon-says game that they loved. Likewise, Paul tried for a while to reward students by letting them make themselves a cup of Milo. However, he stopped when he realised that it did not make much difference to students' behaviour. Likewise, Idun, Mindy, and Christine, all experienced teachers, agreed that reward power (Tauber, 2007) does not work, especially with students who are already disengaged from school. This is consistent with Tauber's (2007) warning that reward power is fragile, because it leaves teachers powerless when students do not desire the reward.

However, Hanah also used the strategy of giving students tasks to help her with in the classroom. Agnes used the same strategy with students with externalising behaviour to distract them from attention-seeking behaviour, and she hoped that by giving them tasks they would feel they had a role in the group. The teachers ultimately hoped their students would feel self-motivated because they found learning interesting, not because they were promised a reward or given additional attention. In other words, through building students' confidence in themselves as learners through encouragement (Isenbarger and Zembylas, 2006), Hanah, Agnes, and Christine tried to awaken intrinsic motivation in students, or what Fredricks et al (2004) refer to as students being cognitively engaged. The teachers first tried to get students behaviourally engaged; following rules and participating in learning activities with effort and persistence (Fredricks et al., 2004). For example, when Hanah used her strategy of giving students tasks to help with in class, she expected that they might respond out of a desire to please her, but hoped that they eventually would enjoy the activity.

Involving parents

After the riot in Paul's class, the teachers at his school planned to visit the students' parents the next day to report that their children's behaviour at school was unacceptable. Thus, feeling that they had exhausted their strategies for dealing with misbehaviour at school, the teachers resorted to seeking support from parents. In terms of French and Raven's five types of power (Tauber, 2007) outlined in Chapter 2, coercive power did not work with Paul's Grade 7/8 class, because the students did not care about punishments the school might give out. In response to detention and suspensions, the students often chose not to come to school at all. On average, the school only had a 60 percent attendance rate. Further, these students did not respect the teacher's role in having the right to prescribe their behaviour, so Paul had no legitimate power. He and another teacher tried to use reward power by taking the students for a hot chocolate at the local café, but it did not stop students swearing at him once the chocolate was consumed. The students had no respect for his expertise as a teacher, so he had no expertise power.

The last type of power is referent power (Tauber, 2007), in which the students would cooperate with Paul, because they liked him, and valued their relationship with him. Referent, or relationship (Lewis et al., 2005), power is

created through the teacher showing care for students, listening and communicating with them (Tauber, 2007). However, because of the continuous disruptive behaviour of his students, Paul saw no opportunity to start developing relationships with them. Instead, the school had a routine where the Head Teacher, not Paul, would have an individual talk with the misbehaving students. I believe this was a lost opportunity for Paul, because it is the teacher who talks with the student, who is likely to get 'the advantage of the relationship power that arises from the conversation' (Lewis et al., 2005, p. 739). Thus, by not organising to talk with his Grade 7/8 students one-on-one about their behaviour, Paul lost out on building his relationship power (Lewis et al., 2005).

In the context of Paul's school, involving parents in disciplinary matters usually did not prove efficient either. Paul admitted that in the past this approach yielded no long-term positive change in the children's behaviour, because even though the parents were sympathetic to the teachers' complaints, they saw their children as autonomous and responsible for their own choices (Malin, 1990), a common view held in Aboriginal-Australian culture, as noted previously. In Christine's case, also a teacher of Aboriginal students, she was able to successfully engage the help of some parents. For example, Zac's father wanted to know when Zac was not showing up to school, and when he was misbehaving. For Hanah, meetings with the parents were essential in her development of relationships with students. She felt that when she was able to have good relations with parents, their children were also more comfortable in approaching her.

However, while close parent-teacher alliances can help teachers better understand their students and motivate them to invest in their relationships with students (Thijs and Eilbracht, 2012), Christine warned that involving parents might jeopardise the quality of a teacher-student relationship. In her experience, some students might feel that she was telling on them to their parents, and that can risk *"killing"* some teacher-student relationships. Still, she thought that for the disadvantaged students she was working with, any parent who wanted to be involved was a positive factor. Students with poor teacher-student relationships are often further disadvantaged by their parents also having less contact with their teachers. Research shows that students who already have good teacher-student relationships have parents with 'higher quality interactions with the

school' (O'Connor, 2010, p. 187). Agnes confirmed this by confessing that her positive regard for students was often influenced by the extent of their parents' engagement with her.

A matter of relational equity

Research reveals that teachers are not necessarily aware of the differential behaviours that they display in the classroom, and how these behaviours affect their relationships with students (Newberry, 2010; Newberry and Davis, 2008). However, teacher-student relationships are fluid and can therefore change for the better (Newberry, 2008), as demonstrated in this study. However, I pose that it is not enough to educate teachers on how to develop good relationships with students; teacher relational strategies, without applying an equity lens to teacher-student relationship quality in classrooms. With the term 'equity lens', I mean that research and teacher education on the issue of teacher-student relationship quality, because of its importance to student learning achievement, should examine fairness of opportunity for students in one classroom to form a personal relationship with the teacher.

The use of the IOS scale to map the distribution of close and distant relationships with students in one class helped the teachers reflect on which students they had good, average, and poor relationships with, and provided an opportunity to explore why. Students with behaviour problems are one group of students identified in literature as being disadvantaged by poor relationships with teachers (Newberry, 2008; Nurmi, 2012; Roorda et al., 2011). This was not necessarily the case in my study, in which some of the most disruptive students had developed close relationships with their teachers. However, I had sampled these teachers because of their work with disengaged and challenging students. Therefore, they were teachers who enjoyed and sought to work with disruptive students, and probably had a higher threshold than most teachers for not letting students alienate them by misbehaviour. Instead, as explained by Idun, they were interested in understanding why students had behaviour problems, and how they could help students adjust better at school. Christine in particular, saw conflict as a natural part of teacher-student relationships, saying that *"it can't be roses all the time"*.

Similarly, some studies indicate that students with learning difficulties tend to have lower quality teacher-student relationships (Al-Yagon and Mikulincer,

2004; Baker, 2006; Murray and Greenberg, 2001; Nurmi, 2012; Roorda et al., 2011). My case teachers rejected that there was a pattern between students' learning achievement and the closeness in their teacher-student relationships. Instead, they posited that the key student characteristic explaining why they did not develop a close relationship with some students was because these students did not initiate contact with them. Also, in some cases, students did not respond to the teachers when they tried to engage them. Such students often had a shy, introverted personality (Newberry and Davis, 2008), but they could be any student, including both students with difficult behaviour and more average students, but who all avoided contact with the teacher.

For example, Agnes, a teacher with 20 years experience, was surprised when her IOS map revealed she had forgotten to pay attention to students who did not *"cause any trouble"* either academically or behaviourally. Newberry (2008) discovered the same in her work, referring to these students as the 'forgotten middle' (p. 96). She said that 'one is left to wonder about the middle-achieving students, those who bring no attention to themselves through academics or behaviour and keep to themselves' (Newberry, 2006, p. 50). Teachers working in multicultural classrooms also need to be aware that some students might be less likely to speak in class due to cultural reasons (Hofstede, 1986), such as Paul's Aboriginal-Australian students.

Noddings (2013) says that it is natural to feel more 'drawn to a responsive student' (p. 71), like Christine who said Zac was more *"fun"* than Leo, because a relationship is bidirectional and both parties in the relationship 'must contribute for there to be a caring relation' (Noddings, 2013, p. 13). Newberry and Davis (2008) confirms this assumption by discovering that when teachers felt pressed by students to develop a more personal relationship, they tended to find it easier to respond to students regardless of the challenges posed by their personalities (Newberry and Davis, 2008). This result was also supported by my data. For example, when students described as introverted initiated conversations with teachers, they also developed close teacher-student relationships.

However, if teachers have a passive approach to developing teacher-student relationships, students who fail to make contact with the teacher, will miss out. An ethics of care (Noddings, 1995) theorist would argue that the responsibility

for making contact and seeking to develop a close teacher-student relationship lies with the teacher, because the teacher-student relationship is an 'asymmetrical relationship' (Noddings, 2013, p. 48), in which the teacher is in a more powerful position. According to ethics of care theory, the teacher profession comes with a duty to care for students, regardless of whether or not the teacher likes the students. Thus, teachers must make an effort to develop good teacher-student relationships with all. However, showing care for students is 'hard work that requires continuous reflection on part of the teacher' (Noddings, 2013, p. xvii). Agnes talked about how it is a matter of finding *"a balance between me seeking contact with them, and they seeking contact with me"*.

The teachers' friendly and understanding, but strict, behaviour profiles identified in the MITB model are the characteristics of teachers who care for their students (Wubbels, 2013). Through the relational strategies of getting to know students and talking with them, teachers can develop a feeling of natural caring (Newberry, 2010). Idun noticed how her own behaviour changed when she understood why a student was angry and confrontational. Similarly, the studies of Worthy and Patterson (2001) and Newberry (2010) show how a process of working more closely with a difficult student changes the teacher's attitude of just showing care for a student out of a sense of duty, to a feeling of natural caring and liking of the student. Thus, showing care is more than behaviour, also incorporating the attitude of a teacher (Scarlett et al., 2009). Mindy described a caring attitude as doing *"little caring things"* for students, such as finding toilet paper for a student who came and told her that the students' toilets had run out of toilet paper. Through an ethics of care attitude, teachers are aware of their responsibility to make contact with all students. Noddings (1992) equals caring to giving a student your full attention in each encounter, no matter how brief.

Concluding comments

The case studies describe strategies of accumulating knowledge about students, talking with them, and actively using this knowledge and communication to understand and manage challenging student behaviours. This chapter illustrates that developing close relationships with students involves getting personal; having knowledge about students' interests and

problems, as well as understanding their cultural background, and not just knowledge about their academic performance. When the teacher makes an effort to get to know each individual student, the teacher is meeting students' basic need of belonging (Deci and Ryan, 2000), which in turn increases students' motivation to learn. Furthermore, a good teacher-student relationship develops through two-way communication between teacher and student. In other words, teachers should strive to talk-with students and not talk-to them. I suggest that these relational strategies can guide teachers in their efforts to improve their teacher-student relationships. Most importantly, I believe that teachers must be aware of their responsibility to develop close relationships with all students. Otherwise, the result will be relational inequity in the classroom; with some students being privileged while others are marginalised by their teacher-student relationship. The next chapter outlines this argument in greater detail by discussing how the findings of this study, including the development of the IOS map, contributes to research and teacher education.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: A TOOL FOR REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Teachers can develop good relationships with students by strategically collecting in-depth knowledge about individual students, through engaging them in conversation. If this knowledge is in place, together with effective teaching (Tauber, 2007), student misbehaviour is likely to decrease. However, I argue that it is not sufficient to educate teachers on how to develop good relationships with students without applying an equity lens to teacher-student relationship quality in the classroom. In this final chapter, I summarise this study's contribution to research on teacher-student relationships that can provide a basis for design of teacher education programmes. Included in the chapter is a commentary on the limitations of my study, and my recommendations for the direction of future research.

Contribution to research

The most distinctive characteristic of this study is the development of the new tool, the IOS map. The percentage of close teacher-student relationships increased by 17 percent across the six teachers as they used the IOS map to reflect on the quality of their relationships with students over a six-month period. Although the teachers partly attributed this improvement in perceived closeness in relationships to a natural process of getting to know new students, the teachers stressed that the change also had to be attributed to their increased awareness of relational inequity in their classroom. Thus, the IOS map can be a powerful instrument for engaging teachers in reflective practice on their teacher-student relationships.

My study contributes to all three research gaps identified in Chapter 1. First, the study contributes to knowledge about strategies teachers can use to develop good relationships with students. Overall themes of seeking in-depth knowledge about students and two-way communication emerged. These themes are in themselves common sense, but within these themes more specific questions arose such as: What should teachers know about students, and even their families and communities? Where and when can teachers find opportunities to talk with students? How do teachers get students to engage in conversation? Further, exploring the topic of relational strategies among a group of teachers of

students with challenging behaviours raised the question of how teachers can deal with disruptive students. Some theorists argue that a relational approach to discipline works best (Tauber, 2007). In addition to building good teacher-student relationships, my case teachers also turned to other approaches, such as rewards and involving parents, with mixed results.

The case studies demonstrated that teachers need to be creative in finding time for one-on-one chats with students during the school day. Also, the work of developing good teacher-student relationships does not stop at the school gate. My findings support existing research which shows that teacher-student encounters outside of school are instrumental in breaking down distance in teacher-student relationships through humanising teachers (Gee, 2012; Uitto, 2012). Ultimately, by investing time in conversations with students, teachers build their relationship power (Lewis et al., 2005); getting students to cooperate because they feel bound by a personal relationship with the teacher. For example, Idun who spent considerable time talking with students, often about deeply personal problems students were facing, reported to establish calm in a new classroom of unruly students after just four weeks. Comparatively, Paul who kept conversation with students at a relatively superficial level, and had no individual conversations with his new Grade 7/8 students, was at a loss to how he could get his students to cooperate. He lamented that even sending the students to see the Principal did not yield any results, because they would also *"tell the Principal to get fucked"*. Thus, Idun's ability to establish good communication with students, something Paul maybe lacked because of his inexperience, gave her far more authority in her relationships with students than Paul.

I do not claim that the relational strategies outlined in this study provide a fixed recipe for what teachers can do to develop good relationships with their students. After all, as articulated by Hanah: *"Each individual teacher has his or her own strategies and style of teaching. Another teacher might be doing something that will not work for me and the students I have"*. One cannot expect that one relational strategy is going to work for all teachers, with all students, in all contexts, all of the time. Sometimes factors outside a teacher's control influence the teacher-student relationship, such as students' low school attendance or mental health. Even teachers' perceptions of what constitutes a

good teacher-student relationship vary from teacher to teacher, as demonstrated by this study. However, the information about relational strategies identified here can function as a guidance note for reflection for teachers who want to find ways to improve their teacher-student relationships.

The second research gap this study contributes to is a deeper understanding of the characteristics of students who are likely to form poor relationships with teachers. As outlined in Chapter 2, a conflictual teacher-student relationship is particularly damaging to students (Hamre and Pianta, 2005), and has long-term consequences for students' success in life. For example, numerous studies have explored the high risk that students with behavioural problems have of developing a negative trajectory of poor teacher-student relationships (O'Connor et al., 2011; Pianta, 2001; Spilt et al., 2012a). The teachers in this study perceived a good teacher-student relationship consistently with previous literature as being characterised by open communication and low levels of conflict (Davis, 2003; McCormick et al., 2013; Pianta, 2001; White, 2013). However, Christine challenged the notion that good teacher-student relationships are void of conflict. Similarly, Idun's case highlights the importance of teachers seeking to understand causes of behaviour problems in order to connect with challenging students. This is essential, because one teacher can possibly break the negative relationship pattern of a student (Baker, 2006; Sabol and Pianta, 2012), but it requires considerable teacher effort and awareness (Hattie, 2009).

To my surprise, the student characteristic emerging as putting students most at-risk of poor teacher-student relationships was not disruptive behaviour, but students not making contact with the teacher. Different types of students had this characteristic, including students perceived as more average by the teacher because they did not draw attention to themselves through academic performance or behaviour (Newberry, 2008). It might be that the teachers in this study, who enjoyed working with challenging students, were more prone to neglect this 'forgotten middle' (Newberry, 2008, p. 96). However, it is likely that many teachers can forget about their majority of students when having to attend to a minority of students with learning or behaviour problems. Therefore, the IOS map might support the majority of average students, by making them more visible to the teacher.

This leads me to the third research gap I identified; the question of becoming aware and address relational inequity in classrooms. It is human for a teacher to connect more easily with students who match the teacher's own personality (Davis, 2006; Newberry and Davis, 2008), but this cannot be an excuse for only developing good teacher-student relationships with a few students. Like the example of Christine and her student Leo, teachers who are extroverted can find it challenging to connect with introverted students. Thus, if teachers do not consciously monitor their own behavioural tendencies, it might affect teachers' ability to treat students fairly. This study provides a typology of student characteristics that can be used by researchers and teacher educators interested in identifying students who are disadvantaged by poor teacher-student relationships (Murray and Greenberg, 2000).

Contribution to teacher education

I argue that the IOS map is a tool that can be used in teacher reflective practice aimed at addressing the problem of low learning achievement through discovering relational disadvantage in the classroom. The IOS map can provide teachers with a bridge between theory and practice by giving teachers immediate feedback for reflection (Newberry, 2008). This reflection on practice can 'bring to surface some of their unconscious ways of responding to students', and make teachers 'more aware of how they perceive students' (Larrivee, 2000, p. 298). Thus, to ensure that all students benefit from good teacher-student relationships, teachers can use the IOS map to identify and monitor which students they need to interact with more. For example, in this study several of the teachers discovered that students they had average levels of closeness to, were students they did not talk to regularly.

The IOS map can be used in teacher professional development in different ways: in reflective practice at individual or group level; in teacher education programmes; or in specific interventions aimed at improving teacher-student relationship quality. Although individual teachers can use the map to engage in reflection by themselves as part of their daily work, reflective practice with others might be needed for increased self-awareness to translate into better teacher-student relationships. Research suggests that effective reflective practice requires a partnership of discussion with others in order for change to happen (Day, 1999; Liu and Milman, 2010). In this study, I was the other

person, the coach or instructor (Liu and Milman, 2010), who asked questions and helped teachers reflect on their teacher-student relationships, and their thinking and emotions behind their perceptions. Importantly, the IOS map gives partners in such a discussion a language in which they can describe differences in the quality of individual teacher-student relationships (Bibby, 2009).

At the level of teacher education in general, I join Hughes (2012) in calling for both 'pre-service and in-service teachers to be provided with instruction and consultation in teaching practices found to create a positive social and emotional climate for learning' (p. 325). Combined with the case studies and the literature review explaining the importance of teacher-student relationship quality for students' learning achievement, the IOS map forms a pragmatic tool for use in teacher education programmes. The case studies illustrate how the IOS map can be used and provide a window into the emotional labour (Chang, 2009) teachers engage in while teaching. Thus, the case studies become a vehicle for emotional sharing through descriptions of challenges in real-time teacher-student relationships (Newberry, 2008; Riessman, 2007). Reading the stories of teachers told in this study can hopefully have the potential to mobilise an audience of other teachers in an interpretation of their relational strategies that in turn can lead to a change in how they relate to their students (Riessman, 2007).

In summary, the IOS map and teacher case studies can be useful for teachers, researchers, and teacher educators who are interested in assessing the quality of teacher-student relationships. The case studies and identified relational strategies provide specific examples that can inform teacher educators in designing teacher education programmes aimed at increasing teachers' self-understanding of their interpersonal behaviour in the classroom. I am in the process of submitting a journal article to *Teaching and Teacher Education*, in response to its presentation of Newberry's adaptation of the IOS scale (Newberry and Davis, 2008), illustrating how my further development of the IOS scale into a mapping tool can be used for reflective practice on relational equity. Further, teacher education programmes ought to introduce teachers to research literature on teacher-student relationships, to provide them with an understanding of the strong empirical evidence on the importance of teacher-student relationships compared to other influences on students' learning. The

literature reviewed in this study gives a compelling argument for why a teacher should invest time in developing good teacher-student relationships. For this purpose, I have submitted a version of my literature review for publication to the journal *Review of Educational Research*.

Finally, the 17 percent increase in close teacher-student relationships across the six case studies, as well as Christine's argument that conflict is part of developing a good teacher-student relationship, confirms that the nature of teacher-student relationships are fluid and can change (Newberry, 2010, 2008). This should give hope to teachers who want to improve their relationships with students, and in turn improve the quality of education (Sabol and Pianta, 2012). Whether the increase in teachers' perceived closeness in relationships with students was a permanent change, would be for future studies to investigate. Mindy's relationship with Nate indicated that when Nate first responded positively to Mindy's increased efforts to communicate and connect, Mindy felt encouraged and motivated to persist. However, when Nate stopped responding to her, Mindy became disheartened. Likewise, Christine was unable to improve her relationship with Leo, due to his guardedness. Thus, the effect on improved teacher-student relationship quality as a result of the use of the IOS map would likely depend on the level of positive response teachers receive from students. This is consistent with theory and research emphasising the bidirectional nature of teacher-student relationships, and teachers' need for student response (Newberry and Davis, 2008; Noddings, 2013). Consequently, in situations with particularly challenging students, it is probably even more important that the IOS map be used in discussion with others (Day, 1999; Liu and Milman, 2010) to achieve sustained improvements in teacher-student relationships.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

The small sample size of this study limits the generalization of findings. However, the purpose of the study was not to come up with an authoritative list of relational strategies that is applicable to all teachers in all cultures and teaching contexts. Instead, the purpose of the study was to 'provide better understanding and illuminate the process' (Hart, 1998, p. 47) of how good teacher-student relationships are formed through an in-depth exploration of the experience of a few research participants. Thus, the case study design did not allow for data to be statistically generalised to all teachers as a population due

to the small sample (Robson, 2011), instead the case study findings have been generalised to existing theories and knowledge (Riessman, 2007; Yin, 2009). In this way, I agree with Newberry's (2008) observation that information at micro-level 'contains foundational elements of humanity that can be applied globally' (p. 164). I believe that as claimed by self-determination theory, the need for belonging is an innate need (Deci and Ryan, 2000), and therefore universal and relevant in the realities of all teachers and students, irrespective of context.

Another limitation of the small sample is that it is difficult to see meaningful differences in relational strategies according to teacher characteristics such as gender, age, and teaching experience. For example, the sample included only one male teacher, so a pattern in gender match between teachers and students could not be explored. Existing research indicates that female teachers have better relationships with students than male teachers (Cornelius-White, 2007; Spilt et al., 2012b), although a recent study by Opdenakker, Maulana, and Brok (2012) contradicts this by showing that characteristics of cooperation and friendliness were 'associated more with male teachers' (p. 113). However, both male and female teachers seem to have more conflictual relationships with boys than with girls (Spilt et al., 2012b), indicating that students might not necessarily benefit from teacher-student gender matching (Cho, 2012; Spilt et al., 2012b).

It could therefore be interesting to use the IOS map in future research with larger samples of teachers, including different age groups, levels of teaching experience, and teaching contexts. For example, extending research on teacher-student relationships with the IOS mapping tool to a variety of cultural and country contexts, could explore to what extent the themes of relational strategies identified in this study contain 'foundational elements of humanity that can be applied globally' (Newberry, 2008, p. 164). It is also likely that conducting this type of research among a sample of teachers who do not have a strong belief in the importance of teacher-student relationships for learning achievement can yield other findings. For example, I would expect different relational strategies to be proposed by teachers who have a coercive approach to discipline (Tauber, 2007).

Further, I recommend that future research with the IOS map that seeks to explore whether changes in relationships can be attributed to the reflective function of the tool, should base itself on a sample of teachers who have been

teaching a group of students for more than one year. My case teachers stressed that it takes time to develop trust with new students, and therefore the quality of teacher-student relationships gradually evolve from distant to close over time. With a large group of students, Hanah claimed that it takes her one year before she knows students well enough to benefit from it in her teaching. Similarly, in her comments to reading her case study, Mindy highlighted that because teachers in general have a limited amount of time in which to develop individual relationships with students, it can take years to develop a close relationship, especially in situations when *"a student does not trust adults and the institution of education"*. A longitudinal dimension to future research of one year or longer, as opposed to the six-month period of this study, could also allow for tracking of improvement in student learning achievement in parallel with IOS data.

As explained in Chapter 3, this study did not include students' perspectives or observation of classroom practice, because I wanted to focus on teachers' interpretations of their realities. However, in future research, it could be interesting to administer the IOS map to students to rate their teachers; exploring the patterns in teacher characteristics across distant and close relationships, again triangulating the IOS data with MITB data. Additionally, from a student perspective, it could be valuable to examine relational strategies that students are using to connect with their teachers.

In conclusion, the topic of teacher-student relationships is essential to education because of its link to student motivation and learning achievement. Consequently, the topic is important because all students have the right to an education that develops their full potential (UN General Assembly, 1989). Teachers can develop good relationships with students by strategically collecting in-depth knowledge about individual students and by engaging them in conversation. However, my argument is that it is not sufficient to educate teachers on how to develop good relationships with students without applying an equity lens to teacher-student relationship quality in their classroom. What is distinctive about this study is the development of the new IOS map. By using the IOS map to reflect on the quality of their teacher-student relationships over a period of six months, the percentage of close relationships across the six teachers increased by 17 percent. The teachers partly attributed this change to

their increased awareness of relational inequity in their classrooms made visible to them through the IOS map. Thus, the IOS map is potentially a powerful instrument for engaging teachers in reflective practice on their relationships with students. As a result, better teacher-student relationships will foster students who are happier at school, and intrinsically motivated to learn, because they feel that they are liked by their teacher.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: The IOS and AF scales sheet administered at first interview

Please CIRCLE the picture below which best describes your relationship
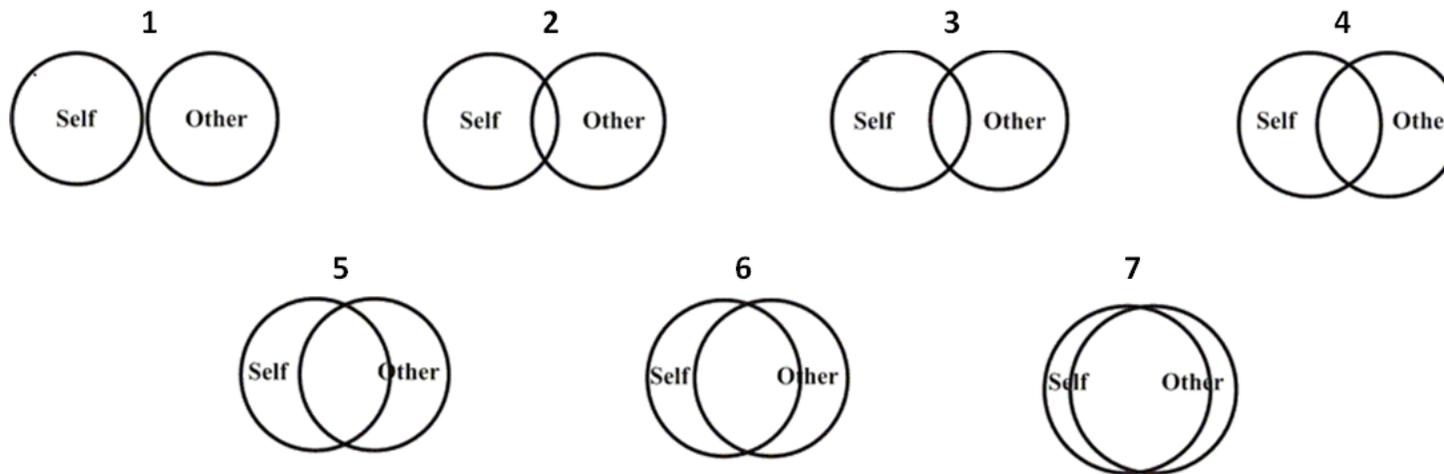
Teacher Assessment of Student Academic Functioning
Compared to other students in my class, the overall academic performance of this child is . . .

Using the point scale below, please CIRCLE the appropriate number

1. Very low functioning   2. Low functioning   3. Good functioning   4. High functioning   5. Very high functioning

Subject: _____

First name or initials student: _____   Gender: M / F   Name teacher: _____   Date: _____

Appendix B: Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction[5]

Teacher: _____   Date: _____

Please rate yourself by circling the number to each question that best corresponds to your answer

|	Never				Always
1. I talk enthusiastically about my subject.	0	1	2	3	4
2. I trust the students.	0	1	2	3	4
3. I seem uncertain.	0	1	2	3	4
4. I get angry unexpectedly.	0	1	2	3	4
5. I explain things clearly.	0	1	2	3	4
6. If students don't agree with me, they can talk about it.	0	1	2	3	4
7. I am hesitant.	0	1	2	3	4
8. I get angry quickly.	0	1	2	3	4
9. I hold the students' attention.	0	1	2	3	4
10. I am willing to explain things again.	0	1	2	3	4
11. I act as if I do not know what to do.	0	1	2	3	4
12. I am too quick to correct students when they break a rule.	0	1	2	3	4
13. I know everything that goes on in the classroom.	0	1	2	3	4
14. If students have something to say, I will listen.	0	1	2	3	4
15. I let the students take charge.	0	1	2	3	4
16. I am impatient.	0	1	2	3	4
17. I am a good leader.	0	1	2	3	4
18. I realize when students don't understand.	0	1	2	3	4
19. I am not sure what to do when students fool around.	0	1	2	3	4
20. It is easy for students to have an argument with me.	0	1	2	3	4
21. I act confidently.	0	1	2	3	4
22. I am patient.	0	1	2	3	4
23. It's easy to make me appear unsure.	0	1	2	3	4
24. I make mocking remarks.	0	1	2	3	4
25. I help students with their work.	0	1	2	3	4
26. Students can decide some things in my class.	0	1	2	3	4
27. I think that students cheat.	0	1	2	3	4
28. I am strict.	0	1	2	3	4

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[5] 48-item short version of the QTI questionnaire, teacher version (Wubbels and Levy, 1991)

		Never				Always
29.	I am friendly.	0	1	2	3	4
30.	Students can influence me.	0	1	2	3	4
31.	I think that students don't know anything.	0	1	2	3	4
32.	Students have to be silent in my class.	0	1	2	3	4
33.	I am someone students can depend on.	0	1	2	3	4
34.	I let students decide when they will do the work in class.	0	1	2	3	4
35.	I put students down.	0	1	2	3	4
36.	My tests are hard.	0	1	2	3	4
37.	I have a sense of humor.	0	1	2	3	4
38.	I let students get away with a lot in class.	0	1	2	3	4
39.	I think that students can't do things well.	0	1	2	3	4
40.	My standards are very high.	0	1	2	3	4
41.	I can take a joke.	0	1	2	3	4
42.	I give students a lot of free time in class.	0	1	2	3	4
43.	I seem dissatisfied.	0	1	2	3	4
44.	I am severe when marking papers.	0	1	2	3	4
45.	My class is pleasant.	0	1	2	3	4
46.	I am lenient.	0	1	2	3	4
47.	I am suspicious.	0	1	2	3	4
48.	Students are afraid of me.	0	1	2	3	4

Questionnaire coding:

8 MITB behaviours	QTI statements
Steering	1,5,9,13,17, 21
Friendly	25,29,33,37,41,45
Understanding	2,6,10,14,18,22
Accommodating	26,30,34,38,42,46
Uncertain	3,7,11,15,19,23
Dissatisfied	27,31,35,39,43,47
Reprimanding	4,8,12,16,20,24
Enforcing	28,32,36,40,44,48

Appendix C: The IOS map

1 Distant	2	3	4 Average	5	6	7 Close
Self Other	Self Other	Self Other	Self Other	Self Other	Self Other	Self Other

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Introductory remarks:

- Thank the research participant for participating in the study.
- Explain the purpose of the study.
- Duration of the interview will be approximately 1 hour.
- Explain and discuss the ethical considerations of the study:
    - Research participants' names, the names of students, and the school will not be used in the reporting of this research.
    - The right to withdraw from the study if you should wish to.

A. Initial interview

1. Ask the teacher to talk about his or her background as teacher

- Tell me about your teacher career so far.
- How long have you been teaching?
- Why did you become a teacher (motivation)?
- Age; educational background
- Number of years teaching
- What kind of schools have you worked at?
- What kind of students have you taught? (grade levels, subjects, types of students, challenges)
- Describe your current students/ class: how long have known them; size of class; boys and girls.
- Describe what you think is a good teacher-student relationship.

2. Mapping closeness in relationships to current students with the IOS scale

- Choose one class of students you are teaching at the moment.
- Rate each teacher-student relationship by circling one of the seven IOS pairs of circles; and rate how you assess the academic functioning of the student according to their classmates on the AF scale
- I organise the rated teacher-student relationships on a table from distant (1) to close (7).
- Does this result surprise you in any way?
- What is common for the students who you have a close, average, and distant relationship with?
- Do you see a pattern between the closeness of teacher-student relationships and academic performance of the students?

3. **Discussing strategies for developing good teacher-student relationships**

- Describe the strategies you use to develop good teacher-student relationships.
- For example, how do you welcome a new student?
- What are the teaching methods you use?
- Can you do anything differently with the class of students you have mapped in this interview?

4. **Mapping of teacher interpersonal behaviour**

- Explain the QTI questionnaire and the MITB.
- Rate the statements in the questionnaire by circling the number that best corresponds to your answer. For example: If you always think that you 'talk enthusiastically about your subject' – circle 4.
- If you think you 'never talk enthusiastically about your subject' – circle 0.
- You can also choose the numbers 1,2,3, which are in-between.

B. Second interview

- Ask the teacher to talk about the students in the class that was mapped during the first interview. Discuss changes in IOS scale ratings while looking at the IOS map (note changes with a pen).
- Ask the teacher to talk about what s/he has been doing in relation to relational strategies. Does the teacher find him or herself doing anything differently?
- Ask the teacher if s/he did anything to improve relationships that were described as distant/difficult during first interview. What happened?
- Has the teacher learnt anything new about the students?
- Discuss the MITB profile generated from the QTI administered during the first interview.

C. Third interview

- Ask the teacher to talk about the students in the class that was mapped during the first interview. Discuss changes in IOS scale ratings while looking at the IOS map (note changes with a pen).
- Ask the teacher to talk about what s/he has been doing in relation to relational strategies. Does the teacher find him or herself doing anything differently?
- Re-administer the QTI questionnaire.