A Child's Transition to School: A Phenomenological Study

by

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Abstract

As a kindergarten teacher, I have witnessed many ways that children and parents experience the transition to school—seamlessly for those who seem to fit into classroom rhythms with ease and joy; anxiously and, at times, with resistance for those who have difficulty finding their place. As a parent, I helped my own children navigate changes to their daily routines when school began. I also adjusted the rhythms of our family life to integrate with the school schedule, coordinating our daily plans with school arrivals and departures and planning family holidays during school breaks. When the transition to school goes smoothly for first-time students, it is easy to overlook the changes they are experiencing, and when a transition is rife with difficulty, they are often approached as problems to be solved.

For more than four decades, "problem" transitions have concerned parents, teachers, school administrators, policymakers, and educational researchers. The extent research conceptualizes the transition to school as "readiness," prioritizing the cognitive, social, and interpersonal skills a child needs for school as well as the practices and strategies that teachers, parents, and communities can use to make schools ready for children. With so much effort spent looking for solutions, researchers miss the opportunity to delve deeply into the humanness in this life-changing event. The review of the relevant literature that I conducted as part of this study uncovers the opportunity for phenomenological query and reflective exploration regarding a child's transition to school.

Inspired by Max van Manen's (2014) phenomenology of practice methodology, this doctoral study considers the experience of the transition to school for parents and teachers. A phenomenological approach is well-suited for exploring this extensively studied childhood transition because it seeks to understand the meaning structures of pre-reflected, lived

experiences before theories conceptualize such events. Interviews with three teachers and nine families reveal embodied, relational, and spatial-temporal events of preparing, arriving, separating, and welcoming during the transition to school. Lived experiences become the basis for phenomenological and philosophical reflections.

In three articles— *A Child's Transition to School: Review of the Relevant Literature*, *Phenomenology of the Parent-Child Goodbye* and *The Phenomenology of the Kindergarten Classroom*—I use this rigorous and sophisticated research method to explore some of the possible meaning structures of a child's transition to school. This dissertation reveals the co-constitutive nature of relationally intersubjective and generative human activities intentionally directed toward the child being in a classroom and becoming a student.

Preface

This paper-based dissertation is the original work of Lee Makovichuk. Research ethics approval was received from the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board and Edmonton Public Schools' Research and Innovation for Student Learning. *A Child's Transition to School: A Phenomenological Study*, Pro00092932, August 30, 2019. An amendment to research activities, to comply with COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, was received May 11, 2020.

I was inspired to undertake this study during a phenomenology research course facilitated by Dr. Cathy Adams and Dr. Michael van Manen. I systematically worked through a process of phenomenology of practice epoché and reductive methods (van Manen, 2014) to explore possible meaning structures of the parent-child goodbye on a first day of school. I recall the class discussion vividly, with Dr. Adams helping me to see the goodbye as a hope for someone, in this case the teacher, to watch over the child (Makovichuk, 2020). In that moment, I wondered if I had ever *really seen* a child's transition to school, even though I had witnessed many parents bring and leave their children with me as a kindergarten teacher. My dissertation topic had been revealed.

In this dissertation, Chapter Three is published as L. Makovichuk, "The Phenomenology of the Parent-Child Goodbye on the First Day of School," *Phenomenology & Practice*, vol. 15, issue 2, 39-51. The paper originated as a course assignment for which I was solely responsible, though I thankfully received feedback from my professors and classmates. After the course was complete–and while restructuring research activities with the onset of COVID restrictions—I developed the paper further.

Chapter Two and Chapter Four are articles under review in two peer-reviewed journals, as L. Makovichuk. Chapter Two, *A Child's Transition to School: Review of the Relevant Literature,* provides a foundation for further phenomenological research. I read the research using a phenomenological gaze, pointing to existing phenomenon evidenced in extant studies. Chapter Four, *A Phenomenology of the Kindergarten Classroom,* offers further phenomenological insight toward understanding the embody-ness and relationality of this common childhood milestone. In ongoing dialogue with Dr. Anna Kirova, my doctoral supervisor, I deepened my philosophical reflections on the pedagogical significance of preparing the classroom for the first day of school.

Dedication

To my sons:

Darren, who shows me that commitment with humour and kindness is a generous gift we can offer those we care about

and

Cameron, who reminds me that there is strength in humility and grace toward others and ourselves

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This dissertation would not be possible without the ongoing support of my family and community. I am forever grateful to all the people who encourage me to be the best version of myself.

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I sincerely thank my committee members: Dr. Larry Prochner, Dr. Cathy Adams, Dr. Linda Laidlaw, Dr. Blaine Hatt, and Dr. George Buck. I admire each of them as scholars and cherish the opportunity to learn from them. Their insightful feedback, critical questioning, and direction in the final presentation of this work have supported me in articulating the kind of pedagogy I value for children and families and early childhood educators and teachers.

I am very thankful to the International Phenomenology Writing Group, whose members are Dr. Gillian Lemermeyer, Dr. Maria Begoña Errasti, Janine Chesworth, and myself. We formed the group to support one another through phenomenological and philosophical dialogues on readings and reflections. Their solicitous interest in phenomenology contributed to my evolving thinking, even when the arduous writing process became isolating.

I thank the University of Alberta Child Study Centre community and my colleagues at MacEwan University. A doctoral journey begins long before the initial application proposal and course study. I've thought of you, the children and families, and colleagues who walked alongside me as an early childhood educator those many years ago. They all have a special place in this pedagogical work because it was my work with them that led me here.

Additionally, I would like to thank the adjudicating committee of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), who awarded me three years (2019, 2020, 2021) of doctoral fellowship funding (#752-2019-2507), and the University of Alberta Faculty of Graduate Studies for awarding me the President's Doctoral Prize of Distinction for the same years, in support of this doctoral research. Additionally, the awards for the University of Alberta

Recruitment Scholarship (2017), the Janet Sleigh Baxter Scholarship (2018), and the Andrew Stewart Memorial Graduate Prize (2021) gave me the confidence to venture into graduate study and research.

My heartfelt thanks to copy editor Theresa Agnew. Her kind and thoughtful close reading of my draft offered me further insight into the written word through the eyes of potential readers.

And I am eternally grateful to my family. They gifted me with their unconditional patience and devotion as I struggled through the writing and rewriting process. In *Writing in the Dark*, Max van Manen (2012) writes of the *dwelling space* researchers assume when writing phenomenological texts. I appreciate the long silent walks together and the many read-aloud with family members listening as I dwelled in the research and obsessed over words and ideas in pursuit of phenomenological wonder and insight.

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Glossary of Phenomenological Terms

*The **Epoché-Reduction*** is the primary phenomenological method developed by Edmund Husserl. This basic method involves two complementary movements, the epoché, and the reduction.

The ***epoché*** derived from 16th-century Greek, meaning "the suspension of belief" (Blackburn, 2016, p. 159), is defined in the phenomenology of practice as "abstention, to stay away from" (van Manen, 2014, p. 215). More commonly referred to as "bracketing" in human science research, the *epoché* is one of two corresponding actions and involves *putting aside* scientific explanations, taken-for-granted beliefs, and assumptions that get in the way of seeing a phenomenon. In addition to bracketing presumptions, the *epoché* is an *opening-up-to* phenomenon (van Manen, 2014) and is enacted in harmony with the *reduction*, not to make smaller (reduce), but instead "an attentive turning to the world" (van Manen, 2014, p. 218).

Originary is a term used by van Manen (2014) to describe "the *originary* sources of meaning" (p. 15, emphasis added). For phenomenology, sources of meaning consider leading primary philosophical and phenomenological texts to reflect on a singular lived human experience. The aim of phenomenology is not only to contribute to scientific thinking but to offer a compelling and original thought experiment for thinking differently by offering a new and insightful point of view.

Phenomenology of practice is Max van Manen's (2014) contribution to phenomenological research, and the approach is hermeneutic in nature. Building on phenomenological traditions and philosophical thought, van Manen articulates a thought experiment for strengthening reflection using descriptive and metaphoric devices for letting show human phenomena of professionals. Every day and common lived experiences of teachers, nurses, and other practitioners are the concern of phenomenology of practice researchers, who aim to understand possible meaning structures of pedagogical events. Phenomenology of practice is also ***hermeneutic phenomenology*** which confronts the limitations of the spoken and written word in a dialogic manner to make visible the social, historical, and psychological subjectivity of language and experience.

The ***prereflective experience*** is the primary dimension of the originary source of meaning in phenomenology research. It refers to the experience before it is reflected on and interpreted. In phenomenology and practice, van Manen (2014) uses the term "lived experience" to capture the

intent of *prereflective experience,* which entails one of the most challenging phenomenological notions. When describing, language brings an experience close and can also cover up an experience by interpreting the event to soon. Even when thinking of an experience, we risk distancing ourselves from the now moment by naming it as something. To grasp a ***prereflective experience,*** in phenomenological terms, is to describe an experience concretely, as to show the embodied, time, space, and relational elements of what constitutes consciousness. The "impossibility" of revealing a consciousness of a something before it is interpreted drives the phenomenological attitude toward an attentive and sensitive reading of the world. ***Primordial*** or ***primal impressional consciousness*** refers to this phenomenological attitude. Husserl refers to this attitude in terms of entangled structures of the singularity of a moment (retention) and an orientation to that moment (protention) that manifest in living experience (van Manen, 2014). As such, a ***prereflective experience*** is not just any experience but a lived experience that someone feels and touches.

The ***reduction*** or ***reduction-proper*** is the harmonizing movement of the *epoché.* The reduction comes from 13th century *reduce,* meaning "bring, lead back" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 645), and "refers to a certain attitude of attentiveness and style of thinking" (van Manen, 2014, p. 221). Suspending preconceived explanations, beliefs, and assumptions to *open* oneself makes the space for the reduction that leads back to the phenomenon itself. This Husserlian method involves several variations of the *reduction-proper*, such as the eidetic (variations), ontological (being), ethical (alterity), radical (self-givenness), and originary (inceptual). van Manen (2014) defines the *reduction-proper* as "meaning-giving sources of meaning" (p. 228-239) that a researcher uses in a reflective manner to reveal how a phenomenon shows itself.

Transcendental phenomenology is Edmund Husserl's founding phenomenology philosophy. Transcendental comes from 13th-century *transcenden,* meaning "climb over or beyond" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 826). Transcendental phenomenology refers to a search for the primordial meaning of phenomena. Though many philosophers and phenomenologists have followed and challenged Husserl's philosophical ideas, his contributions to the phenomenology method are undeniable and extensive, and arising from what he refers to as "intentionality," that which constitutes all consciousness—that "phenomena are someone's experiences belonging to someone's stream of consciousness" (van Manen, 2014, p. 91). This subject-object relationality is Husserl's quest for epistemological understanding.

Chapter 1: A Child's Transition to School

I come to this phenomenological study as an early childhood educator and parent. As an educator, I have taken part in many transitional events—preparing the kindergarten classroom for the start of each new school year, visiting children in their homes before the start of school, and adjusting the classroom in response to what I thought students were learning. As a parent, I took my children to school and watched them gain independence as they each navigated what it meant to be a student.

When a child starts school, a significant milestone is reached as they make the transition from home or before-school programming to school and the kindergarten classroom. Barnhart (1995) defines "transition," which arises from the Latin, *trānsitiōnem*, as "a change or passing from one condition, place, etc., to another," or "passing over or away from *trānsi*" (p. 827). The root "tion" refers to "a process of, a condition or state of being, a result of" (p. 816). These definitions describe the observable change the child goes through, still an indiscernible transformation is also occurring in the child's state of being. The child transforms in being a student at school. This childhood milestone holds relational changes for parents and teachers, as well. A parent becomes a parent of a student, and a teacher becomes the teacher of a particular group of students. These transformations are gradual, almost taken for granted, in the busyness of preparing to go to and being in school.

First-Day Greetings

I hear the expected first footsteps outside the door. "Can we come in?" says a voice from the other side. "Yes," I say, pulling open the door. A child peeks at me from behind the legs of a smiling woman. "Good morning. Welcome to kindergarten," I say, gesturing with my hand for the new student and his mother to enter. "You can pick any cubby you'd like, and once you put away your coat and bag, I have a name tag for you." I point to the tags placed neatly on a table. The classroom door swings wide; this time with exuberant voices. "Hello! Come in," I laughingly encourage the students with a wave of my hand. Within minutes, parents and children fill the classroom—placing coats on hooks, stuffing bags into the cubby spaces, pinning on name tags, asking where to put snack bags, and wandering around the classroom. And so, the sounds and the busyness of the school year begin. (Personal memory as a kindergarten teacher, May 2019)

In this depiction of the first day of kindergarten, I recount classroom preparations, opening the classroom door, feeling the bustling activity, and noticing a child peeking from

behind his parent's legs. This child's peeking can be easily dismissed as shyness on the first day of school. A child's quiet behaviour often blends into the momentum of other pressing activities until one's phenomenological gaze provokes a sensitivity to embodied moments. Attending to phenomenological universal existential structures, such as lived bodies, time, space, relationships, and things give rise to human phenomenon. Max van Manen (2016b) suggested that "a good description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience" (p. 39).

The significance of the first day of school is revealed in lived experiences, such as when a teacher welcomes a child who is peeking from behind their parent's legs. Further reflection may show that the parent's legs are a type of threshold, a safe place from which a child can prepare for the experiences of the classroom. The word "threshold" combines two notions, "thresh," meaning "to tread," and "hold," meaning *"*to foster, cherish, keep watch over; to continue in existence or action; to keep back from action" (Barnhart, 1996, p. 811-812). When entering the classroom, a child's "treading and holding" continue the child-parent relationship, while tentatively engaging with a teacher. This embodied moment shared between the child, a parent, and a teacher points to the phenomenon of inter-relationality in a child's transition to kindergarten.

Orienting to the Phenomenon of a Child's Transition to School

As an early childhood educator, I studied the child's transition to school from a pedagogical perspective. However, like van Manen (2016b), I believe pedagogy "requires a phenomenological sensitivity to lived experience (children's realties and lifeworlds)" (p. 2). When pedagogy—generally understood as the practice of teaching—is tempered through a phenomenological lens, it delves deeply into common tasks and everyday moments such as preparing name tags, planning a thoughtful classroom layout, and welcoming children and families on the first day. Phenomenology invites the teacher to reflect on the very nature and quality of their pedagogical relationship with their students. The relationships between a parent and a child, and a teacher and students are both pedagogical in that adults hold concern for the child in the present moment and for whom the child will become (van Manen, 2016a).

While the term "teacher" is commonly used to describe the teaching role in school settings; I prefer the term "educator" to describe the teaching role I held at the University Child

Study Kindergarten, located in the almost 100-year-old house on the University of Alberta campus. In my role, I worked alongside other educators and welcomed many learners—children, novice teachers, and educators. I saw myself as a learner among them, not just the one teaching. To educate is to "bring up, rear," arising from *educere* to "bring out" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 232). An educator brings out the nature of who the student is; it is not only concerned with educational outcomes. As an educator, I am a sensitive learner of the child, the emerging student, and the person. In this study, I used the term "educator" when I speak of my role and "preschool educator" to define educators of before-school programs. When referring to general teaching and kindergarten teachers, I used the common term "teacher." "Child" and "student" are used interchangeably in the transition to school research. In this study, I discerned between the child at home and the student at school, a distinction that becomes increasingly apparent and significant throughout this reflexive study.

Leaving Home

"Hurry, you don't want to be late for your first day of kindergarten," I say, slipping my son's jacket over one arm and then the next. Zipping up his coat, I look into his eyes and smile, "You're so big now!" Closing the door and turning the lock, I breathe a sigh. We're finally on our way! Taking mental stock of the items I packed for his first day, I realize he's talking to me, "...will you?" "Will I what?" I ask. "Stay. Will you stay?" he pleads. "For a few minutes," I assure him. "Then, I will come back to pick you up at the end of class." The school bell rings as we get out of the car, causing our steps to quicken. (Personal memory as a parent, October 2017)

As I helped my children get out the door and off to school, I was struck by the passage of time. It seemed like only yesterday that I held them in my arms, rocked them to sleep, and watched them take their first steps. The pull of the school bell brought me back to the present. The hurried pace of the morning routine is driven by "clock time"—waking up, eating breakfast, preparing lunches, and rushing out the door to get to school before the bell rings. Constantly looking at my watch while doing these daily routines makes this "getting ready for school" morning different from lazy weekend mornings, for example. Weekends can be more fluid, with less concern for needing to get someplace on time, like work or school. The school bell publicly marks punctuality and tardiness from the very first day, changing family experiences with time. As a phenomenon of linear past, present, and future, "school time" pushes onward from the

beginning of the day to the end and from year to year, shaping the way children and parents are in and alongside the world of school.

A Child's Transition to School as a Study of Human Science

As human science methodologies, phenomenology and pedagogy seek to understand what it means to be in the world and the world of school, respectively. van Manen (2016b) suggested "a human being is not just something you automatically *are*, it is also something you must try to *be*" (p. 5). He described this continual state of becoming that begins by situating and orienting oneself to the phenomenon and involves a sensitive and deliberate reflective method that ultimately changes how one sees and thinks of the world, as an educator-in-the-world-of-school, for example. Educators like myself, who embrace phenomenology research, do not seek an objective view. On the contrary, our research is about knowing that moments of pedagogical significance are found in the messiness and complexity of living a life. Moments that matter are not necessarily big events; rather they are found in experiences that linger unexpectedly, as van Manen (2014) described:

> Our experiences may sometimes carry significance that we may only experience later, sometimes much later when certain events haunt us or return to us in memories that seem to come not from the past but from the future—the future latency of past events. (p. 59)

Phenomenology shows the entangled-ness of long-ago moments that seemingly arise suddenly, as if they are occurring in the moment and all-at-once having significance for a future not yet lived.

A First Memory of School

I remember high white concrete walls, a stage with curtains, and children singing. I don't know them, and I don't think I'm a student yet. It's a before-school visit for children and parents. I recall feeling alone. I'm sitting at a small table with other children. I look for my mom. I feel as though I've spent the whole time looking for her. Funny, I don't remember actually finding her, but obviously I did. (Personal childhood memory, May 2019)

I recall the enormity of the school building as I searched for my mother among the unfamiliar people. Trying to locate a parent can leave a child with a sense of being alone. The idea of "alone-ness" conjures other meanings, such as unaccompanied, unaided, lonely, only, isolated, forlorn, and solitary. However, being alone at school is different from being abandoned, unaided, or forlorn. I sense my mother is nearby in the before-school visit I describe above. I

knew I was not abandoned, but I also know I want to be able to see where she is. In a phenomenological inquiry of childhood loneliness, Anna Kirova (2002) noted, "Parents are vitally important not only to the foundation but also to the preservation of the child's self" (p.164). As a child, I had a strong connection with my mother, so much so that other children and activities did not distract me during the school visit; instead, I felt compelled to connect with her, to see her. As a researcher who is interested in the pedagogical significance of a child's transition to school, my childhood memory shows a possible phenomenon of separation and connection between a child and parent that the transition to school brings forth.

Lived-Experience Descriptions from My Life World

My lived-experience descriptions as an educator, a parent, and a child, situate me within the study of a child's transition to school. Edmund Husserl stated, "The same lived-body that serves me as a means for all perception, stands in my way when perceiving itself, and is a *curiously, incompletely* constituted thing" (quoted in Anthony Steinbock, p. 115, italics in original). Husserl and Steinbock point to the complex reality of phenomenologists, who are called to research in a way that allows unique insights into possible phenomena such as treading and holding, linear school time, and separation and connection, while the potential of personal perspectives may also impede phenomenological insight. Though teachers, as expected, assess whether outcomes are achieved; this is not all that teachers *are*. van Manen (2015) described pedagogy as a significant and consequential relationship between an adult and a child. He stated,

> The good pedagogy is not some social product or educational outcome but rather goodness itself: goodness *of* and *for* this or that child or these young people. This goodness must constantly be recognized, realized, and retrieved in particular actions in concrete and contingent situations and relations. (p. 20, italics in original)

In my current role as an instructor of emerging early childhood educators, I encourage my students to recognize who they are as people, as post-secondary students, and as future educators of young children. I enact a particular pedagogical responsibility, knowing that reading and applying teaching practices is only one aspect of the educational experience, while reflecting deeply on the pedagogical relationship with a child is quite another. As such, I am called to gain a deeper understanding of a teacher's pedagogical relationships with students.

In a doctoral phenomenology research course, I had a dialogue with the professor involving my written narrative of a parent-child goodbye and the etymology of the word

"goodbye." The origin of goodbye arises from "godbuye"—a wish that the other is watched over when parted—such as a parent wishing that a teacher will watch over the child after leaving. That dialogue made me question if I had ever *really seen* the meaning of this childhood milestone. I cannot say for sure if I found my doctoral topic or if the topic found me—but that event led me to ask phenomenological questions of this childhood milestone.

The Research Questions

This research study explores the following questions:

1. What is a child's transition to school like for a parent?
2. What is a child's transition to school like for a teacher?

A phenomenological question is structured to elicit the primordial lived sense of experience—that which is felt, seen, and heard. For Edmund Husserl, a consciousness of a something is where meaning resides. However, van Manen (2014) asserts that consciousness is elusive and fleeting—it fades into life's busyness. Before a child begins school, preparations are underway both at home by the soon-to-be students and their parents, and at school by kindergarten teachers. Clothing and backpacks are organized, stories of past school days are shared, advice is given, classrooms and lessons are prepared, activities are organized. On the first day or in the days to follow, parents leave their children with a teacher and their new classmates. At school, the student is on their own to address self-care routines and follow school rules. While the child is learning to be a student, the parent is learning to become a parent of a student. Being in the world as a parent of a student is different than being in the world as a parent of a child at home. The same is true for teachers as they prepare classrooms with students in mind and then greet a particular group of students. van Manen (2016b) states, "Lived experience has a certain essence, a 'quality' that we recognize in retrospect" (p. 36), that is accessible through phenomenological writing and reflection. Lived experiences of family and teacher preparations mark a change of context from home or before school programming to school and kindergarten classrooms that incite ontological transformations in the child, parent, and teacher.

Phenomenology as Methodological Orientation

Phenomenology of practice is a rigorous reflection on everyday human phenomenon. This phenomenological research method is hermeneutic in nature in that it is a sophisticated reflective and dialogic exploration intended to result in originary thinking (van Manen, 2014).

Malte Brinkmann and Norm Friesen (2018) stated that "phenomena do not simply exist for phenomenology, but appear as something, according to the intentionality of consciousness, which links subject and object." […] "that a something (a child's transition to school) is linked to something else (a family's preparations for a child's first day of school, or when a teacher greets students at the start of the kindergarten year) and is at the same time separated from it" (para 1). This subject-object relationship is essential to understanding what can be known (an epistemology) and our orientation for knowing (an ontology) through phenomenological research and reflection. Phenomenologists do not deny the existence of an external world and worldly things but seek to understand the meanings residing in human lived experiences of that world.

Taking up van Manen's (2014) phenomenology of practice, this study aims to (re)capture the meanings arising from quotidian moments, the lived moments we take for granted, or experiences that are categorized in general terms. For example, the problematic school transition has gained the attention of families, teachers, school leadership, policymakers, and researchers. Scholarship posits the troubled transition to school using concepts of 'readiness' to address the not-yet-ready child and create ready schools. In Chapter Two of this paper-based dissertation, I offer a review of relevant research that establishes the transition is challenging to define because of differing perceptions of teachers, parents, children, and before-school program educators. However, when the focus is on resolving or reconciling the event, we fail to grasp the significant changes occurring when a child begins school.

Meaning is not given to lived experiences; in phenomenology, it is understood that meaning is already and always there within prereflective moments, such as when arriving at school with their child, a parent feels the ring of the bell in their rushing feet. When a teacher feels a child's hand in theirs after many days of the child resisting being at school. And when a parent steps back when watching her child turn toward the teacher on the first day of school. By focusing on the unique lived experiences of parents and teachers when a child transitions to kindergarten, this study provides a foundation for practicing phenomenological questioning and reflection. Phenomenology is not a research method that resolves technical problems, nor will it explain what school readiness is or isn't. Instead, phenomenology cultivates one's attentiveness and sensitivity toward pedagogical moments with children and students. However, when we are persuaded by our taken-for-granted-ness, the opinions, beliefs, and theories that name something as something else, we are unsuccessful in accessing the phenomenon where meaning is found.

Resisting naming a child's transition to school as readiness lead me to wonder and question and opened-up to seeing it differently.

Seeking Phenomenological Meaning

As a kindergarten teacher, I greeted families and helped children settle into classroom routines. In seeking a deeper understanding of such moments, I lifted lived experiences up, turned them over and around, and gazed at the essence of the moments parents and teachers willingly shared with me. I sought similar human experiences from other notable philosophical and phenomenological writings, for example, a child leaving home to begin university and an infant's smile. Asking phenomenological questions evokes a kind of awe, wonder, and questioning of the evocative; what is one's lived sense of the phenomenon? Though every lived experience when a child starts school is a meaning-filled moment, van Manen (2016b) proposed that "to truly question something is to interrogate something from the heart of our existence, from the center of our being" (p. 43). More than simply questioning such moments, to explore phenomenologically is to be in question oneself, searching for what it means to be a researcher, an educator, a woman, a parent, and a grandparent alongside children experiencing moments that matter. The child's transition to school has called on me to attend to lived experiences through sensitive writing, deep reflexiveness, and a search for meaning that only a phenomenology of practice methodology can offer.

I learned the importance of reflection on practice during my undergraduate education degree. Student teachers are encouraged to reflect with others on their practice moments with the aim of improving their skills in the classroom. As I gained experience as an educator, I was more comfortable adjusting responsively to a student or group of students. Are such moments reflection in practice? van Manen (2015) is critical of a reflection in practice concept, asking, "How reflective can it be?" (p. 50). In his phenomenological pedagogical inquiry, van Manen described moments when teachers or parents "'thinkingly act' and often do things with immediate insight" (p. 51). Distinguishing from reflection in practice, van Manen (1991) suggested that when one acts in such a way as to remain attentive "without reflectively distancing itself from the situation" (p. 516) one is able to act with insight to the present moment with a child or student. He stated (2015),

> As teachers, we sometimes catch ourselves about to say something but then hold back before we have completely committed ourselves to what was already "on our lips." Other times the situation we are in seems to "tell" us, as it were, how we should act. (p. 51-52)

van Manen offered what it is like to act pedagogically tactful and thoughtful in practice moments with others and suggested that the moment we find ourselves also speaks. Brent Molander (2008) made a similar suggestion. Describing an exchange between an architectural student and a teacher in the act of sketching a design problem, Molander offered:

> "[T]he architect (the designer) does not know what she has done or what she is striving towards until the sketch has responded; it shows her what she has done and what she is striving toward. Part of this response is through other persons, of course." (p. 12)

In sketching, the student and teacher are in dialogue, making visible what they know and what is emerging knowledge as pen on paper traces a collective thought experiment whereby the lines and curves also participate in the dialogue. Like van Manen's pedagogical situation that "tells" one to act, the sketching "speaks back" to the student and teacher by showing possibilities for thinking further. Though the act of sketching may dialogue with an artist or designer, for a phenomenological researcher a text speaks back to provoke imaginative insight. van Manen (2014) suggested that a "pathos" drives phenomenological methodology, "being swept up in a spell of wonder about phenomena as they appear, show, present, or give themselves to us" (p. 26). A phenomenological researcher orients to human phenomena with a sense of wonder.

Phenomenological Questioning and Wonder

What does it mean to question phenomenologically? Phenomenological writing and research are a pursuit of what makes the phenomenon what it is (van Manen, 2014). The lived experiences that phenomenology research aims to explore are concretely described and prereflected, "that which presents itself directly—unmediated by thought or language" (van Manen, 2014, p. 42). Lived experiences such as a parent's embodied feeling of empty arms when walking back to the car after leaving a child at school on the first day; a student's rushing feet at the sound of the school bell; a teacher's vivid imagination of future students when arranging classroom desks and materials. These and other everyday moments, the things people see, hear, touch, feel, and sense, give access to "essences [that] become the foundation for all knowledge about a phenomenon" (Farrell, 2020, p. 3).

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the father of transcendental phenomenology, posited that consciousness is where the meaning of a something resides. His descriptive phenomenological analysis is made possible through the "epoché" (bracketing), "reduction," and "free imaginative variation" of a phenomenon (Farrell, 2020, p. 3). Though one accomplishes descriptive analysis through writing, language is often insufficient for describing a phenomenon fully. van Manen (2014) proposed that the eidetic reduction, a reflection on variations, is one way to point indirectly to the uniqueness of a phenomenon. For example, a parent-child goodbye at grandma's house is very different from a parent-child goodbye on the first day of school; rushing feet when hearing the school bell is unlike running a race; preparing a nursery for the birth of an infant is distinct from preparing a classroom for a group of students. Contrasting similar yet different experiences stir a sense of wonder of human phenomena that are often taken for granted.

The Epoché-Reduction for Disrupting What One Thinks and Knows. Tone Saevi (2013) stated, "Writing phenomenologically is the transitional practice of going beyond the abstract, conceptual 'label-language' and involves the attempt to let experience reverberate immediately beyond everything we think we already know" (p. 6). Phenomenological analysis requires discerning interpretations of human phenomena. Its aim is not to support what one thinks about one's practice, nor does it draw on theoretical perspectives to support established beliefs about teaching and learning. I experienced the difference between writing and writing phenomenologically in the summer/fall of 2021. While I was recuperating from a health crisis, I had "forced" time to write. The tone of that draft paper supported what I knew and believed to be thoughtful practice for helping children and families as they began kindergarten. My writing contained perspectives and explanations supported by theories. And while that form of writing may have value for an interpretative case study or narrative inquiry, it lacked a sense of questioning and wonder for human phenomenon that takes time to cultivate.

van Manen (2002) wrote phenomenologically of the "writerly" attitude and sensitivity that aims to reveal the essential meanings of human events. Husserl suggested that suspending (epoché) one's opinions as if to set aside one's point of view is necessary for descriptive interpretations and "what we can know about the world" (Farrell, 2020, p. 3). Martin Heidegger (1989-1976) believed that being and being-in-the-world are inseparable and that "meaning is inherent within lived experience" (Farrell, 2020, p. 3). Accordingly, what is known (epistemology) is not separate from how one is in the world (ontology). In *Being and Time,*

Heidegger (1953/2010 trans.) posited, “Interpretation is existentially based in understanding, and not the other way around. Interpretation is not the acknowledgment of what has been understood, but rather the development of possibilities projected in understanding” (p. 144). For Heidegger, Farrell (2020) suggested, “[M]eaning is encountered in the lived experience itself” (p. 3), and the “forestructures of understanding represent what we already know (consciously or unconsciously) about the phenomenon” (p. 4). van Manen (2014) described the “ontological reduction” (p. 231) as a meaning giving source for understanding the situatedness of a phenomenon. Ontologically, who we are and what we experience gives us access to understanding; however, Heidegger (1953/2010) cautioned, “[W]hen we just stare at something, our just-having-it-before-us lies before us *as a failure to understand* it any more” (p. 145, italics in original). Heidegger’s warning aligns with Husserl’s epoché—that interpretation requires one to suspend judgments and look beyond the obvious. For example, as a kindergarten teacher, I received many gifts from children, such as flowers picked on the way to school, a drawing, a rock, or a vegetable from a garden. Reflecting phenomenologically on the experience of receiving a gift from a student on the first day of school necessitated that I disrupt my long-held beliefs about the classroom as a shared space between a teacher and students. Further, the desire to understand the meaning of such a common gift-receiving experience also required me to situate the gift-giving within the context of school and the kindergarten classroom. For example, a gift from a student when arriving to meet a teacher in their classroom (Makovichuk, under review).

No one thinks of a gift for a teacher as a hospitable gesture, but what kind of gift would it be? While a sense of wonder for a phenomenon is vital, one’s ability to disrupt one’s taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs is essential for opening a space for a phenomenon to show itself.

Opening Phenomenologically with the Reduction Proper. Phenomenology of practice is a matter of constructing original thinking by always returning “to the things themselves” (Farrell, 2020, p. 2). The insightful quote from Husserl is a constant reminder that meaning originates from human phenomena. And according to Heidegger, rigorous philosophic and phenomenological interpretations entail “following certain woodland paths toward a ‘clearing’ where something could be shown or revealed in its essential nature” (Farrell, 2020, p. 4). Heidegger’s woodland paths are not necessarily well-traveled. However, there are guideposts, such as the eidetic, ontological, and originary reductions highlighted above, along with other reductions that a researcher draws-out to elicit a sophisticated reflection of phenomena. To

reflect phenomenologically requires a creative dialogue with phenomena and with other phenomenologists and philosophers.

Phenomenological studies by Gert Biesta, Frederik Buytendijk, Cheung Chan-Fai, Andrew Foran, Anna Kirova, Wilfred Lippitz, Susan Todd, Jacob van Lennep, and Max van Manen were particularly insightful. These scholars offered me a sense of what I attempted to achieve in my writing and research, a certain phenomenological tone, sensitive receptiveness, and perceptive awareness. Phenomenology is a creative method in that "a new order is formed by new original questions initiated by creative and critical thinkers whose works are subsequently passed down by followers and interpreters" (van Manen, 2014, p. 73). I humbly thank the people whose work I gained insights. They showed me ways of opening to phenomena and offered me exemplars of a questioning attitude. I experienced openings in thinking throughout the writing, researching, and reading that made the arduous task of phenomenological writing riveting. One such moment occurred when I explored a teacher's lived experience when preparing a classroom. In a creative dialogue with the lived experience, I engaged with Biesta's (2017) phenomenon of a generative education and Lippitz's (2007) phenomenology of foreignness when a possible phenomenon of transformation showed itself (Makovichuk, under review). van Manen (2014) described the "originary reduction" as "suddenly 'seeing' the phenomenal meaning of something, discerning a truth in an instant of writing, being struck by an incisive thought" (p. 236). One never knows when an insightful understanding of something will make itself known, and as Francisco Varela et al. (2016) proposed, meaning arises from one's journeying with others.

In a dialogic fashion with phenomena arising from teachers' and parents' lived experiences, I sought to nurture a certain sensitivity and awareness of what it means to be in the world as a parent and teacher when a child begins school. Molander (2008) proposed:

> The idea of dialogical is used to reveal a *structure of meaning* in which the relation between those who 'converse' is not a relation between subject and object, but rather between two subjects, or between a subject and the (unobjectified) totality of which she forms a part. (p. 18, italics in original)

Because phenomenology disrupts inherent understandings, critiques them, and calls into question what we take for granted (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014), a child's transition to school is presented anew. This study aimed to understand what makes the phenomenon of a child's

transition to school what it is by exploring what it is like for a parent to prepare and take a child to school and what it is like for a teacher to prepare and be with a group of students.

Collecting Lived-Experience Descriptions

Lived-experience descriptions are seminal to many research methods, such as case studies, narrative and interpretative inquiries, and ethnography. “What distinguishes phenomenology from other kinds of inquiry is precisely that phenomenology wants to investigate the originary emergences of human experience and meaning,” said van Manen (2014, p. 54). For Chapter Three and Chapter Four of this dissertation, I collected and recounted concrete lived experiences of teachers and parents regarding a child's transition to school. The lived experiences allowed me to open the study to what it means to be human. In each chapter, I include a summary of the data I collected.

Before collecting the data, I obtained approval from the University of Alberta (Pro 00092932) on August 30, 2019. I received Faculty of Education Cooperative Activities Program (CAP) approval from Edmonton Public School Authority on February 4, 2020. Both letters of approvals are appended to this dissertation. In the time between the two ethic approvals for research, and after my successful candidacy on September 11, 2019, I began recruiting parents to interview from my circle of family and friends. These first interviews were conducted in person.

Following the approval of my CAP application, I approached the principals of five Edmonton schools that had been approved for my study. To ensure a diverse population sample for my research, I selected schools from different parts of the city: west, northeast, east, south, and central. Three principals agreed to meet with me to discuss my research and gave me permission to contact their kindergarten teachers. Three teachers consented to participate. Then, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic closed schools and all research activity halted.

In April 2020, I filed an amendment to my original REB application, changing in-person and classroom visits to online interviews with teachers and parents. I also removed interviews with children. I was not able to observe in kindergarten classrooms and I felt that conducting online interviews with children who did not know me might cause them undue stress. The Research Ethics Board and the Cooperative Activities program reviewers agreed, and I received approval for my amendment on May 12, 2020. I reconnected with the three teachers who had agreed to participate, and we scheduled online interviews for May and June 2020. The lived

experiences the teachers shared with me reflected their in-person transitional experiences with children and families from earlier that year.

I also interviewed nine families from my circle of friends and family. All the parents I interviewed had a child who began kindergarten in person at the start of the 2019 school year, and their experiences reflected their in-person school start. I scheduled meeting times with parents, and all except the two interviews I had conducted in November 2019 were conducted online in May, June, and July 2020.

With the participants' permission, I audio-recorded in-person interviews and online interviews (using the approved university's Google Meet platform). I began the one-hour interviews by reviewing the consent process. I asked open-ended, semi-structured questions that gave me the flexibility to respond to the experiences that participants recounted in their interviews. Not all questions were asked of all participants, and some questions and prompts emerged within interviews to elicit concrete descriptions from participants. A record of the questions I asked in the interviews (planned and emergent) is appended to this dissertation.

I transcribed each recording and read and reread them for concrete descriptions of lived experiences. Teachers and parents shared their experiences openly and fully. Here is one kindergarten teacher's description (edited slightly for clarity) of families starting to arrive on the first day of school.

> *One family came in. They were the first to arrive, and they arrived early. The boy was very shy and stood very close to the parent, and they kind of wandered in and were a little bit shy. I asked them to find his locker and to put his things in there and then to come back. Then I gave them a piece of paper that asked them basic information: contact information, if they speak any other languages, and who's going to pick him up at the end of the day, because we don't have buses. And I asked about any allergies. They sat down and started filling the form out, and then the boy started to explore the room while other families started trickling in. The same process happened with each family, and then the families gave me the form back and said their goodbyes. Then they left.* (May 2020)

In the interviews, participants often began by describing what they and others did. However, for phenomenological research more concrete descriptions are needed. At times, I found it difficult to help my participants understand how to access the lived concreteness of their experiences. Previously, when I conducted interviews for an Interpretative Inquiry Research course,

participants recounted rich stories of experiences through a process of drawing and telling. Those stories included reports, explanations, and opinions, much like the teacher's description above. While these perspectives are ideal for interpretative inquiry case study analysis to show the meaning people make of their experiences (Ellis et al., 2013), for phenomenological research, van Manen (2014) warns against "interview material that is skimpy, and that lacks sufficient concreteness" (p. 317). My responsibility was to help participants locate their felt sense of an experience and what they see, hear, feel, or touch.

Qualitative, open-ended questions, both general and specific, invite "the informant to open up and expand on in a way that is distinctive from normal conversations" (Brenner, 2006, p. 363). In phenomenological interviews, a question such as "Can you tell me what it was like to arrive at the school on that first morning?" is asked to assist a participant to reconnect with a lived experience. Specific follow-up questions can lead to concrete descriptions of an experience. For example, a researcher may ask: "How did that feel?" "What did you say?" "What was that like?" Even still, it is often easier for participants to talk *about* experiences in general terms than to describe an experience as if they are living it again. When I asked a follow-up question and provided a prompt to the kindergarten teacher who shared her experiences (above), she had difficulty shifting her perspective:

> Me: *While the boy was exploring, what did you do?*
>
> Teacher: *I was trying to ask him questions, but he was very shy. I remember asking him about his name because I really liked his name and trying to talk to the parents a little bit, but not really knowing what to say.*
>
> Me: *So, feeling an awkwardness.* (I offer, hoping the teacher will expand further)
>
> Teacher: *Yeah, like trying to start a conversation without being too intrusive almost. I want to know about their family without asking them questions. I was trying to think of things to say to get to know them, but not be too forward or too intrusive, I guess. Because it was my first year of teaching, I was very nervous, so I didn't really know what to expect. I just remember thinking this is really crazy*.

While I sensed the teacher's uncertainty and awkwardness, my inexperience with phenomenological questioning caused me to fall short in helping her access an embodied sense of that moment. Gillian Lemermeyer (2020) shares a similar experience, "I was surprised by how difficult it was to elicit concrete, descriptive accounts in phenomenological interviews and

assumed that missing out on these moments was a function of my inexperience doing phenomenological research interviews" (p. 32). For my situation, I also wondered if the online environment contributed to the lack of specific connectedness between me, the participant, and the moment being recalled. van Manen (2014) suggested, "[P]eople are more inclined to remember and tell stories when the surroundings are conducive to thinking about these experiences" (p. 315). While a digital platform is accessible for families from home and teachers from their classrooms, I couldn't help but wonder if meeting a researcher online for the first or second time may cause a sense of distance and disconnectedness.

After each interview, I reflected on the experience and my notes and fine-tuned my questions for the following interview. For example, I asked a teacher to describe the classroom as a way of orienting to her context. During the interview, I asked about particular spaces and materials that the teacher had previously mentioned. I also attempted to get to know participants by asking how long they had been teaching and what made them want to teach, or by asking parents how they were managing COVID restrictions at home. While these beginnings may have fostered a sense of friendliness, I felt that the interviews I conducted were more like what Brenner (2006) described for conducting a qualitative interview where "the informant is encouraged to speak more than the researcher" (p. 363). The conversational nature of the phenomenological interview, as described by Lemermeyer (2020), was mostly absent at the beginning of my interviews. Reflecting on Lemermeyer's article, *The Unique Intimacy of the Phenomenological Interview,* I wondered if my inexperience was also about not having sufficiently accessed a true phenomenological wonder of the phenomenon.

> The unique character of the phenomenological interview may be revealed by exploring its connection and purpose within the dual gesture of the reduction: the phenomenon is considered with a sense of wonder. Yet how do we come to wonder? Is it possible to cultivate such a disposition? How might the researcher animate this central method of phenomenology during the interview? It is one thing to "resolve to take nothing for granted," but another to actually take nothing for granted. (p. 36)

What Does It Mean to Take Nothing for Granted in an Interview?

Lemermeyer (2020) discussed the necessity for the epoché and reductive attentiveness during the interview process. The researcher must deliberately push aside what they think they know to make space for reflecting-in-the-process of interviewing. Taking nothing for granted

requires the interviewer to give their full attention to the intent and purpose of the phenomenological interview by actively conversing with participants while suspending what they think they know and being open to hearing and seeing something new. This difficult process takes time and experience, and even then, there is a "possibility of finishing without a single usable descriptive account" (Lemermeyer, 2020, p. 33). When I interviewed a teacher who described a strategy to help a child leave their mother, I attempted to connect to her persistent efforts. I said, "You've helped this process, and then the child holds your hand and goes with you into the classroom. How did that feel?" The teacher responds:

> *It's just, umm, what is the word? Just really excited for them to have gained that confidence because it means I know things are possible. Like, when they're in a place, when that fear isn't running the show, then they really get to make connections and have a richer experience at school. So, I guess—how do I feel? I mean, it's just really—honestly, the words that come are—rewarding and affirming, and it's like—yes, this works to give them the space and to honour them, to acknowledge them, I suppose. Their experience and to see that growth for them; it's, I suppose, affirming. It gives me a lot of satisfaction. I get to see what they experience, what I hope for them to have at school.* (May 2020)

When I asked, "How did that feel?" I was hoping she would share an embodied lived experience. Upon further reflection, I wonder how the interview may have unfolded had I slowed down and stayed in the moment with my participant. What if I asked about other "reward and affirmation" variations that a teacher might experience? Would the conversation have supported my participant to access the felt sense of this particular reward and affirmation?

In *Phenomenology of Practice,* van Manen (2014) describes two accounts of a mother and child holding hands to illustrate "primal impressionable consciousness" (p. 53). Originally coined by Husserl, the expression refers to what becomes conscious to us as we experience an event again when recounting the moment (p. 52). In the first descriptive account, a mother explained why she held onto her child's hand in the shopping mall; in the second account, the mother recalls her felt sense of the experience, as if the moment is happening. van Manen's description led me to wonder what the child's hand felt like for the teacher I interviewed. In a follow-up exchange with her, I asked about the experience of the child's hand in hers; but the time had passed. The felt sense, if there had been one at all, had already faded. One of my key

learnings from conducting and reflecting on phenomenological interviews is to follow more closely, by situating in the "now" moment alongside the person I interview, as if we are seeing, feeling, touching, and sensing the experience together. When I was able to be more present to my participants, I gained an appreciation for their experiences, such as when a teacher described being ready for the first day of kindergarten. I prompted, "Describe that moment. What are you feeling when you are on your way for the first day?"

Crafting Lived-Experience Anecdotes. After transcribing the interviews, I read and reread them, looking for concrete descriptions. While I did not find concrete lived experiences neatly detailed in the transcripts, I did find bits of concrete description scattered throughout a transcript. For example, one teacher recounted leaving home for her kindergarten classroom. She said, "They are easily enthralled—it's such a delightful place to be, and I don't know, *not magnetic, but there's a draw there—a pull*" (May 2020). Gathering short, concrete phrases like these, sprinkled amidst the much more extended accounts of lived experience, I was able to construct lived experience anecdotes. I shared the constructed anecdotes with the teachers and families to ensure the descriptions I had constructed were plausible experiences they could relate to. In passing, one parent commented that she continued to reflect on the interview in the following days and weeks. What I shared with her reminded her of another experience when sitting in her car for what felt like a long time after dropping her child at school. It was the first day her child entered the kindergarten classroom on his own and without incident.

In addition to the lived-experience descriptions obtained from participant interviews, I examined two personal anecdotes: as a parent taking my son to school on the first day (Makovichuk, 2020) and as an educator receiving a zucchini from a child on the first day of school (Makovichuk, under review). In phenomenological studies, it is not unusual for researchers to draw on personal lived experiences, and as van Manen (2014) suggested, "One's own experiences are the possible experiences of others and also that the experiences of others are the possible experiences of oneself" (p. 314).

For phenomenological research, lived experiences are presented as short anecdotes that have been edited to elicit a felt sense of an experience by using personal pronouns, present tense, and specific, concrete details. van Manen (2014) proposed editing guidelines for achieving phenomenologically relevant experiences, noting that the importance of "*fictionalizing* a factual, empirical, or an already fictional account in order to arrive at a more *plausible* description of a

possible human experience" (p. 256, italics in original). Unlike participant experiences that illustrate and inform theoretical concepts, such as peoples' experiences that are seminal in an ethnographic case study or an interpretative inquiry, for phenomenological studies, lived experience anecdotes serve as human events for which phenomenological reflection is possible. Anecdotes reveal that which is relatable and singular through example. "[T]he example is the example of something experientially knowable or understandable that is not directly sayable—a singularity" (van Manen, 2014, p. 258); therefore, gathered lived experiences, whether from interviews, my own experiences, or fiction, must be plausible and relatable.

Quality of the Research

Phenomenology of practice research offers interpretative understandings of human experience. However, not all interpretations are equal; researchers choose specific criterion for appraising the interpretations that are made. Traditionally, a study is evaluated according to its validity, reliability, and empirical evidence, using rules that are grounded in a "logic of validation" (Packer & Addison, 1989, p. 277). Drawing on Scheurich's framing for regulatory, successor, and interruptive validities, Patti Lather (2001) suggested that regulatory validity "parallels positivist criteria," and successor validity "blurs the line of ethics and validity." Lather advocated for an approach that "brings ethics and epistemology together" for "the social uses of knowledge we construct" (p. 247). Lather posited epistemology (what is truth?) is understood differently across the sciences and social sciences. Whereas positivism is concerned with an objectified truth free of human subjectivity, interpretivism, specifically phenomenology, is concerned with revealing a subject-object truth. Michael Crotty (2012) in his discussion of phenomenology, stated, "We are beings-in-the-world. Because of this, we cannot be described apart from our world, just as our world—always a human world—cannot be described apart from us" (p. 79). As such, strategies for evaluating validity and reliability are not the same across the sciences.

Packer and Addison (1989) suggested that interpretative methods should be evaluated on their ability to fill four criteria: yield plausible findings, fit with other research, be convincing, and provoke change in practice. As a search for "plausible insight into the primal inceptive meaning structures of prereflective or lived experiences" (p. 344), the phenomenological epoché and reductions push back on conceptual understandings resulting from research methods that hide existential meanings from view. As such, van Manen (2014) offered a "criteria for

evaluative appraisal" (pp. 355-356) to assess a study, such as this one, on its depth and openness for exploring "meaning structures beyond what is immediately experienced" (pp. 355-356). I've used van Manen's criteria to develop six questions for readers to consider:

- Does the study awaken what parents and teachers experience when a child begins school?
- Does the study show the descriptive richness of recognizable transition to school experiences?
- Does the study incite heuristic questioning and wondering about what a child's transition to school is like?
- Does the study offer interpretative depth by disrupting taken-for-granted assumptions regarding a child's transition to school?
- Does the study maintain distinctive rigor and critique for a child's transition to school?
- Does the study offer inceptual epiphanies that call on ethical and pedagogical commitment to children as they begin school?

Structure and Overview of the Papers

Chapters Two, Three, and Four consists of three papers I submitted for publication. Each article is presented as a singular study and include an abstract, background research, situated interviews, reflective analysis of the data, and concluding discussion. The article format create some repetition in Chapters Two, Three and For that is typical of paper-based dissertations.

Chapter Two: A Review of the Relevant Literature

I conducted a literature review of relevant research. I submitted, *A Child's Transition to School: Review of Relevant Literature,* to the *Journal of Early Childhood Research* in October 2022. Studies that span four decades conceptualize a normative readiness discourse that privileges some and marginalizes others. By exercising a phenomenological attitude, I was able to lift descriptions of lived experiences that created an openness for phenomenological conversation that contribute to an ethical and relational pedagogical dialogue.

Chapter Three: The Parent-Child Goodbye on the First Day of School

This paper originated as an assignment in a doctoral course on phenomenological research. After completing my candidacy exam, I approached the professor, Dr. Cathy Adams,

and gained her approval to further develop the paper for publication and this dissertation. The resulting paper was published in *Phenomenology and Practice* in December 2020.

In the paper, I interviewed four families about their "goodbye" experiences on the first day of kindergarten. Phenomenological wonder and questioning of this particular parent-child goodbye shows the phenomenon of this experience to be unlike any other parent and child parting. The significance of family preparations, separations, connectedness, and interconnectedness leads to new pedagogical understandings of the triadic relationship between the child, parent, and teacher when a child begins school.

Chapter Four: The Phenomenology of the Kindergarten Classroom

I submitted this paper to the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* in February 2022. For this paper, I interviewed three kindergarten teachers and nine families. The kindergarten classroom appeared as a location in the extant research; however, phenomenological reflections on lived experiences of anticipating the classroom when leaving home on the first day, separating from the child at the classroom door, preparing a classroom with students in mind, and receiving a gift from a student on a first day shows the ontological and transformative nature of the kindergarten classroom.

Notably, the three papers do not exhaust all aspects of the phenomena surrounding the child's transition to school. However, they do present the power of phenomenology as a methodology to uncover more profound meanings and shed light on taken-for-granted experiences with pedagogical significance.

Significance of the Research

This study is only a beginning. While I have recaptured parent and teacher lived experiences that let show changes underway when a child transitions to school, there are so many more moments that could provide further pedagogical insights and understandings. As we continue to move out of the pandemic crisis, schools are opening, and the opportunity to learn from children about their experiences will bring further insight into the triadic relationship surrounding this childhood milestone. Families who transgress multiple cultural, linguistic, and geographic borders have lived experiences that will bring even further insight into what it is like to navigate the liminal space of this transitional event.

So much of the school readiness discourse is about remedying the event before it even happens. Through this study, I was able to show that the changes occurring are intersubjective

and generative in time and space with significant others – parents and children; teachers and students. I found that the words we use to name something gloss over what it is to be with others. While we gain the name "parent" when a child is born, and we gain the title "teacher" when we complete our teacher education, it is in the act of parenting a child and in the act of teaching a group of students that we become parents and teachers. As teachers, educators, and parents, we are always in a state of becoming with each new group of students and each child. For the kindergarten teacher, we have the greatest potential for educational transformation when we address the child becoming a student as the unique Other. And though school is essential for the student coming to know themselves within the broader context of the social world of school, the child in intimate relationships with family members also constitutes what it means to be in school.

The Western normative readiness discourse posits some families and children as ready and others as not. Yet, when we understand potential meanings arising from lived experiences of parents and teachers, the conversation shifts from school readiness to an ethical and relational dialogue of change. Such a dialogue can lead to thoughtful and intentional pedagogical relationships with parents who are becoming parents of students and the children who are becoming students.

Chapter 2: A Child's Transition to School: Review of Relevant Literature

This paper was submitted October 2022 to the *Journal of Early Childhood Research.*

Abstract

For more than four decades, policymakers, school administrators, teachers, educational researchers, and families have explored the implications of a young child's readiness for school. Traditionally, research has shown that a child's learning is interrupted when they have trouble with the transition, potentially slowing their academic progress. Transition-to-school research viewed these troubled transitions as problems and seeks to help the "not yet ready" child prepare for and adjust to school. Alternatively, the "ready school" movement considers a broader context, shifting the emphasis away from the individual child and studying the transition as a collaborative event involving family, school, and community. Because all those involved—teachers, families, and children—have unique perspectives on school readiness, the research is exceptionally complex. Teachers and preschool educators focus on what a child can and cannot yet do; families hope their child will adjust and succeed; the children try to find their way in a new environment.

My review of the relevant research revealed the complicated nature of this transitional milestone in a child's life and uncovers gaps in the research that can be addressed through phenomenological study. Lived experiences shaped by feelings of difference, joy, loneliness, hope, fear, and connectedness are documented in the current literature and showed that the transition to school holds tremendous significance for children, families, and early childhood educators and teachers. These experiences hold the potential for phenomenological research that can lead to greater insight for developing and advancing sensitive pedagogical practices.

Each year, children, their families, and their teachers prepare for the transition to school. Families anticipate this milestone by talking with their children about what school will be like– and what school was like for them as children. Older siblings often impart school rules, such as recess starting when the bell rings and teachers expecting you to listen. Advertisements for school supplies and back-to-school clothing portray the first day of school as an exciting, colourful, glossy, happy, handholding, dancing experience. Picture books introduce young children to the idea of leaving a parent, meeting a teacher, and being in a classroom. In schools, staff and teachers prepare for registration and organize classrooms. The many thoughts and preparation that so many groups extend clearly posit the transition to school as a significant event in a child's life.

When a child fits into the daily rhythms of school with ease, parents and teachers may not notice the adjustments the child is making as they navigate their new environment. However, a child who has trouble making the transition to school draws the attention of parents, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and educational researchers (Ackerman & Barnett, 2014; Iorio & Parnell, 2015; Moss, 2013; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017). The "problem" transition has led to research-driven policies, interventions, and practices for preparing the "not-yet-ready" child and for creating "student-ready" schools. Additionally, the child's perspective and the transition as a negotiated community experience are theorized (Dockett et al., 2019; Hartley et al., 2012). The sheer magnitude of studies exemplifies the tremendous complexity of this early transitional milestone. For more than four decades, researchers have asked: What is readiness? What views do teachers, families, and children have about what it means to be ready? What transitional practices support school entry? How can families, communities, and schools work together to prepare for smooth transitions? Considering the expansive attention paid to this topic, one might ask, what is left to know about this period of change?

This literature review describes the relevant research on a child's transition to school. In doing so, it revealed a gap in the literature that I believe could be addressed through phenomenological studies. In reading the relevant literature, I take up a phenomenological gaze to attend to lived experience where the "originary" and "prereflective" phenomena reside. Max van Manen (2014) described this gaze.

> In the encounter with things and events of the world, phenomenology directs its gaze toward the regions where meanings and understandings originate, well up, and percolate through the porous membranes of past sediments—then infuse, permeate, infect, touch, stir us, and exercise a formative and affective effect on our being. (pp. 26-27)

As with all human science research, the harmony between methodologies, the kinds of questions one explores, and who one is in the world are semiotic. Therefore, in reading the relevant literature, I do so as an early childhood educator deeply interested in phenomenological research as it applies to the pedagogical significance of the child's transition to school.

What is "School Readiness"?

Research that focuses on understanding school readiness aimed to help parents, teachers, and educators prepare children for kindergarten (Dockett & Perry, 2013; Janus & Duku, 2007; Petriwskyj et al., 2005; Pianta et al., 2007; Prior et al., 2011; Schmitt et al., 2021; Welsh et al., 2010). Typically, school attendance is compulsory starting in Grade One; however, many children enter school a year earlier, when they attend kindergarten or preschool. In this literature review, I use the term "kindergarten" to refer to the program year before Grade One.

Kindergarten as a Preparatory Year

In the 1800s, Froebel's kindergarten inspired the development of free kindergartens across Britain and North America that would rescue children from the perceived unrest that happened in the streets and "assimilate them into the mainstream of society" (Prochner, 2009). By the mid-1900s, kindergartens, under school authorities, were conceived as a "bridging mechanism between home or preschool and elementary school" (Lehrer & Bastien, 2015, p. 21). With kindergarten attendance compulsory in some jurisdictions and optional in others, children across the globe begin school somewhere between four and seven years of age. The age of school entry appears to be exogenous in terms of children's age and school cut-off dates (Datar, 2006). For example, many children attend optional kindergarten programs in Iceland and Turkey before transitioning into primary school when they are six or seven years old, respectively (Einarsdóttir, 2003; Kotaman, 2014). While attending kindergarten is optional in Norway, children begin primary school in the year they turn seven (Black et al., 2011). Children in Austria, Germany, and Nicaragua begin school at six years of age, following one or more years of kindergarten (Niklas et al., 2018). In New South Wales, schools operate from the end of January to early December, and children begin kindergarten if they turn five before July 31, six

months into the school year (Dockett et al., 2002). In New Zealand, children start kindergarten on their fifth birthday (Hartley et al., 2012). In Alberta, Canada, schools operate from September through June. Children with diagnosed disabilities are able to attend funded early childhood education programming from the time they are 2.8 years of age. However, most children living in Alberta must be five years old by December 31 to start the optional kindergarten year (AB ED, 2022). The December cut-off date aligns with North American trends for shifting to earlier cut-off dates (Elder & Lubotsky, 2009; Fletcher & Kim, 2016), which implies that maturity is one way to resolve transitional issues for the not-yet-ready child.

More Time for the Not-Yet-Ready Child. In the United States, a family's decision to delay a child from starting kindergarten is referred to as "redshirting," a term typically used to describe a sporting practice in which new players sit on the sidelines for their first year and learn by watching more experienced players (Fortner & Jenkins, 2017). In their study, Kevin Fortner and Jade Jenkins looked at Grade Three math and reading scores for children who had been redshirted at kindergarten entry. They discovered a positive correlation between these scores and gifted children who had been redshirted, but students with special needs gained no benefits (Fortner & Jenkins, 2017). The study also showed that male children are redshirted twice as often as female children, and white children are redshirted more often than their minority peers. Karen Diamond et al. (2000) found that while ethnically diverse parents reported a higher rate of concern for their child's readiness, Caucasian parents were more likely to redshirt their children the year before kindergarten. While the studies did not explore a family's reasons for redshirting their children, it revealed that children who accessed free or low-cost school lunch programs were less likely to be redshirted. Fortner and Jenkins (2017) and Diamond et al. (2000) speculated that some parents used redshirting to safeguard their child's future educational success; for other families, the practice is out of reach due to costs associated with prior-to-school programming or keeping a child at home for an additional year.

Research regarding the success of such interventions and practices shows that short-term benefits diminish over time. When children from low socio-economic backgrounds, children with special needs, and boys begin kindergarten as older children, they show higher math and reading scores through Grade Two (Datar, 2006). Jason Fletcher and Taehoon Kim (2016) found that older kindergarten entrants show promise in math and reading scores at Grade Four; however, such gains fade by Grade Eight. Sandra Black et al. (2011) suggested that the benefits

continue to fade as children complete Grade Twelve and are nonexistent by age 35 when people are fully in the workforce. Todd Elder and Darren Lubotsky (2009) hypothesized that while children's prior-to-school experiences are more likely to influence early math and reading achievement scores, later school entry may, in fact, decrease an over-identification of ADD/ADHD in young children.

"Readying" Children for Kindergarten. Preparing children to go to school has a long history in Canada and the United States. Marianne Bloch and Koeun Kim (2015) examine "a history" of school readiness. They explained: "[W]ith the growth of expectations for children going to school, and staying in school, expectations for preparing children for certain types of life behavior and success in school grew" (p. 4). With increasing school expectations, Head Start programming took root across North America as an intervention for "at-risk" children of impoverished families, English language learners who were often new immigrants or refugees, and children with developmental delays.

Joanne Lehrer and Robert Bastien (2015) examined the implementation of "waiting classes" in Quebec, Canada in the 1960s and 1970s. This intervention program retained kindergarten children seen as not-yet-ready for Grade One, or not "normally developing," and assigned them to a "waiting class," which took place between kindergarten and Grade One. While the intent of the intervention was to prepare the not-yet-ready students, by "1967 entire neighborhoods were being classified as 'disadvantaged' and both children from poor families, as well as immigrant families, were pathologized" (p. 26-27).

The social practice of delaying children's start to kindergarten or retaining them in intervention programs continues today (Moss, 2013). Such biases as girls mature faster than boys, boys need more time, and older children are more successful in school are embedded in retention practices (Ackerman & Barnett, 2014; Diamond et al., 2000), and mask Western constructions of the "normal" child underlying the school-readiness discourse. Questioning the success of retaining children in "waiting classes," Lehrer and Bastien (2015) noted that many children were directed to special education classes or repeated subsequent grades in elementary school. Through the words of a six-year-old boy, Elizabeth Graue (1992) revealed the emotional distress a child may feel when held back.

> Read and be good and sit down and be still. . . . If you don't know how to be good then you'll be a bad boy. . . . Then you'll have to wish that you know how to be good. . . . Nobody will want you if you're a bad kid. (p. 239)

This child's words illustrate a real struggle between wanting to be good but being perceived as the "bad boy." Graue (1992; 2006) concluded that the lack of consensus about school readiness ultimately results in community and family practices that delay some children's school entry or retain other children for an additional year of kindergarten.

Measuring Readiness. The Early Development Instrument (EDI), designed in Canada, used the five domains of child development (social, emotional, cognitive, language, and physical) to analyze entire classrooms and communities, rather than individual children (Cohen & Friedman, 2015; Guhn et al., 2007). Paul McDermott et al. (2014) recommended the Adjustment Scales for Early Transition in Schooling (ASETS) for understanding children's pro-social behaviours and contextualizing adjustment concerns. Sara Schmitt et al. (2021) investigated the temporal and bi-directional correlations between children's self-regulation and social-emotional functioning when making the transition from preschool to kindergarten. Christine McWayne et al. (2012) surveyed parents and Head Start teachers using five school readiness patterns that intersect children's social and cognitive skills and children's behavioural issues. The study revealed that all the children demonstrated growth with one or two years of Head Start programming through one year of kindergarten; still, the children with high behavior problems at school were "disproportionately boys, children of color, and the youngest group." (p. 874). The researchers also noted a misalignment for English language learners, children with diagnosed disabilities, and families living with socio-economic instability and school readiness markers.

Western Constructions of 'At-Risk'. The notion of a universal childhood as conceptualized by Piagetian cognitive stage theory is often taken for granted when developing readiness measurement tools and practices (Bloch & Kim, 2015). Kyle Snow (2006) raised ethical questions about using assessment tools to screen a child's readiness, before beginning or as they begin school, and suggests the results illustrate family and community diversity and disparity of resources more than a child's readiness. With little regard for the diverse "funds of knowledge" embedded in family culture, and social and community experiences, assessment tools privilege the Western homogeneity of the "normal child." Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Lisa

Markham (2005) investigated ethnic and racial gaps in school readiness in relation to parenting styles. Their study involved White, African American, and Hispanic parents from high and low socio-economic backgrounds. Although the researchers recognized that the measurement tools "privilege more Western, middle-class parenting behaviours" (p. 149), they also found the behaviours measured by the Home Observation for the Measurement of the Environment (HOME) Inventory correlated with current perceptions of school readiness discourse. While the study focused primarily on parenting interventions, the authors concur that ethnic and racial differences in parenting styles mirror differences in a child's readiness for school (Brooks-Gunn & Markham, 2005).

Diverse Transitional Experiences. Carol McAllister et al. (2005) talked about school readiness with parents (primarily mothers) whose children were in Early Head Start programs. In their study, McAllister and her colleagues learned that many of the families, who were often from ethnically diverse backgrounds, perceive school as a "challenging, even threatening . . . environment" (2005, p. 620) for which they are "fortifying their children socially and emotionally so that they could successfully face and transcend such challenges" (p. 621). Sarai Coba-Rodriguez et al. (2020) recruited 17 mothers, who were 18 years or older, self-identified as Latino, lived below the American poverty threshold, and had a child enrolled in Head Start to help them be kindergarten-ready. Her study examined culturally embedded practices using home observations and interviews with the mothers. In academic activities, such as reciting the alphabet, counting, and reading, the mothers engaged with their children using instruction, teachable moments, readily available and educational resources, and knowledge recall strategies such as asking, "What colour is that tree?" (p. 2689) or feigning ignorance so the child would tell them what they knew. Even though their strategies for preparing their children were commendable, the mothers felt they faced barriers in supporting their children's transition to school. For example, one mother said,

> I don't speak English. Sometimes I want to teach Josue a word because he asks me, "How do you say this?" And I tell him, "Sweetie, I don't know how to say that." That's why I am telling you that I wish I knew how to speak English, to be able to help him. (p. 2690)

Cathy Kaplun et al. (2017) interviewed 57 mothers who struggled with socio-economic insecurity, health concerns, substance abuse, and early maternal age. The mothers talked about

their child's transition to school as an opportunity to work, make friends, and volunteer in their child's school. The mothers also expressed hopes and desires for their child's school success (56%), academic accomplishments (47%), and positive social connections (43%). Some mothers said they hoped that their child would be more successful than they had been (10%); they also showed concern for their child's pre-academic skills (61%). Generally, the mothers perceived education as a right and intended to be involved in their child's learning (70%) through volunteer work (37%) and by helping with homework (98%). After kindergarten started, the mothers said they felt guilty about the limited amount of time and resources they had for helping their children with homework due to work demands and caring for younger children at home. A study by Erin Carlisle et al. (2005) identified even more barriers to families' participation in their child's schooling, such as cultural beliefs, linguistic difficulties, family structures, work schedules, limited social networks that would typically provide families with the confidence to participate, teacher attitudes and expectations, and the quality of their own educational experiences. Linda Laidlaw et al. (2015) explored preschool and kindergarten-age children's early digital literacy practices in Alberta and Australia. Their research focused on skills such as typing their name as a password, using digital search tools, using video, and narrating stories with play objects, as well as their engagement with a wide range of apps using sound, music, imagery, and text in meaningful ways. Laidlaw et al. suggested there is a "mismatch between the expectation of early schooling and the interests and skills children are bringing with them" (p. 9) and therefore the early literacy skills children do have are not contributing to understandings of school readiness.

Sheri Leafgren (2015) questioned the school readiness discourse that posits children, especially children of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity and low socio-economic status, as not yet ready, by asking, "How do you *start* behind" (p. 95, italics in original)? In the chapter, *"Are You My Dawg?": Socially and Politically Marginalized Children Desiring to Be Seen and Valued by Their Teachers*, Leafgren highlighted the consequences of teachers' perspectives that disregard children's cultural and linguistic knowledge. When school readiness is conceptualized in developmental terms alone, the diverse early experiences children have at home and in their communities make the image of the "school ready child" more diverse than normative views posit. As such, school readiness is a hegemonic social structure that privileges some and marginalizes others.

Perceptions of School Readiness

In an Australian study, children, parents, preschool educators, and primary school teachers were asked to identify the most important transitional issues (Dockett & Perry, 2001). The children reported that knowing the school rules was the most important, whereas educators, teachers, and parents were most concerned with a child's adjustment to school. Depending on one's perspective, this adjustment might be understood in terms of the child fitting with the school, the school fitting with the child, or perhaps, the child and school fitting together (Niklas et al., 2018).

Differences Among Teachers' Perceptions. Tashia Abry et al. (2015) suggested that teachers' perceptions of readiness are likely to influence the learning experiences and structures they create for children and possibly contribute to difficult preschool-to-school transitions. Teachers' expectations about school readiness arise from their beliefs, values, and knowledge about how and what children should learn, and these precepts play out in day-to-day teaching practices. Abry et al. (2015) surveyed preschool educators and school-based teachers about children's academic, self-regulatory, and interpersonal skills. While both groups rated self-regulatory and interpersonal skills as more important than academic skills, the preschool educators placed a higher value on academic skills than the teachers. In a separate multi-nation study involving Australia, Austria, Colombia, Germany, Nicaragua, and Slovenia, Frank Niklas et al. (2018) found that perceptions of school readiness differ between countries, pre-service and in-service teachers, male and female teachers, and new and experienced teachers. Huseyin Kotaman (2014) interviewed Turkish teachers about the skills they thought children needed upon entering compulsory school. Similarities among the teachers' perceptions in the studies by Niklas and Kotaman related to a child's self-regulatory skills and interpersonal competence; however, for the Turkish teachers, the importance of self-care, fine motor skill development, and hearing and sight screenings were also prominent. Interestingly, one Turkish teacher expressed a preference for children to arrive at school without prior knowledge of letters and numbers:

> If students are able to read when they come to first grade, we have difficulty. Because as a teacher I have to teach reading to other students in the class and therefore students who can read get bored and they do not want to come to school. (Kotaman, 2014, pp. 549-550)

In their study, Huey-Ling Lin et al. (2003) found that teachers with more experience believe school readiness is dependent on children's social competency skills, whereas teachers with fewer years of experience placed a higher value on children's academic skills.

Jóhanna Einarsdóttir (2003) explored differences among kindergarten and primary school teachers' perceptions of readiness by asking about students' transitions into primary school. While 23% of primary teachers reported that 50% or more of their students had difficulty following directions and working in groups in primary school, only 4% of kindergarten teachers felt their students had difficulty following directions and only 1% had difficulty working in groups. Interestingly, the kindergarten and primary school teachers with large classes (more than 21 and 26 children, respectively) were more likely to report children having difficulty in the same tasks than teachers who worked with smaller class sizes. The study did not distinguish if the large class sizes created the context in which children's difficulties, or if children's difficulties were the perceptions of very busy teachers.

Sukhdeep Gill et al. (2006) found that preschool educators and kindergarten teachers had different ideas about the roles they play in preparing their students' families for the transition to kindergarten. For the most part, preschool educators felt they were responsible for providing parents with information about kindergarten readiness and expectations. In comparison, kindergarten teachers had a more holistic view of their responsibilities, which included providing information, supporting registration activities, and facilitating before-school visits and meetings (Gill et al., 2006). The differences among teachers' and educators' perceptions about what makes a school-ready child is significant and made even more complicated when family's perceptions are considered.

Different Perceptions of Teachers and Parents. In 2004, Sue Dockett and Bob Perry asked educators, teachers, and parents what constituted a smooth transition to school. During the second term of kindergarten, they conducted a survey that elicited responses from 108 kindergarten teachers, 54 preschool educators, and 350 parents. They noted that parents rated academic knowledge highest, whereas kindergarten teachers rated the children's adjustment and dispositions as most important. Preschool educators also rated dispositions highest but did not rate school adjustment as high as the kindergarten teachers.

This research suggests that perceptions significantly influence how children are viewed during their transition to school, what knowledge and skills children should have for the transition, and the roles and expectations of teachers, educators, and parents. The different perceptions of teacher, educators and parent make the notion of the school-ready child ambiguous and, therefore, the transition to school for families and children even more uncertain.

Children's Perspectives on the Transition to School. When asked what they think school will be like, children talk about learning time, "*do maths*"; play time, "*play in the playground*"; school as a place, "*at big school*"; relationships, "I'll *see my sister*"; and uncertainties, "*I don't know what I will do; my sister and brother never told me*" (Dockett & Perry, 2013). For some children, hearing about school from others incited a mixture of anticipation for what was to come and worries about meeting expectations, loss of freedom, and time for play. Einarsdóttir et al. (2009) explored children's ideas about school through their drawings, which revealed concerns with social relationships. Children were asked to draw what they liked and disliked about starting school, what they missed from preschool, and how they felt before and after starting school. One child described their drawing, saying, "When I started school I was crying because it was scary, and I made new friends and that made me happy. Now I am happy because I am used to school" (p. 221–222). Anja Hvidtfeldt Stanek (2019) studied children's participation in social groups in the early days of kindergarten, with some children already knowing one another and others new to the group. Aida, a child who was new to the group, experienced a stomach ache at different times throughout the day. Supported by a knowledgeable and sensitive teacher, Aida was able to "find [her] way in the community of children" (p. 24). While the school readiness discourse often situates the individual child as ready or not yet ready, this study presented the complexity of social participation within the group and the role the teacher plays in how participation and belongingness are shaped.

Hilde Hogsnes (2015) examined the importance of familiar objects in a child's transition to primary school. In this interpretative study, a child (1) discovered a familiar book and photographs each page, (2) jumped up and down when revisiting the photos with the researcher, (3) shared a game that relates to the favourite book gifted to the classroom by his mother, and (4) discovered the book is no longer in the classroom. Hogsnes (2015) interpreted the book as a vital boundary object for this child, helping to "grasp the familiar in a new, strange setting" (p. 9).

In New Zealand, where children begin primary school on their fifth birthday, the continuous intake model means that one or a few children are oriented to the classroom at a time, rather than as part of a larger group. While the advantages of this individual attention may seem evident, not every child has a positive experience. For some children, entering an already "active classroom" was "a noisy and confusing experience . . . with unfamiliar routines and large groups of unfamiliar people" (Peters, 2000, p. 11). This case study also revealed children's concerns

about school rules and procedures. In her study, Helena Ackesjö (2019) documented preparatory activities that educators use in preschool and kindergarten programs. Her research illustrated that children are more concerned about separating from friends than about becoming part of a new community, positioning the transition to school as an event of "detachment" to make "attachments" in the new kindergarten setting. With so much focus on the forward movement that the transition to school and school readiness demands, it's easy to overlook significant early experiences that children have in making sense of who they are and who they are becoming. Drawing on children's perspectives, the transition to kindergarten is understood as a relational, contextualized event involving family, friends, and educators across multiple communities.

What are Ready Schools?

"Ready schools" shift the focus from the "student-at-risk" to the "student-at-promise" (Burke & Burke, 2005; Huser et al., 2016), seeing the transition to school as a time of settling in, adjustment, and preparation (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Fabian, 2002; Lago, 2019) and acknowledging students' strengths, rather than "problem behaviours" (Dockett & Perry, 2016; Hausken & Rathburn, 2002). At student-ready schools, teachers meet students and welcome families using transitional practices meant to prepare, navigate, welcome, and adjust by disseminating the "right" kind of information (Petriwskyj et al., 2005). When children make the transition from home or preschool programs to kindergarten, transitional activities can involve families, preschool educators, kindergarten teachers, and school staff.

Jennifer LoCasale-Crouch et al. (2008) investigated the extent to which pre-kindergarten teachers' use of transitional activities influences children's reported adjustment to kindergarten. Their findings indicated that the activities with the greatest impact for children were those that involved them directly, such as visiting the kindergarten class with their pre-kindergarten teachers. Activities that impacted kindergarten teachers' perceptions of children involved communication between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers and before-school visits by children and their pre-kindergarten teachers. While the visits seemed to correlate with kindergarten teachers' positive perceptions of children's social skills on one hand; on the other, kindergarten teachers' negative perceptions of behavioural issues among children of low-income families also occurred. The researchers suggested further study is needed to understand the correlations between frequency, intentionality, and duration of transitional activities for supporting children's adjustment to kindergarten. Amy Schulting et al. (2005) studied the ways

that transitional practices impacted children and their families. Involving more than 21,000 children in 992 schools across the United States, the study gathered data using children's cognitive assessments together with parent and teacher surveys. Schulting and her colleagues found modest results for children's early academic scores and parental involvement at the kindergarten level when schools implemented transitional practices; however, the studies by both LoCasale-Crouch et al. and Schulting et al. found that students from low socio-economic communities experienced significant benefits when educators and teachers use transitional activities. According to Schulting et al., (2005) strong leadership, the commitment of teachers, and positive home-school relationships appeared to make a notable difference for communities seen as disadvantaged.

Carol Hartley et al. (2012) conducted community-based research involving an early childhood program and two schools in New Zealand. *Crossing the Border: A Community Negotiates the Transition from Early Childhood to Primary School* drew inspiration from Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model that illustrates the "nested-ness" of children and families within community and society, influencing the transitional milestone in inter-relational ways. The study found that transitional activities such as taking children's preschool portfolios to kindergarten, posting images of both programs in the preschool and school environments, involving children in documenting what is important to them in the transition, making cross-curricular connections, and using older buddies made "crossing the border" between early childhood and school-based programming multifaceted and strengthened relationships among community members. The authors concluded that the significance of relationships, connections, belongingness, and engagement for "crossing both a physical and a cultural 'border'" (p. 1).

Discussion: Identifying Further Direction for Research

This literature review described studies from North America, Europe, Austria, Scandinavia, Australia, Turkey, and New Zealand over the past twenty years. The research recognizes that the transition to school is a significant milestone in a child's life with formative influences—academic, social, and personal. Some of the studies illustrated how the perceptions of children, families, preschool educators, and kindergarten teachers shape the ways children move from home to school and between before-school and school programs. Others considered the ways students adjust to classroom life. The build-up leading to this common, annual

milestone, including children's and their families' anticipations and school staff and teachers' expectations, shape practices intended to "normalize" the event.

Lina Lago's (2019) ethnographic study of children's transitions to school showed that "different transitions are constructed in relation to expectations of what a 'normal' transition looks like" (p. 65), illustrating the power that the school readiness hegemony wields. While the definition of "normal" may be somewhat elusive, most studies placed the responsibility of "not being ready" squarely on the shoulders of the individual child and their family. Other research constructed readiness in terms of "ready communities," whereby school staff work with preschool and child-care educators, families, and communities to support children to navigate the transition to kindergarten. Focusing on the uniqueness of each child's, family's, and teacher's transition to kindergarten experience can address a gap in research.

A child jumping with joy when discovering a familiar book or drawing oneself with teary eyes before finding a friend, a mother "fortifying" their child for the school experience, a teacher supporting students to thrive in a busy classroom suggest—moments like these suggest that the transition to school is about far more than "readiness." Researching the phenomena that arise from everyday lived experiences raises new questions: What is it like to be in kindergarten? What is it like for a child to make friends in kindergarten? What is it like for a teacher to experience a kindergarten classroom? These phenomenological-focused questions seek to understand the lived experiences of those involved and consider phenomena such as connection to familiar things, embodied aloneness and friendship, relationality of separation and belongingness, and the orienting nature of time and space. Phenomenological research can enhance insights and deepen ontological, epistemological, and axiological understandings of this childhood milestone.

Concluding Thoughts

Current research prioritizes the cognitive, social, and interpersonal skills that a child has and needs, as well as the practices and strategies teachers, educators, parents, and communities use to prepare children for school—and schools for children. School readiness, conceived as a characteristic of individual children, is problematic due to the lack of a clear definition of what skills are necessary for school entry. As well, perceptions of the ready or not-yet-ready child raise ethical questions regarding family diversity and socio-economic disparity in measuring children's and families' readiness.

In contrast, “ready schools” increase continuity by providing a smooth transition between home and school, potentially blurring the boundaries of both. Relationships and connections among families, schools, and communities can be strengthened; however, questions of access to resources must be addressed—which communities get the necessary resources, how many, and how long they are available—raising questions of equality and equity, with no clear answers.

In my review of the relevant research, I attended to lived experiences of teachers and families and discovered moments of feeling unwanted, being different, jumping for joy, being in busy noisy classrooms, fear for one’s child, and sadness at not having a friend. I argue that pursuing a phenomenological understanding of these every day, singular lived experiences can lead to more profound pedagogical insights regarding the transition to school. To be sure, this is a life-changing event for the child, this parent, and that teacher. And although we might think of this milestone as a crossing over from what was to what is as an ordinary, common, and transitional period in a child’s life, gaining further understanding of the human phenomena holds potential for deeper understandings and more sensitive pedagogical practices.

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Chapter 3: Phenomenology of the Parent-Child Goodbye on the First Day of School

Makovichuk, L. (2020). The Phenomenology of the Parent-Child Goodbye on the first day of kindergarten. *Phenomenology & Practice, 15*(2), 39–51. https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/pandpr/index.php/pandpr/article/view/29439

Abstract

As a milestone in a child's life, the first day of school is a much-anticipated event. Preparations usually begin well in advance as families shop for school supplies, visit the school, and talk about what school will be like. The many preparations instigated by the moment of saying goodbye on the first day of school were much more complex than they appeared. While such moments can slip unnoticed in the busyness of arriving and leaving, they can also provoke a memory of a child's birth or precipitate a sudden awareness of empty arms. This paper explores the often-overlooked phenomenon of the parent-child goodbye on the first school day. It reflects on the singularly parental experiences of preparation, expectation, and relationality. Lippitz's (2007) inquiry into the foreignness of school invites wonder about the child's transformation into a student and what that might mean for a parent. van Manen's (2015) phenomenology of pedagogical tactfulness offers insight into the relationality between a parent-child goodbye and the teacher-student hello. Exploring the phenomenology of the parent-child goodbye on the first day of school opened new possibilities for understanding the meaning of a child's transition to school for the parent.

In the 16th century, goodbye was expressed godbuye, meaning “God be with you” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 324), a wish that one will be caringly watched over when apart. While traces of godbuye may still linger in such sentiments as “take care,” generally “goodbyes” bring closure to time together. Thus, a child held in a parent’s arms, and with a little prompting, a young child waves goodbye. Those looking on may express amazement and admiration for one so small. We often praise and encourage these actions of the small child with little forethought of a parting ritual that will one day separate the parent and child. “Goodbye” may seem formal to one’s ears; still, we might wonder what is good about goodbyes. Goodbyes mark our farewells from others: “See you soon” signals the parting will be brief. “Have a good day” acknowledges daily comings and goings. And habitually, we gesture with a hand wave or a smile and nod as we leave. So often, when expressing parting words or gestures, a response is invited. In answer to a parent’s blown kiss goodbye, a young child presses a tiny hand to her mouth—one of many doorway ceremonies that range in significance, as do a lingering hug, tearful separation, high-five, knuckle-to-knuckle ritual that signal leaving one’s child.

Goodbye rituals are so common they may go unnoticed, blending into the backdrop of daily demands associated with work, school, and everyday comings, and goings. While goodbyes between a parent and child may be varied, the first day of school parent-child goodbye is not like other goodbyes. This goodbye marks the child’s transition from home to school. In North America, the first day of school often begins with kindergarten. Although kindergarten is not mandatory in many jurisdictions, it is intended to provide a transitional year into school. Notably, the child’s transition to school has been a focus of research for many decades, prioritizing cognitive, social, and interpersonal skills for conceptualizing what a child needs for school (Black et al., 2011; Elder & Lubotsky, 2009; Janus & Duku, 2007; McDermott et al., 2014) and what practices and strategies teachers, parents, and communities can use to ready children for school (Dockett & Perry, 2001; Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Schulting et al., 2005) and ready schools for children (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Moss, 2013; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). However, it fails to gain an understanding of the significance of the parent-child goodbye as a moment of the child’s transgression to the “alien world” of school (Steinbock, 1995). Understandably, the distressing parent-child goodbye expressed with visible discomfort draws much attention; and yet, there are many other moments from which meaning can be gained. What if we resist the pace of life that too often compels us onward to dwell in moments of

parent-child goodbyes, so as to evoke insights into this moment of the child's transition to school?

This paper applies van Manen's (2014) phenomenological and philosophical method in exploring possible meanings that arise from parent-child goodbyes on the first day of school. van Manen's (2017) phenomenology of practice method calls a researcher to deliberate thoughtfully, perceptively, meticulously on the prereflective lived experience—to "lift it up from our daily existence and hold it with our phenomenological gaze" (p. 812). The gaze of which van Manen (2017) speaks has potential to show that which is elusive yet common in our daily living. As a method, phenomenology of practice is a rigorous effort to bracket what is often taken-for-granted (the epoché) by returning again and again to the concretely lived parent experiences of the parent-child goodbye (reductions); it evokes insights and wonder about this everyday phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews with four parents were carried out to capture moments of goodbyes that dwell within parent memories and family stories. The data was then organized into lived experience anecdotes as a foundation for phenomenological reflection about what it is like for a parent to say goodbye on a first day of school, and inquiry into what makes this experience of saying "goodbye" different from other instances.

A Parent-Child Goodbye: Preparing, and Yet, Not Prepared[1]

In recounting a goodbye on a first day of school, a parent recalls preparations and early memories.

At the door, coats on—we are ready to leave—him for his first day in early learning, and me for my first day teaching a new school year. He stands ready with the backpack we packed and repacked with items carefully selected: a favoured stuffed animal, new shoes, a familiar blanket, a change of clothes. I smile. It seems only yesterday that he screamed his arrival into the world. Look at him now. An unexpected heaviness builds in my chest as I feel my eyes water. I take a moment to assure him, "You're going to have a great day!" In response, he replies, "I love you dad." Our hug lingers. I kiss his cheek. Then off he goes. I walk away feeling the weight of my empty arms. (Interview with a parent, January 21, 2018.[2])

[1] The formatting and headings in this chapter have been updated to align with the APA 7th ed. style for this dissertation and appear different from the published article.

[2] The anecdotes in this chapter were constructed from interviews conducted as part of doctoral courses (EDSE 611/621, 2017-2018).

For many families, the first day of school is an anticipated event, reminiscent of taking a child to child care or to grandma's house. Still, the preparations for this day are different. In the weeks approaching a first day, families visit the school, ask questions, consider options. Who should drive? Can we walk? What time should we leave? Should we stay or go? Amidst the travel and timing plans, items are gathered, purchased, labelled, cleaned, packed and packed again. Familiar items to be included in the child's backpack are selected, switched, negotiated. "You can take the bear that fits in the backpack, and we will leave the giant bear in your room at home." In such moments of preparation, a parent's mind is occupied with events only imagined. What if he gets paint on his clothes? What if she feels lonely? Preparedness suggests that everything has been thought through. And yet, is it possible to fully anticipate a future not yet lived?

The parent has experienced moments of separation from the child all along. The first days cradling a newborn child soon after the umbilical cord is cut may be recalled when preparing the child for a first day of school. As significant milestones, both these events are tended with busy arms. As the child grows, the parent's arms stay-in-wait to catch the child taking those tottering first steps, or stretched-wide for the running child to slow down, be careful, stay close. In these moments when the child is developing their own sense of being an individual, separate from the parent, we can see how fully occupied a parent's arms remain with carrying, catching, rocking, and cuddling a young child. And as the start of school nears, a parent's arms are still busy with selecting, folding, packing school supplies and things a child might need when the parent is not there.

The goodbye at Grandma's familiar house when a child is left in the care of family members, and the goodbye at child care when a child is given over to caregivers, are different than the goodbye on the first day of school. Grandparents and caregivers care for the child when the parent is otherwise occupied by helping to change a child's dirty shirt, insisting that the child stop to eat a snack, comforting the child when she is lonely or hurt. In these caring moments, the child is not alone. The parent-child goodbye on the first day of school marks the child's transition into independent self-care—getting shoes on and off, washing hands, finding and asking for help, managing snack containers—and all within a timely manner set by school schedules and activities. As the parent gets the child ready for moments 'not yet lived', moments

when the child is self-reliant, those carefully packed items may be a parent's way to watch over this child while apart.

When the moment of "goodbye" finally occurs, a hug may linger, and a goodbye kiss brings contact soon parted. For the child, a brief "I love you dad" before heading off, tells the parent that the child is ready. And yet, aside of the prepared items and conversations, there is a surprising heaviness growing in one's chest, startling watery eyes and suddenness of empty arms. While one parent experiences the weightiness of empty arms in the child's absence, another parent raises one's arm freely in the air with the weightlessness of a newly encountered freedom. And though a passing feeling, those empty parental arms point to what is not yet lived—what it is like to be a parent of this child in school.

A Parent-Child Goodbye: Being Present to the Other

Describing what it was like to walk with her son on the first day of school, Smith (2011) recalls being present in the moments before letting go.

I remember walking him to school on his first day. I had mixed feelings but he was very excited. As we arrived at the school, I kissed him goodbye, told him he would have a great day, and reminded him I would see him at lunch time. He trotted off happily with his new friend. But then he stopped and called. "You should go to the mall so you won't be lonely without me there." Then he waved and disappeared. (p. 1)

Intermingling emotions between a parent and child are evoked when recalling the walk on the first day of school. The child's excitement for new friends intertwines with a parent's apprehension about leaving the child on his own; the child's enthusiasm for what school will be like entangles with the anxiety a parent feels about leaving the child; the child's eagerness for new experiences interweaves with a parent's anticipation of letting go. And still, the parent takes the child to school. Then unexpectedly and without prompting, the child expresses concern for the parent who will be left alone.

It is common and expected for the parent to care for one's child, but when the child cares for the parent it may be easily dismissed as trivial. The term 'parent' arises from the Latin, parens, meaning to "bring forth, give birth to, produce" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 541). Bringing forth a child may begin with giving birth, yet for many, what it means to parent involves so much more. Parenting is not a one-sided relationship in which a parent cares for a child and the child remains a passive recipient. In a phenomenology of mothering, Bergum (1997) reflects on moments of

relational responsibility as “the experience of being for the other” (p. 22, italics in original). In a phenomenology of being a father in a child’s transition to school, Madjar (2016) reflects on a father-child relationship as being with the child. Adoptive parents would agree that parenting is more about a life lived with and for the child than the moment of birth. The terms with and for denotes the “entangledness” of the parent-child relationship. When a parent first holds a baby, the moment of wonder is soon replaced with the sense of immense responsibility for feeding, cleaning, and keeping the infant safe. The very young child is fully dependent on the parent or guardian. In the early years, caring for the child is constant: feeding, bathing, clothing, applying first aid, wiping tears, wiping noses, playing, laughing, cuddling, taking the child to the doctor and the dentist. Caring for the child goes on and on, always unique and fundamentally singular, at times overwhelmingly so. In so many ways we learn to parent from being parented when we were young; and yet, becoming a parent happens in the very act of parenting this child. As interdependent beings, we are transformed by how we care for our children, and how they respond to our caring. And although it is said that a parent produces a child, the child makes a parent.

Profoundly reciprocal, a parent-child relationship is also pedagogical. The pedagogical relationship articulated by van Manen (2015) is not limited to the physical care of a child; more specifically, it is essentially being present to the experience of the child within the particular situation that matters. The complexity of these moments cannot be pre-planned like the teaching and practicing of a skill; rather, it is seeing the child. More than looking at the child, pedagogical *seeing* is attentiveness to the experience of the observed being seen; the possibility of *seeing* that which is significant though not visible; and consequently this *seeing* is always action towards the other (Saevi & Foran, 2012, italics added). Primarily oriented to the caring education of this child, when a parent is pedagogically present, the child may experience being *seen* by the parent in moments that are often unplanned but responsive, usually spontaneous and yet sensitive, ordinarily unpremeditated though intentional (van Manen, 1991; 2015). Different than simply showing a child how to care for their belongings when cleaning their bedroom, and different from teaching a child how to feed and clean a pet for example, the pedagogy of caring for the child is essentially relational, always ethical, and yet without predictable consequences (van Manen, 2015). We cannot know how a moment will shape the child.

Children learn so much from what we do as parents. Unexpectedly, we glimpse ourselves mirrored in the child's mannerisms, when we see our own tilt of the head as the child leans into a conversation, or we hear ourselves in the child's off-handed quip to a friend or a doll. And when bags, shoes and coats are absently dropped at the door on the return home, we may look to rebuke the other parent for careless "role modeling." However, many parents may never fully realize the impact of a pedagogical moment—a moment in which the child experiences our sensitivity and perceptiveness and is shaped by our presence in some way. Parenting begins with the possibility of being present with a child in everyday parenting moments, such as walking the child to school and promising, "You will have a great day," regardless of one's own conflicting emotions, confirming, "I will see you at lunch," even when the parent does not want to leave the child. And though it may create a moment of pause, echoing in the child's words, "You should go to the mall so you won't be lonely without me there," or "I love you dad," in response to a verbal assurance for a great day, the very essence of a pedagogical relationship is alive as the parent experiences being present to the child in a way that is remembered. Parenting is relational and though parents are expected to take their child to school and let them go, a child is also sensitive to the experience *for* the parent.

A Parent-Child Non-Goodbye

When a parent takes a child to school on a first day, it is an unlikely event that a goodbye does not happen.

As we walk the familiar halls, this time feels different. He begins kindergarten today. Together, we step into the classroom and I see rows of desks. I think, "In kindergarten? Where are the familiar play centres? Where is the story carpet? Where are the building and art materials his brothers enjoyed so much?" The teacher moves frantically about. She directs children to sit in desks. "Did I say hello? Did she say hello?" I don't remember. I notice him in a desk, a colouring sheet in front of him. I am standing at the end of his row, waiting, watching. My stomach roils, churning, round and round. My mind racing, "What should I do?" The voice in my head booms, "You can't leave him here! Do something!" I feel panic rising. I'm at his desk. I take his hand, "Let's go." (Interview with a parent, January 23, 2018)

Standing in the classroom, a parent watches amidst the commotion of the first day of school. Listening to the teacher directing children to sit, the parent tries to recall if hellos were exchanged. The rows of desks and colouring sheets in kindergarten evoke memories of absent art

and building materials enjoyed by children now older. The classroom appears so different from what was expected that the parent experiences a visceral reaction. Beginning in the stomach, the effect reaches upward, awakening a voice in one's head. "Do something!" the inside voice demands, forcing the parent to take the child by the hand. The anticipated moment of the goodbye dissolves as the parent leads the child towards the door.

It is easy to dismiss the non-goodbye as the overreaction of a protective parent. The transition to school is so common that to resist leaving one's child at school would be considered unconventional—one might say, it is strange and unusual. We take for granted that the parent-child goodbye on the child's first day of school will proceed as expected. For some parents the goodbye happens at home: waving goodbye as a child steps onto the school bus, for example, leaving the parent on the roadside to watch the bus pull away. For other parents, the goodbye moment at home is pressed between daily preparations and rushing to work. Still for other families the goodbye on the first day of school brings tears and pleading negotiations for the parent to stay. Parents that homeschool their children avoid the goodbye on the first day of school; but for many families, when a child goes to school at some point a parent-child goodbye happens regardless of how a classroom might appear.

A classroom conveys an instructive order about learning and teaching, about being a student and being a teacher. The arrangement of furniture, learning materials, the organization of time structure the ways people relate and interact. In classrooms where students sit in individual desks that face the front where the teacher stands, content is disseminated, individual students follow instructions and do lesson activities. Student work is then reviewed by the teacher for completion and understanding. The assumption that teaching leads to learning is supported by the classroom structure. In another classroom, students engage in various learning activities and the teacher meets students in their learning. In the flow and movement, a teacher pauses, observes, asks a question, offers a strategy or idea for guiding a student. In such a classroom, student understanding and teacher pedagogy are socially active and responsively intertwined, and classroom structures support the role of the teacher making in-the-moment decisions about what it means to educate (Biesta, 2012).

Structure and order are aspects of the very experiences of schooling, whether they fit or not with our own particular lifeworld. The meaning of school order as the order of the world outside of the home carries varying degrees of sameness, difference, strangeness, and

foreignness. Husserl helps us understand how these meaning-giving encounters are all-at-once co-constitutive of our being in the world (Steinbock, 1995). In phenomenological-pedagogical contexts, Lippitz (2007) explores foreignness "as a relational concept, referring to phenomena that always appear and achieve articulation in relationship to something that is *not* seen as foreign" (p. 78, italics in original). Although not deemed a foreign land, school, with its unique order of time, space, and relationships, is fundamentally different from what a child experiences at home. The differences between home and school are transgressive for the child; not necessarily negative, but rather, transformative. In an exploration of foreignness for newcomer children in school, Kirova (2013) highlighted this ontological shift for children that school imposes through its explicit and implicit rules, roles, and interactions among students and teachers. And though this shift can be jarring for many children making the transition to school, it is important to remember that "the point of education is never that children or students learn, but that they learn *something*, that they learn this for particular *purposes*, and that they learn this from *someone*" (Biesta, 2012, p. 36, italics in original). In school, children learn not only the content of the curriculum, they also learn how they fit, or not, within the broader world, and this (re)shapes a child's lifeworld, separate from the parent and away from home. In the moment of the parent-child goodbye lies a parental decision, though shrouded in family hopes and dreams and past school experiences, there is resolve for the transformative nature of this school.

In encountering the classroom space, a parent comes face-to-face with what school will be like for one's child. For some parents, traditional rows of desks and work sheets are welcomed, reassuring them that the child's learning will unfold in familiar ways. For other parents, those same rows and papers call upon them to take notice of their own taken-for-granted values, beliefs, past experiences, and expectations for what it means to be educated. Confronted by the absence of a story carpet and building and art materials in kindergarten, the parent might experience a rupture in one's hopes and dreams for what the child's learning experience will be like. Coming upon a classroom as different, strange, even foreign from what was expected, the parent is presented with a seminal decision, "Do we stay?" "Do we go?

A Parent-Child Goodbye: What is the Right Time?

When the parent takes a child to school on the first day of school the actual moment of the parent-child goodbye has its own time.

The administrator greets us warmly and leads us, his hand-in-mine, to the kindergarten room. The children are gathered on a carpet with the teacher. She glances in our direction. Smiling, she waves us over. I nudge him forward. I sit at the edge of the carpet, and he settles on my lap. I smile at the other parents gathered 'round. My attention turns to the teacher as she begins to read, "It was the first day of school, and... ." The end of the story sparks movement in the parents and children. I hug him. "See you later, I can't wait to hear all about your day." Our embrace is snug. I feel his arms grasp my neck. "Bye mom." I watch him turn and move into the bustle of the group. (Interview with a parent, January 23, 2018)

Unhurried, a parent settles along with the child to hear the teacher's first story on a first day of school. The gathering of children, parents and a teacher suggests a relaxed tempo for how people come together and take-leave in this classroom. As the story ends, the children and parents begin to stir; amid the lively activity, a parent-child goodbye takes time with its own unique expression—its own tone.

Time is a human experience that is primal to how we experience being-in-the-world. In the years before school, time is measured in family rhythms. For some families, time is loosely paced, rising with the sun, play and work in the midday sun, shared family time and bedtime at sunset. For other families, clock-time sets the beat, signalling daily comings and goings, daily activities, meal times and family time. Families mark the passage of time in such practices as noting the growth of children on a door frame, and yearly celebrations such as birthdays, family traditions and life's significant milestones. Dodson (2016) explores how time "binds a child to parent" (p. 443)," while reflecting on the inevitability of letting the child go. As a family, time is filled with life's joys, adventures, fears and anxieties, all at once propelling us forward while reminding us of what has passed: memories of the day the child was born, recollections of first words, first steps. Then, soon enough or too soon, the child is destined to begin school and time at home must adjust.

The shift between time experienced in one's home and school-time can be onerous with parents and children trying to get ready, arrive on time, and be prepared for the school day. School-time is marked by bells that affirm punctuality and judge tardiness, and clock-time is ever present as time not yet filled, waiting for the next class or watching minutes tick by until recess or home time. Time-waiting moves slowly, at times a laborious effort toward a final moment of crescendo—the moment most anticipated. The slow rising and falling of school time

is felt in the flow of school activities and noted in daily agendas for recording impending due dates and forthcoming school events. Calendars track the months of school, and yet it is the arrival of summer break that is so often awaited. When they can, families set work schedules to match school breaks. Then, all too soon, the long summer days quickly languish with the approaching school year.

In the ebb and flow of school-time a parent and child exchange a goodbye. “It makes the goodbye much easier for the child,” says a teacher who instructs parents to leave the children at the classroom door. “Easier” means less disruptive. For one family guiding the child to the door, a quick goodbye is said. Once the child enters the classroom, the parent turns to leave. For another, the parent lingers at the doorway, snatching glimpses between others moving through the doorway to see the child wandering the classroom and settle among a group of other children. In another school, some parents are told of open-door policies that imply freedom for joining classroom activities, participating, helping, watching. For families joining classroom activities, a goodbye may be paced between school activities that pull the child in the direction of school life and a parent set to leave. For a few parents, the goodbye stretches into days, even weeks, when a child is not yet ready for a parent to leave the classroom. The parent of a teary-eyed child not yet ready to separate may engage, with the teacher’s help, in a concentrated effort to move from the child’s side: to the sidelines, out into the hallway, eventually to leave the child at school alone. This goodbye may extend over days, or even weeks, with an emotional holding-on: “Don’t go,” and pleading, “Will you stay,” combined with the parental negotiations, “I will stay for ten minutes.” The parent wishes for these daily goodbyes to “ease,” meaning the goodbye will take less time, be less stressful, and become less visible to others. The parent hopes that in time the child will get use to the new time-space routine and new people. Still, for other families, the good-bye takes place early in the day with drop-off at the out of school care program or the bus stop near home. The parent-child goodbye is expressed uniquely within each parent-child relationship, and uniquely in time and space as well.

A parent-child goodbye may be unhurried when a teacher’s smile invites the parent to join the first story. Still for others, the goodbye may extend over days and weeks amid classroom activities, a stolen moment at drop-off in the hallway, in a parking lot, or waving goodbye as the bus pulls away. The space and time for a goodbye may be intimately connected to the space in which it takes place—at home, on the side of the road, in a doorway, amid classroom activities;

still, the goodbye tone is not solely for bringing closure. This goodbye opens opportunities for a new relationship.

A Parent-Child Goodbye: Opening for a New Pedagogical Relationship

When a parent says goodbye to the child on the first day of school, the teacher is there to welcome the child.

I feel the load of the pack shift from my arm to the hook. "Keep your toys in your bag until I pick you up, okay?" He nods. It is the first day of school. We locate his name tag, and as I pin it to his shirt, our eyes meet. "It's going to be fun, you'll see. Remember, Michael will be here, too." I give him a reassuring squeeze, "I love you, you're going to have so much fun." His eyes scan the room. His smile brightens when Michael arrives. The teacher begins a song. I usher him to the carpet, feeling a rush in my movements. As I step back toward the wall, he looks up and our eyes meet. "I'll see you soon. Remember to..." My words trail off as his attention shifts to Michael settling beside him. Next, he turns to the teacher, holding a storybook. (Personal memory of a teacher, November 25, 2017)

In the moments leading up to a parent-child goodbye on the first day of school, handing the child over to the teacher is observed in the parent's movements. Home toys are carted to school; the backpack from arm to the well-used hook; a name tag from table to a child's shirt; the child ushered to the shared carpet space and waiting teacher. A similar movement is noticeable in the child's line of sight moving from eye contact with the parent, to scanning the classroom, looking at the friend alongside, and finally turning to the teacher. In these movements, we see how the child is directed away from the parent and toward the teacher. In guiding the child towards school, traces of the teacher's welcome appear in the prepared name tags and labelled coat hooks, a song for gathering the children.

A parent-child first day of school *goodbye* is the first day of school *hello* between a teacher and students. At home, the child is in many singular relationships as a daughter, a sister, a granddaughter, a niece. At school, the child becomes one of a group, "one of a type" (Packer & Giocoechea, 2000, p. 236). As the child enters the group, the parent may still only have eyes for their child, for they know their child uniquely. Watching from the classroom edges, the parent is comforted when the child is joined by a friend. In a small way, the parent feels assured that the child will not be alone; and yet, the parent-child goodbye on the first day of school is like leaving a child on their own.

The first day of school might not be the first time a parent leaves a child in the care of another adult. When a parent takes a young child to a friend's birthday party for example, a birthday child's parents are there to welcome the new arrival at the party. Often, the child's first friends are the children of the parent's friends, family relations, or even children of work colleagues. Arriving at a birthday celebration, the adults exchange pleasantries and catch-up on recent events, while the children run off to play. Once the birthday festivities are underway, the parent may leave the child for a short time knowing that the child will be cared for by friends or family members. Like a birthday party, a first day of school may be shared with familiar, as well as unfamiliar parents and children; however, at school the teacher has a vital role. Selected by the school, the teacher holds a record of knowledge and practice deemed worthy. The title, "The Teacher," signifies not only skillful knowledge, but also trustworthiness.

In the school community, the teacher is tasked with teaching the students and in doing so, the teacher watches over the group. The notion of '*in loco parentis'*, a legal term meaning in place of the parent, implies a kind of promise whereby the school, and by extension the teacher, takes up responsibility for the students. Still, it is the parent who must first give the child over; ushering the child to the carpet, the parent assures the child, "It's going to be fun, you'll see." But it is when the parent steps back toward the wall and looks on that an opening is fully created. This isn't just any opening, it's not the same as leaving the child with the friends and family at the birthday party or for an evening out. This is a different opening involving a prepared backpack, a name tag, a story carpet, and a welcome song. This opening is for a teacher, not like the parent, in a pedagogical relationship that has the potential to see to the caring education of the child (van Manen, 2015). Taking pause, the parent sees the child turn toward the teacher, and the teacher begins with the children. Still, the pedagogy of the child is only shared, after all, the parent leaves a child with a teacher only briefly.

The Parent-Child Goodbye

The teacher is seminal in shaping the child to student, but not before the parent-child goodbye. Though there have been comings and goings all along within family life, school is a formative moment separating the child and parent.

The parent-child goodbye on a first day of school is an embodied experience. When the time for school arrives the old sentiment "*god be with you*" may linger in the packed school bags, hugs and kisses. Anticipating what the child might need, preparations for the first day of school

may be the parent's way of continuing to watch over the child. Still for the parent, becoming a parent of a child in school leaves preparations incomplete.

The parent-child goodbye on a first day of school is a time-space experience. Alongside plans and preparations for how the first day of school will go, the moment of a parent-child goodbye may be a quick exchange at the classroom door, snatched between classroom activities, prolonged with pleading negotiations in the hallway. Even for the goodbye at home, the school bell looms—marking the child's entry into school and a shift in time experienced at home.

The parent-child goodbye on the first day of school is a transgressive experience. We are not necessarily conscious of our own or other taken-for-granted expectations until we bump up against that which is strange or even foreign. Schools, as well-established and mostly trusted societal institutions, may rouse a parent to question: What is the best space for the child's learning? What will school mean for our family? However, home and school are in what Husserl calls a co-constitutive relationality of "homeworld" and "alienworld" (Steinbock, 1995). Whereas homeworld is understood as what is intimately experienced and alienworld is understood as outside of one's intimate experience, both are necessary for understanding what it means to belong. Without experiencing the alienworld of school, that child may not fully understand the meaning of being at home. The school experience expands the child's understanding of the world, both the world of home and non-home, and their place in it. This is what education is about, after all—when a child discovers who they are within the larger world (Biesta, 2012). Like no other goodbyes in the parent-child life, when the parent takes the child to school the parent-child goodbye on the first day of school signifies a "rite of passage," an entrance to the social world outside of home, separate from the parent.

The parent-child goodbye on the first day of school is a relational experience. The child learns many things from a parent—first words, family rituals, a sense of self, and perhaps a caring disposition. Parenting is the first relationship with the child that holds the potential for pedagogical tactfulness (van Manen, 1991; 2015). The parent, who knows the child like no other, may wonder if the teacher could possibly recognize what this child needs. Like the parent, pedagogy calls a teacher to act with care and sensitivity (Saevi & Foran, 2012); and yet with so many students to watch over, a parent may wonder: Will the teacher recognize when this child is sad? Will a teacher know what he needs? The teacher, too, has the potential to take up the caring education of the child in the social world outside of home. Understood as more than simply

teaching a child, pedagogy is also knowing and acting with care, always recognizing this child and what this child needs from a given learning situation (Foran et al., 2020; van Manen, 1991; 2015). The teacher has an important role in helping the child recognize the importance of their different kinds of relationship with others, both in and outside the home.

In the moment of the parent-child goodbye, a parent gives the child over to the teacher and the school; still, the parent remains a parent of the child becoming student. On the first day of school, the parent may bring the child to school and assist with name tags and belongings, or perhaps the parent stands alongside the road, watching the school bus pull away taking the child to school. And while the parent looks on with eyes only for this child, perhaps there lies the trace of *godbuye*—a wish for a teacher to caringly watch over and share in the pedagogy of the child.

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Chapter 4: The Phenomenology of the Kindergarten Classroom

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Abstract

For several decades, researchers have explored the nuances of a child's first year as a student, discussing this transitional milestone in terms of "readiness" and proposing ways to prepare children for school and schools for children. In these studies, the kindergarten classroom is often presented as simply the locale in which a child's school life begins or a "container" for school activities. Yet, in interviews with parents and teachers, lived experiences in the classroom figured prominently: when a parent takes a photo of their child before heading to the classroom on the first day, a teacher prepares the classroom for a new group of kindergarten students, a child enters the classroom leaving the parent in the hallway, and a child brings a gift for the teacher in the classroom, a teacher's special place. This phenomenological study uncovers meaning structures commonly overlooked in other research, in particular that a kindergarten classroom is an orienting place for those who inhabit it that situates and impacts their respective roles and relationships. More than just a location within a school building, the classroom is implicated in what it means to become a parent of a student, to be a teacher of a new group of kindergarten students, and to be a child becoming a student. Using van Manen's (2014) phenomenology of practice method, the kindergarten classroom's transformative potential is shown through arriving, preparing, leaving, and welcoming moments.

Classrooms are places where students come to learn, and teachers come to teach. Most contain desks and tables. In many, the walls are covered with educational materials and abound with ideas about what learning is most valued. For a great many children, the classroom is the place they spend the most outside their homes and child care settings.

In *Fate of Place*, Edward Casey (1997) proposed that "just as place is animated by the lived bodies that are in it, a lived place animates these same bodies as they become implaced there" (p. 242). It follows, then, that being in a classroom is different from being at home or in a grocery store. According to Casey (1997), the notion of "having been placed" (p. 260) is more than simply being located. Drawing on Heidegger's (1953/2010) notion of being-in-the-world, Casey proposed that the intra-action between "placed there *in* a body and *by* a body" (p. 260, italics in original) is always at work amidst people and place. In the classrooms of my youth, for example, I learned how to be a student by entering the classroom at the sound of the bell, sitting at my desk, paying attention, raising my hand, lining up, and following rules. As a parent, I shared my children's schooling experiences by listening to them recount their days, reading notes that came home from school, and attending parent-teacher meetings. As a kindergarten teacher, I arranged the classroom and learning materials and then rearranged them in response to my students' learning. When I began to explore the phenomenology of a child's transition to school, the classroom appeared repeatedly as the place parents leave their children with teachers, teachers meet students in learning, and children learn to be students. The lived experiences of the classroom awoke a sense of wonder about the meaning of such places for children, parents, and teachers.

The classroom is so common to schooling that even when children play school, their actions reflect the classroom dynamic: someone is the teacher "teaching" with "pretend" students following instructions, being reprimanded, or encouraged. Yet, classroom experiences often lay dormant in memories until something stirs them awake. Phenomenological research offers a way of showing how the classroom shapes, facilitates, or restricts the acts with and on others: a teacher with students, a parent with a student, a teacher with parents. Gaining insight of phenomenological meaning structures of lived-time-space, embodiment, and lived-relationality (van Manen, 2014) the classroom is presented in ways not discussed in the literature.

Background

Extant research of the child's transition to school regards the classroom as a particular location shaped by rules, routines, and activity (Einarsdóttir, 2003). The classroom appears as a container for teaching and evaluating curricular content (McDermott et al., 2014; Guhn et al., 2007), a locale where the busyness of school life happens among teachers and students (Peters, 2000), and a place where children expand their social networks and friendships among same-age peers (Ladd et al., 1996; Feiring & Lewis, 1989). Robert Pinata et al. (2002) noted that although highly variable, child outcomes are directly related to teacher-child ratio, classroom activities, teacher-child interactions, and family income. Mei Seung-Lam and Andrew Pollard (2006) proposed that the "transition [to school] is not only a change of location, but also a process of change and a shift of identity" (p. 129) in which prior-to-school competencies, identity, and ways of relating with others adjust to the primary school and the "social context of the classroom" (p. 136). Though many of us have experienced or can imagine classroom activities, the phenomenon of subjective changes experienced by all involved, have not been explored in the literature.

Research on the continuity of the school transition identified differences in educator perceptions of children when educators perceive a busy or calm classroom environment (Einarsdóttir, 2003). The perception of a busy classroom is different from how time, space, and relationships are experienced in a calm classroom. Kindergarten classrooms are often described in terms of child-sized furniture (Fleer, 2003), hands-on learning materials (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), and supports and strategies to help children learn what school expects of them. Sue Dockett and Bob Perry (2004) surveyed 350 parents to discover their perceptions about what makes a smooth transition. The study revealed that parents often focus on their children's academic abilities. Another study, by Cathy Kaplun et al. (2017) highlighted how parents often prepared children for academics by using workbooks to practice the alphabet, counting, and reading. Both studies discussed how parents' and grandparents' memories influenced their hopes and wishes for the child to have a different or similar schooling experience (Kaplun et al., 2017; Turunen & Dockett, 2013).

A child's transition to school is lived within classrooms among teachers and students, often with parents alongside. Encountering a busy classroom, learning materials, furniture, and people are embodied experiences and appear uniquely in one's lifeworld. Being-in-place is without separation from people-place relationships (Seamon, 2000) and the encounters of a kindergarten classroom. This paper explored the possible meanings arising from parents' and

teachers' lived experiences of the kindergarten classroom. It asked: What is it like to experience the classroom when the child transitions to school?

Methodology: Phenomenology

Max van Manen's (2014) phenomenology of practice is a sophisticated methodology that is well-suited to explore the lived experiences of the kindergarten classroom. Phenomenology requires a mindful approach to the meaning structures that arise from everyday experiences. As families prepare their children to start school, a transition is also taking place in classrooms as teachers prepare for their students' arrival. While the extant research supports the importance of preparing the child to be ready for school and readying schools for children, phenomenological methodology brackets what is taken for granted by way of the epoché and makes space for reflection and inquiry that resists naming what a classroom is and is not.

Gaining Research Ethics Approval

Approval for this study was obtained from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board and Cooperation Activities Partners. Within a month of gaining ethics approval, the COVID pandemic forced school closures followed with a pivot to online learning until the end of the school year. I filed an amendment to my method to conduct live online interviews. Data collection took place upon approval of my requested modifications.

***Data Gathering Interviews*.** Teacher-participants from three different schools and nine family-participants from four different communities were recruited. Two interviews were with the same family, one with each parent. Interviews of approximately 60 minutes in length were conducted live-online during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The semi-structured interviews began with a review of informed consent and focused on the participant's in-person transition to kindergarten experiences earlier in that school year. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and reviewed for concrete, lived-experience descriptions (LEDs). The constructed LEDs were shared with participants to verify the "plausibility" of the experiences. Max van Manen (2014) suggested that this method of data gathering of "other people's experiences" (p. 313) and constructing tenable LEDs for concreteness, offers the foundation for phenomenological research and inquiry.

***Data analysis*.** Taking up van Manen's (2014) "criteria for evaluative appraisal", I oriented to the phenomenon using a hermeneutic circle of inquiry. Moving back and forth between descriptions of lived experiences and interpretative inquiry, I attended to the

concreteness of the experiences, gaining reflective depth, and a continuous questioning of the phenomenon. In this article, phenomenological reflections on lived experiences of arriving, preparing, separating, and welcoming reveal the classroom as a context for relational and embodied intersubjectivity and possibility when a child begins kindergarten.

Somewhere Between the Front Door and the School

The first morning he is eager to get the backpack he packed the night before. I step back as he stands at the front door and smiles for the photo. I see his excitement and smile at him. He looks so big with his backpack and new clothes. When we get to the classroom, it's different. I feel the shift in him, from excitement to nervousness. He isn't clingy, but I sense he doesn't love it. He just does it. (Interview with a parent, May 1, 2020)

Most families excitedly anticipate the start of a new school year. Taking advantage of this, a plethora of commercial advertisements almost eclipse the event itself, luring parents to buy the latest school fashions and the newest pop-culture motifs with images of the shiny, smiling, anonymous faces of children. Parents are subject to the desires these promotions incite in their children, which almost overtake the first day, although a smile for the photo at the front door suggests otherwise.

Arriving at school and the classroom, a parent senses their child's shift from excitement to nervousness. Observing their child's face, a parent feels compelled to respond. For Emmanuel Levinas, "the relationship with the face is immediately ethical in nature" (Paris, 2016, para 4). Levinas' philosophy of ethics summons a responsibility for the alterity of the Other as separate and different from oneself. Phenomenologically, alterity is concerned with "the otherness of the other" (van Manen, 2014, p. 64), which makes the Other uniquely who they are. What does a smile reveal about the child's unique Otherness? What is the meaning of a smile?

Frederik Buytendijk (1988) explored the meaning of this magical moment in the phenomenology of a child's first smile. Easily dismissed as an infant's biological response, Buytendijk exposed the smile as an encounter with another.

> [T]here is a reciprocity in the anticipation of joy which is mirrored in the smile. The human being is the inexhaustible source of happiness for the exploring power of sympathetic affection, and therefore, we see the mutual smile as the most convincing expression of pure love. (p. 19)

When parents use phrases to elicit a smile for a photo, such as “Say cheese!” or “Say Pizza!”, the smile exchange is markedly different than that encountered in the first shared smile between an infant and a parent. The camera elicits a performance of the happy smile. Similarly, staged smiles for photos of a child and sandcastle on a beachy holiday or in front of the tiger cage during an afternoon at the zoo, capture events we seek to memorialize, like the first day of school. And while family trips may be enjoyable and exciting, the shifting emotions for the start of school makes the smile at the front door unique. Exploring a range of smiles, Buytendijk (1988) examined the ambivalent smile in a friendly encounter and the smile of an anticipated tickle. Etymology defines “ambivalence” in terms of *ambi*, meaning “in two ways,” and *valentia*, meaning “strength,” or *valere*, meaning “be strong” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 22). Indeed, a smile anticipating the first day of school could well be ambivalent, as excitement mingles with nervous equanimity. What might an ambivalent smile mean for a parent and child on the first day of school?

A parent-child relationship and teacher-student relationships are both pedagogical in that they are concerned with whom the child is and will become. Max van Manen (2015) posited that for both a parent and a teacher, they, “must constantly be able to interpret and understand the present situation and experiences of the child and anticipate the moments when the child in fuller self-responsibility can increasingly participate in the culture” (pp. 119-120). In such encounters, a parent, or teacher for that matter, sees the child as uniquely Other, not a smaller version of oneself. Martin Heidegger (1953/2010) described the other as the relational Other that one shares being-in-the-world-with (p.118). Sharon Todd (2003), drawing on Emmanuel Levinas’ philosophical writings, explored the relationality of being-with and being-for. In being-with, one responds to the Other because they can relate their own experiences to the experience of the other; whereas, being-for is alterity toward the Other, a responsibility to remain open to the difference of the Other. In pedagogical terms, the parent-child relationship can be understood as both being-with and being-for. In being-with, a parent senses a shift in the child because they too experience entangled feelings in the child’s transition to school. In being-for, a parent encounters a responsibility to the alterity of the child-Other in anticipating the kindergarten classroom. The child’s kindergarten classroom, not the classroom of their youth, is the place where the child will enact self-responsibility and participation in community apart from a parent.

Preparing a Kindergarten Classroom with Students in Mind

After moving things around again, I breathe in and gaze over the classroom, trying to feel the room's flow. I search for long lines where children might run back and forth, places that look inviting and not closed off, spaces I can easily access, and areas with not too much stuff. I slowly shake my head. The flow is never the same year to year. Standing in different positions in the room, I seek openness and light—that just-right-feel. I glance at the materials and wonder—will they engage with them? Smiling, I know that when the children arrive, the classroom will change again. (Interview with a kindergarten teacher, May 22, 2020)

A teacher first encounters a group of students as they prepare the classroom for their arrival. Arranging furnishings and materials, a teacher meets the students in her mind's eye. Seeing, according to Max van Manen (2016a), is never objective; rather, "how and what we *see* depends on who and how we are in the world" (p. 23, italics in original). Attuning to students, a teacher orients to the classroom in a particular way; the teacher "tries the classroom on."

Trying a classroom on evokes images of donning a new outfit. We sense a garment's fit, texture, how it hangs, clings, stretches, or binds. In a phenomenological exploration of the hotel room, Jacob van Lennep (1987) remarks, "a room is a sacred garment" (p. 209) and noted that to dwell in one's home is to feel its comfort, light, texture, artifacts collected, gifted, or inherited from previous generations. One's home enfolds a familiar time and space with a uniquely personal history. Heidegger (1953/2010) suggested that dwelling entails taking care of a place, a home, for example. In contrast, a hotel room is neutral, void of personality, and though cleaned, it is not cared for in the same way as one cares for a home. "In this room," van Lennep (1987) declared, "I do not bear any responsibility, in that it does not indicate my past or my future, in that I merely appear in it as a number in an arbitrary series …" (p. 213). A hotel room is occupied temporarily, unlike the temporality of one's home.

A teacher embodies a classroom in a remarkably different way than one who dwells at home or stays in a hotel room. In the classroom, whether physical or virtual, a teacher orients to students in a "teacherly" way. In his discussion of Heidegger's notion of spatiality, Theodore Schatzki (2010) referenced "orientation" and "dis-tance."

> Orientation is the orientation of being-in-the-world. This orientation lies in the equipment-using actions people perform, that is, the uses people make of equipment. These uses are tied to the projects, ends, and motives that determine people's activity. […] Dis-tance, meanwhile, is the elimination or overcoming of distance, i.e., bringing

> near. […] Dis-tance simply means that people's activities so unfold that entities that were far are brought near. (p. 31-32)

Taking up Heidegger's use of the hyphen in the German word for "dis-tance," Schatzki disrupted the common understanding of "distance" meaning to stand apart. Keeping the hyphen, "dis" maintains the meaning, "opposite" of together, with "stance" meaning, to stand. "Dis-tance" carries the meaning of standing near and far. As such, what it means to be a teacher is ontologically embodied within classroom preparations even before students arrive on the first day of school. Being oriented to children not yet present happens in other contexts as well. For example, when expectant parents prepare a nursery for an unborn child or parents prepare a place in the home for an adopted child. Although soon-to-be parents don't yet know their children, they rely on past experiences such as their own childhood, knowledge of other children, and stories gained from others in their preparations for the arrival of the child. In his hermeneutic study on the meaning of children in the lives of adults, David Smith (1983) reflects on the child's "need for a place" (p. 233). Not solely a physical space, Smith conceives a place for a child is as much an attitude of making space in one's life. Just as parents prepare a home for a child's arrival, teachers prepare their classrooms for a new group of students, making space for them in their teaching life.

In preparing for their students' arrival, a teacher contemplates classroom arrangements that enable or disrupt students' movement, spaces for meeting students in learning, and materials that provoke curiosity and interest. Schatzki (2010) suggested human activity is a kind of "temporal flow" where "the existential past, present, and future occur together at once" (p. 27). Schatzki called this "activity timespace" (p. ix), whereby time and space are inseparable and constitute a particular kind of social activity, unique to humans. As such, the social activity of teaching and learning makes the timespace of classroom preparations uniquely different from preparing a home for a new baby or adopted child. The timespace in preparing a classroom is remarkably different from Anna Kirova's (2010) description of schooled "clock time."

> The experience of being continually rushed in order to fit in as many activities possible in a day as a measure of one's productivity and ultimately usefulness to society is created by clock time and is not common among people who do not live in the *now time*. (p. 35, italics in original)

In her phenomenological study of newcomer children's experiences in school, Kirova used *fotonovelas*—photographic images imposed with speech bubbles. The children's photo documentation of the lunch hour, inscribed with speech bubbles, offered a rich data collection for analysis. The data revealed the school bell as playing "a powerful and central role in the process of controlling and disciplining the bodies …" (p. 36), where clock time reveals "a succession of *now* moments or succession of transitory present" (p. 35, italics in original). Distinctly different from discrete now moments of schooling, the temporality and temporal flow that Schatzki describes entwine past, present, and future.

Applied to classroom preparations, Schatzki's phenomenon of timespace helps us see how past, present, and future are entangled in the decisions a teacher makes for classroom design. A classroom is unique to the historicity of schooling, constituting a particular social activity among teachers and students (and parents too, for that matter). In a phenomenological study of the history of the school, Nick Piem (2001) traced the genealogy of school buildings. The influences of modern Western industrialization and notions of efficiency are foundational to school buildings designed to educate a "self-regulating" workforce (p. 182). Ideas of social responsibility, surveillance, and power permeate the original grand halls and classrooms, ontologically making school an institution of power with a long history. As noted by Piem, classrooms and teachers are implicated in the self-governing social formation of students. The history of self-governance is alive in the arrangement of furnishings to limit running, for example. And yet, a future not yet lived mingles in the hopes that learning materials will entice students' interest and curiosity. Is it possible that the kindergarten classroom offers an even greater promise for a different educational future?

Embracing openness for the child who is learning to be a student, a teacher holds the possibility for reimagining a classroom. As such, seeking openness and light in the kindergarten classroom, a teacher pedagogically seeks to see the students before her and, all-at-once, the student they will become (van Manen, 2015). In a study of foreignness and otherness in school spaces, Lippitz (2007) concluded,

> It is the discontinuity and breach between the generations which virtually holds open the relationship between children and their parents, between educators and students. Not determining, and not being able to determine that which children themselves are, opens up the actual possibility of pedagogy. (p. 91)

Pedagogy and pedagogical attentiveness call-on teachers and parents to interact sensitively with the child and student before them, becoming attuned to their potentiality, including the recognition that the child and student is uniquely Other. Like parents, teachers hold a responsibility to the alterity of the Other by being open to the student-Other. For Gert Biesta (2017), it is a "student's subjectiveness" (p. 94) that opens the possibility of a generative education, where teaching is about "questions of emancipation and freedom" (p. 21), rather than conformity and compliance. With the arrival of each new group of kindergarten children, not yet students of industrialization, the kindergarten classroom concretizes the possibility of a transformative educational future.

Arriving: The Classroom Door

Parents were invited into the school to help find coat hooks, but not into the classroom. So, it was like push your child through the door. Of course, I didn't. My arms felt long and dangly, though. I wasn't ready for this. (Interview with a parent, May 1, 2020)

On the first day of school, some kindergarten teachers stand in the doorway to greet each child as they enter, leaving parents to stand in the hallway with arms uncharacteristically empty. Try as they might to peek at their child in the classroom, the teacher's body fills the doorway. In other classrooms, a parent and child walk through the doorway and into the classroom together. Parents take their leave at some point on that first day or the days that follow; after that the classroom door keeps teachers and their students together, separating them from the rest of the people in the school.

In interviews with teachers and parents, the classroom door was revealed as a transitional point in the kindergarten experience—a place to stand to greet each child, say goodbye, watch a child move away. Doors are structural elements that allow entry and that close-off spaces such as classrooms, offices, gyms, teachers' lunchrooms. While a closed classroom door keeps children from wandering off, it also contains the bustling classroom activity, ensuring the buzz of learning doesn't disrupt others. The word "contain" arises from *conteinen* and refers to holding together to "behave in a certain way" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 156). A classroom door holds children together with a teacher, united by their respective roles as students and teacher, governed by the school's rules and the bell that signals when the door opens and closes.

The classroom door differs from the front door of a home, where the first day of school photo is taken and through which a child returns at the end of a school day. The door to a home

ontologically separates and connects. In a phenomenological investigation of doors and windows, Cheung Chan-Fai (2004) pondered the lived experiences of the home door as a "boundary defining the inside from the outside, the inner and the outer, the entrance and the exit, as well as the private and the public" (p. 255-256). In the privacy of their home, a family is "behind closed doors," removed from the gaze of others. The door of a home, according to Chan-Fai, is the "existential possibility of disclosure and concealment" (p. 256). Although a classroom door also creates separation, is a classroom truly private when the door is closed?

A closed classroom door indicates that a teacher would rather be left alone with her students, and there are unspoken rules about opening a closed classroom door. After receiving the teacher's permission, children receive "passes" to open the door and leave the classroom. Expected guests and parent volunteers knock to gain entry. School principals may open the classroom door, sometimes announced by a slight knock, to check in on classroom happenings. Usually, however, the teacher closes and opens the classroom door. Unlike the door of one's home that has the potential to conceal the private life of those who dwell there, the classroom door contains a kind of private-public forum. Beyond the closed door, the classroom is private in that it creates a sense of intimacy between a teacher and students, and because not all that happens there is shared with a child's family. Still, behind the closed door, children experience the gaze of other children and the teacher, especially when banished to the "time-out chair," asked a direct question, or sent from the classroom to sit in the hallway noticeably away from others. These public declarations mold a child into a student who behaves in a certain way. What happens publicly in classrooms is reflected in the original understanding of "public," meaning "open to general observation, sight or knowledge" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 615). Unlike the privacy that a home door offers, a classroom door holds the existential possibility of public gaze.

The term "public" also refers to public spaces and ideas, such as a public library, a public school, or public opinion. In these instances, "public" means "open to all" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 615) and refers to notions of access, exposure, questioning, and transparency. Public education entitles all children right to access; nonetheless, a classroom door separates children from parents. Even in schools that embrace an "open-door" policy, the door is not opened for parents to parent their children. Rather, such policies are intended for parents who want to be involved in the school by assisting with preparations for a special school activity or supervising students during non-educational activities, such as the noon hour. When requested, parents help in some

classrooms during specific learning activities, helping students to print or read, for example, especially for those students who need more help.

The parents' arms that "long and dangly" as their child entered the classroom may be a sign of something other than relinquishing a child's dependence. Though away from the parent, the child is not alone in a classroom. Under the gaze of others, the child learns to be independent, follow rules, manage time, and do self-help tasks independently. While it may easy to judge a parent for "overparenting" a child by doing for them rather than a child doing for oneself, Claire Smith (2011) posits parenthood as always preparing for the eventual separation when a child leaves home. While the separation in the child's transition to school is not the ultimate separation that Smith speaks of, the classroom door clearly links to the emptiness a parent feels as their child crosses the threshold into the classroom.

When children pass through the kindergarten classroom door, they are initiated into the ways of being a student. Wilfred Lippitz (2007) explored foreignness and otherness as essential aspects of becoming a student and posited that, "[C]hildren are destiny for their parents, but the destiny of a given child is not that of the parent" (p. 91). Because a parent cannot know all that happens beyond the classroom door, the child becoming student cannot be fully known to the parent. In becoming a student, a child's behaviour changes; they come to know themselves as one of a group and "one of a type" (Packer & Giocoechea, 2000, p. 236). Like being in a foreign land, Lippitz suggested, the child enters the school a stranger to the ways of "doing school:" lining up at the sound of the bell, raising a hand to speak, waiting in line when going to and from the classroom, sitting on a carpet or in a desk until a teacher permits them to move. Both Lippitz (2007) and Biesta (2017) proposed that a student's self-determination and independence make education a generative process, intra-active and relational among a teacher and students within a classroom. Consequently, like the parent who cannot fully know the child-student at school, a teacher cannot know the "whole child." Gaston Bachelard (1958/2014), in his phenomenology of outside and inside, offered, "there are two 'beings' in a door, that a door awakens in us a two-way dream, that is doubly symbolical" (p. 239). Applying this proposition to a classroom door, an existential duality emerges, with a child on one side of the door and a student on the other. In separating the child from parent, a kindergarten classroom door divides a child from the intimacy of their parents' arms—from student-becoming a public self.

A Teacher Welcomes a Student to the Classroom

Captivated by his zucchini-filled arms, I lower myself to a chair and wait. He approaches, smiling, holding the overly large vegetable in both arms. "He grew it from the seeds you gave him when we visited in the spring," his mother offers. "I don't think I have ever seen a zucchini this big," I say. "It's for you," he offers. I feel the weight of it in my hands. "I wonder if the children will have ideas about what to do with it. Do you think you could tell us how you grew it?" He nods. Turning to his mom, he announces, "I will stay." (Personal memory as a teacher, 2020)

The first day of kindergarten is filled with bustling activity as children and parents arrive and teachers invite the school's newest pupils to explore the room and explain where to hang backpacks and coats, find name tags, fill out forms. Rarely does a teacher have time to pause and wait for a student to approach, but when I saw the giant zucchini, I knew this was a unique moment. Gifts for kindergarten teachers are not unexpected; you might receive a drawn picture, a found flower, a special rock. An apple for the teacher originated as payment for teachers in historical times (Binkovitz, 2012). When I accepted the zucchini at the onset of a school year, payment was clearly not on my mind or the parent's.

Presenting a host with a bottle of wine or box of chocolates when invited to a dinner or party is common practice in Western societies today. One might even say it's a gift in anticipation of hospitality. "Hospitality" originates from the Latin understanding of "friendliness to guests" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 361). In service industries such as hotels and restaurants, paying guests receive hospitality from employed hosts. "Hosts" has several definitions: (1) *oste*, meaning "the person who receives guests"; (2) *hostis*, meaning "enemy, stranger"; (3) "bread or wafer regarded as the body of Christ" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 361). A religious host receives guests in need of food, shelter, or spiritual guidance, imparting the body of Christ. As such, hospitality is possible when a host has a place, a church, or a soup kitchen to receive guests. On a socio-political level, hospitality is about opening a country to strangers who seek immigration or asylum and raises questions about the relationship between the host country and people's right to citizenship.

Mark Westmoreland (2008) analyzed Derrida's philosophy of hospitality as ethics. Hospitality as purely ethical is impossible, stated Westmoreland, in his discussion of Derrida's proposition that "absolute hospitality" requires a host "to give all one has to another without asking any questions, imposing any restrictions, or requiring any compensation" (p. 3). More

commonly understood and experienced, “conditional hospitality” is defined as rights and duty, obligation and expectations, invitation and exchange between a host who opens their home, church, or country to guests. In this common understanding of hospitality, Derrida claimed conditional hospitality is a form of “violence” (p. 3), whereby the host-guest relationship is defined by obligations and expectations to behave in “my house” or “my country,” and the host always maintains the right to reject a guest. Although teachers may not typically describe themselves as hosts and their students as guests, the intersubjectivity of the hospitable relationship holds insight for the teacher-student relationship.

The intersubjectivity of host and guest maintains a particular kind of relationship. A host opens their home, or classroom for that matter, to guests. Hosts have certain expectations of how their guests will behave in the place that’s been opened to them. In exchange, guests expect a hospitable experience. In their phenomenological study, Rochelle Skogen and Paulin Mulatris (2011) explored a pedagogy of hospitality in pre-service teachers’ experiences in Canadian schools. By making space for student teachers in the life of a classroom, the role of guests and hosts are assumed, and the quality of the host-teacher’s hospitality holding particular consequences. As in any hospitable relationship, the risk of violence or an inhospitable experience is possible. Skogen and Mulatris concluded that a good host teacher can “see the potential in all student-guests right from the start even though it may not be immediately visible to them” (p. 36). In the busyness of a first day, a kindergarten teacher may not see but may register the movements of bodies coming and going. “Hello, come in,” “Put your things here,” “Join me there” are the words expressed by teachers as classroom hosts welcoming guests, the children, and parents.

van Manen (2016a) described how students are not seen by all teachers and certainly not all in the same way. Seeing a student pedagogically happens in everyday classroom encounters and relational moments that are filled with caring, sensitivity, and responsibility, while being present to what is possible. This kind of seeing is more than shining a light on something or someone. van Manen (2016a) says: “Being seen is more than being acknowledged. For a child, it means *experiencing* being seen by the *teacher*. It means being confirmed as existing, as being a unique person and a learner” (p. 31, italics in original). As described by van Manen, the pedagogical relationship in which a child is deeply recognized by a teacher is like the hospitable teacher-host described by Skogen and Mulatris, who confirms the potential of all guests.

Similarly, welcoming students on the first day of kindergarten, and seeing the potential in each of them, calls on a teacher's sense of duty, obligation, and hospitality.

As a hospitable relationship, the intersubjectivity between host and guest, teacher and student are essential. To be a good host, or good teacher, one must be acknowledged as such. A teacher is confirmed as a good host-teacher or a hostile-teacher, and the classroom as a hospitable place or a hostile place. The real gift is not the items children give their teachers, but words and actions that convey "I will stay," affirming the goodness of the teacher-host and embracing the classroom as a hospitable place.

A Few Final Thoughts

In this study, I explored the role that the kindergarten classroom plays in the child's transition to school. More than a container or locale for school activities, the classroom is a place of particular events, preparing, arriving, welcoming, separating. Edward Casey (1997) distinguished that place extends,

> [I]n forming the event, refusing to remain confined to any simple location by expanding outward in accordance with the event it embodies. So conceived, a building *spaces itself out in place*. Not because place is what a building is *in*, that is, its bare locus, but because place is what a building expands *into*; what it becomes (and is always still becoming). (p. 315, italics in original)

In the child's transition to school, the classroom ontologically "expands into" what it means to become a student, a kindergarten teacher, and a parent of a student. In preparing the kindergarten classroom, the possibility of a generative education lingers in the teacher's decisions for self-regulating arrangements alongside learning materials selected to captivate student interests. The kindergarten classroom is also on the mind of the parent and child before leaving home on the first day of school. Between home and the classroom, the child's self-responsibility and participation in classroom life is already emerging in the alterity of the Other, the child as a unique being. Arriving at the child's first classroom, the door indicates both literal and symbolic separation—parent and child, child and student, private and public.

It is here, in the kindergarten classroom, that the intersubjectivity of the student and teacher relationship emerges through a pedagogy of hospitality. The quality of the host-teacher is not so much entertaining guests; more so it is in one's generous ability to see and acknowledge

the student becoming, as a unique Other. In so doing, the kindergarten teacher embraces "becoming-ness" in classroom transformations.

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Chapter 5: The Co-constitutive and Intersubjective Nature of a Student's Becomingness

Becoming a student begins when a child starts school. Product advertisements, family preparations and teacher plans direct the child toward school and being a student. School itself constitutes what it means to be a student, to move through the day at the sound of the bell and to follow the rules, routines, and rhythms for being one of a group. The significance of this ontological change in the child is still not understood. We understand even less the ontological changes the transition to school requires of the child's parents and teachers, and their interconnectedness.

Students experience many transitions, or a change in context, as they begin and advance through school. After high school, some students continue into college or university; then, at some point before or after graduation, most people make the transition into the workforce. Transitions are experienced uniquely and have the potential to change relationships, roles and responsibilities, identities, and place in the world. For example, moving to a new city may bring change in schools, friends, and jobs. When grown children move away from home to live in a university residence (Smith, 2011) or their own home, they accept the responsibilities that come with living independently. A change of place may bring friends and family members closer, or it can create a sense of loneliness or even foreignness. While some changes are expected and other changes are sudden, in every transition there is an element of uncertainty about what the change will be like. Will I make friends? Will I find a job? What will life be like?

People may experience traumatic change instigated by the onset of war, environmental devastation, or financial and emotional crisis. Those immigrating to or seeking asylum in a new country may encounter unfamiliar language, culture, and weather, for example. Wills Kalisha (2020) explored what it is like for unaccompanied youth seeking asylum in Norway to experience extended wait times. The youth are without their parents and are granted temporary entry into Norway, while they face the likelihood of deportation when they reach the age of eighteen. I have not experienced a transition like this, where my life is in limbo, though I imagine a sense of being suspended, living in between, as if there is no other side to cross over to. The strangeness is so great in some transitions that the words "foreign" and "foreignness" are used to describe a sense of feeling as not belonging.

Vastly different from the experiences of the youth seeking asylum in Norway, I relocated to another Canadian city with my family when I was twelve years old and then again at thirteen. The moves, leaving friends, and changing schools remain etched in my memory and shaped my

decisions when purchasing my own home many years later. I wanted my children to feel a sense of belonging, to have friends, to know their school, and so I chose a house that was walking distance to all three levels of school. Though we stayed in our little house throughout my children's schooling, I watched my son experience changing relationships when his close friends moved away. Change is an essential element of transitions, change in context, change in a state of being, change in relationships and roles. Yet not all changes have the same implications. A transition to school, as a liminal experience where the familiar and the unfamiliar are bounded, is a process of ontological change for all involved: the child, the parents, and the teachers.

A child's transition to school has gained the attention of researchers, teachers, and parents, particularly if the transition is a difficult one. In these instances, the prevailing attitude is that the transition to school would be less disruptive if the children were better prepared or if the "right" strategies were used to prepare families and children. But these mindsets suggest the transition to school should be settled even before the children begin school, before they become students. By using a phenomenological approach that emphasizes philosophical reflection to explore the possible meaning structures arising from human phenomenon, the emphasis shifts from explaining it and what to do, toward understanding the essential nature of a transitional event—what makes it what it is.

van Manen (2014) distinguished phenomenology as the study of "the 'experience' of the what" (p. 91). For Edmund Husserl, van Manen (2014) contended, lived experience is understood as "the what" that appears in consciousness, the prereflective experience that concerns transcendental phenomenology. However, Husserl's proposal that knowledge arises from that which appears in consciousness does not satisfy van Manen. Drawing on Heidegger, van Manen proposed that prereflective lived experience also reveals an orientation (ontology) to a something. As humans we are already in the world as people, parents, teachers, and so forth, and our primordial experiences reveal how we are, not only that we are.

This study of a child's transition to school asked what makes a child's transition to school what it is for parents and teachers? In this investigation, Anthony Steinbock's (1995) discussion of Husserl's notion of co-constitution between homeworld and alienworld was essential. His analysis suggested that Husserl uses the term "homeworld" to mean the world that we are born to, and which fundamentally shapes how we experience and know the world. The term "alienworld" refers to ways of being that are different from our fundamental or homeworld. He

proposed that the homeworld and encounters with an alienworld are co-constitutive in nature, whereby each "world" (that which is familiar and that which is unfamiliar, strange, and foreign) is both constituting and constituted by the other.

If we understand the child's homeworld as all that is familiar because the child has been born into its rules and ways of doing things, and the school as the alienworld with new rules, roles, and expectations, the child's transition to school is a liminal experience of "appropriation" and "transgression."

> There are two modes of liminal experiencing: "appropriation" and "transgression." This constitutive duet unfolds as the co-constitution of the alien through appropriative experience of the home, and as the co-constitution of the home through the transgressive experience of the alien. Here neither homeworld nor alienworld can be regarded as the "original sphere" since they are in continual historical becoming as delimited from one another. (Steinbock, 1995, p. 179, italics in original)

In this study, parents' and teachers' experiences of facilitating the child's transition to school revealed the co-constitutive nature of the relationship between the child's being at home who is becoming a student at school. The inter-relationality of the child, parent, and teacher is present in their continual becoming that is delimited from one another.

The Co-Constitutive Nature of a Child's Transition to School

When a child begins school, their parents' and teachers' experiences of preparing, arriving, separating, and greeting intentionally direct the child toward entering the alienworld of the school, a classroom, a teacher, and other students. Arriving at school, a parent and a child may run at the sound of the bell, and a parent may help a child to put their belongings away and join the group with a teacher. In these and other preparations, school constitutes what it means to be a parent of a student. The parent embodies the knowledge that the classroom is meant for teachers and students when stepping back to watch the child join the group and turn toward the teacher. Still, in a moment when a parent only has eyes for their child, the glance reveals the liminal space between being a parent of a child and being a parent of a student, whereby the student is one of a group.

In Chapter Four, I described an experience of a parent separating from a child at the classroom door. The classroom door concretizes the duality of the child-student. In an intimate relationship with the parent and family, the child is on one side. On the other is the student as

one of a group with a teacher. While life at home is influenced by school time and classroom expectations, it nonetheless remains a private and connected space of human activity (Chan-Fai, 2004) uniquely different from the public space of the classroom (Makovichuk, under review). The co-constitution of home and school is encountered through the parent-child and teacher-student relationship, whereby one is relationally for the child and the other is for the group.

The Intersubjectivity of a Child's Transition to School

The co-constitutive nature of school and home is relationally intersubjective between a child, a parent, and a teacher. In Chapter Three, I described the lived experiences of a parent stepping back from the classroom after dropping off their child or standing alongside the road watching the school bus pull away. An opening, embodied in a parent's empty arms, is created when the child leaves the parent to go to school and enter the classroom. Such an opening gives room for the teacher-student relationship to emerge.

From a pedagogical perspective, the teacher and the classroom are necessary for a child to become a student. As with a parent-child relationship, a teacher *in loco parentis* acts responsibly toward the student. When they make name tags and create spaces for the students to put their belongings, for example (interview with a teacher, May 2020), a teacher acts toward a group of students in a "teacherly" way. Being a teacher is different than being named, "Teacher." We become a teacher in relationship with our students—these students, in the way we are *with* and *for* the students who are present to us.

In Chapter Four, a student's gift for the teacher on the first day of school suggests the intersubjectivity of a host-guest relationship (Westmoreland, 2008) and reveals the classroom as a host's special place. The teacher-host opens the classroom to the student-guest (Makovichuk, under review). When students enter the classroom, they show their willingness to be guests in different ways. Some overtly say, "I will stay." Others put their hand in the teacher's hand (interview with a teacher, May 2020) or join the teacher and group for a story (interview with a parent, January 2018). Just as each response can confirm the hospitality of the teacher-host and the classroom as a hospitable place, a student may reject the teacher-host and the inhospitable classroom.

The triadic relationship between the parent becoming a parent of a student, the child becoming a student, and the teacher host is relationally intersubjective, each confirming, informing, and transforming the other.

Generative Possibilities for Educational Transformation

The co-constitutive nature of home and school and the intersubjectivity of the child, parent, and teacher roles suggests that when a child begins school the possibility for a generative education exists. In a study of foreignness and otherness in educational contexts, Lippitz (2007) asks, "Does not each new generation, as something radically new, have a chance to live its own life, a life that remains inescapably foreign for the parents' generation—even though it has origins in the parents and their generation?" (p. 90). What might, "having a chance to live their own life" mean for the child becoming a student?

When a child begins school but is not yet fully a student, the possibility of living a student life in their own way is greatest. In Chapter Four, when a parent senses a child's apprehension about going to school despite the hope that the child will embrace school as a "good" place (interview with a parent, May 2020), Levinas' encounter with the Other (Paris, 2016) points to the uniqueness of the child—a child who is not their parent. When a teacher prepares a classroom knowing it will change once the students arrive, the Other is revealed again. The Other, according to Levinas is different from the other defined by Husserl. For Husserl, as Stienbock (1995) explained, the Other is the second, "a mere reflection" (p. 66) that is accessible because of what Husserl calls, "an apperceptive transference of sense" (as cited in Stienbock, 1995, p. 69) through shared consciousness. However, for Levinas, the relationship with the face is immediately ethical and calls on us to address the uniqueness of the Other as different from ourselves (Paris, 2016). Addressing the unique Other that Levinas' philosophical writings bring into view, is like van Manen's notion of relational pedagogy, which considers the way an individual orients themselves toward a subject. For example, a parent, a teacher, or even a stranger would each see a child differently because of their relationship to the particular child. However, pedagogically, our orientation toward a child is not about how that child is like or different from us, but rather how we *see* the child as a unique Other. The child is fundamentally their own person, even though we may live together, reside in a similar community, and attend the same school.

The uniqueness of the Other, as a child and a student, means that a parent can't fully know exactly how a child will settle into becoming a student, nor can a teacher fully know the child, who is a child at home. Biesta (2017) reminded us that the students before us are not the same as the image of an objectified "student."

> [C]lose our eyes to what is visible, to the 'evidence' that tries to tell us that the student is not yet ready, that the student has been unreliable in the past, has abused our trust, and so on. All that may be true, and all that may be taken into consideration, but if we tie the student only to his or her past, only to everything that is known so far, we block the possibility of a different future. (p. 94)

When arranging a classroom to prevent running, to meet students in learning, to select materials that engage student interest knowing that when the students arrive the classroom will change again, a teacher embraces the uniqueness and potentiality of students. The potentiality that students bring to the classroom is the possibility of a generative and transformative education. Biesta (2017) proposed teaching toward a different future of education: "as teachers we orient our actions towards that which is not visible in the here and now – the students subject-ness – which is a matter of seeing what is not visible" (p. 95). The children, who are not yet students, bring with them that which is not visible to the teacher (their interests, experiences in community and home, their hopes and desires, identities, and relationships) and there lies the possibility of educational transformation that calls for a pedagogical relationship that embraces the uniqueness of each student (van Manen, 2015).

A Different Pedagogical Conversation

In *Pedagogical Tact: Knowing What to do When you Don't Know What to Do*, Max van Manen (2015) described a notion of pedagogy that highlights everyday relational moments with children or students. He states, "I genuinely feel that pedagogy is the vocational calling that lies at the origin of humanity and at the heart of our humanness and our purpose for being human in a fragile but fascinating world" (p. 12). Though much of the current research regarding a child's transition to school focuses on their "readiness" for this transition, phenomenology of practice research offers insight into human phenomena—the embodied, relational, and spatial-temporal moments already filled with meaning (van Manen, 2014). By suspending what is already theorized and explained in the readiness discourse that posits children have to be "ready" for school before they enter the classroom for the first time, a phenomenological approach sees a child's transition to school through a philosophical lens that offers new insights.

van Manen (2006) reminded us that "educational situations are always changing because the students are never the same, the teacher is never the same, the atmosphere is never the same, the time is never the same" (p. 187). The co-constitutive nature of a child's transition to school

means that the liminal spaces between parent-child and teacher-student relationships are always evolving. While these relationships are essential for the child becoming a student, both parent and teacher are also transformed in a student's becomingness. This intersubjectivity reveals the inter-relationality in the making of a student at school. Importantly, without one of these significant relationships, a child's transition to school would not be what it is. A child only becomes a student in a school with a teacher; a parent only becomes a parent of a student when a child goes to school; we become teachers in relationship with our students once they arrive. Pedagogically, this triadic relationship makes a child's transition to school what it is.

This Study Is Just a Beginning

In phenomenology, there are always other experiences and philosophical reflections to show a phenomenon's meaning structures (van Manen, 2014). Further interviews will offer further insights into this childhood milestone. And while I speak of the importance of the triadic relationship when a child begins school, children's lived experiences are absent in this study. School restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic prevented me from doing in-class research and moved learning online, so I was not able to interact directly with children who were starting kindergarten even though their lived experiences as they started school are essential for understanding the possible meaning structures in this milestone. If I had visited a kindergarten classroom, I would have been able to get to know the students and teacher and build comfortable relationships that are integral to people sharing their experiences.

An Opening for Further Phenomenological Studies

The literature review in Chapter Two highlighted family and teacher experiences that existed in research and could contribute to further phenomenological insights. For example, ethnically diverse families feeling a need to fortify a child for the school experience, a child sensing they are "bad" when held back, or a teacher experiencing a busy classroom are lived experiences that can offer further insights when explored using a phenomenology of practice methodology.

van Manen (2014) suggested that diversity is inherent in all lived experiences—the day to day and the extraordinary. The experiences of newcomer families are extraordinary and transgressive (Kirova, 2010) in ways that may shed further light on the linguistic and cultural differences that adds further complexity to a child's transition to school. What is it like for a family when their child begins school in a foreign country? Or begins school with a diagnosis of

physical, cognitive, or emotional differences? What is it like to prepare a child to move from before-school programming into kindergarten? Phenomenology of practice is a research methodology that encourages deep philosophical thought that is relational and ethical in nature. Phenomenological research that reflects on what it is like to transgress social and cultural differences can offer more profound and insightful pedagogical understandings for teachers of students who make the transition to school from another country, with diagnostic labels, and from child care or preschool. These unique experiences can contribute to a deeper and broader understanding of what it means to traverse the liminal boundaries of what is familiar at home and in the community to that which is new and unfamiliar at school.

The Phenomenology of Practice and a Child's Transition to School

I first read Max van Manen's insightful pedagogical texts as an early childhood educator. His attentiveness and sensitivity toward parents' and teachers' relationships with a child or student still captivate and inspire me pedagogically. The pedagogical tactfulness that van Manen (2015) wrote about focused on the everyday moments that often takes place between planned lessons. I too, am conscious of such moments happening, a moment with a child or a parent in which an insight seemingly appeared in the moment and (re)shaped how I responded. As an educator referred to the importance of being "responsibility uncertain" to make space for in-the-moment responses to students that mattered for our relationship and for their learning and identity as capable students. When deciding my doctoral research focus, I was intent on learning phenomenology, and now, I can say with confidence that phenomenology-of-practice research has nurtured my attentiveness and sensitivity to pedagogical moments that matter.

For human science researchers, phenomenology of practice attempts to get close to the events that have meaning for our pedagogical relationships with young people (van Manen, 2014). By exploring parents' and teachers' lived experiences regarding a child's transition to school from a phenomenological perspective, I have gained an appreciation for the vital epoché. Our taken-for-granted assumptions get in the way of really seeing the significance of everyday experiences with a child or student. I've learned to exercise the phenomenological epoché and reduction, which have allowed me to recognize my unrelenting judgements that come unexcitedly, and explored, with diligence and depth, the meaning of the moments that seem to matter for my relationships with a child or a student (van Manen, 2015).

Teachers and educators are taught to be reflective. To reflect is to "turn or bend back" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 646); and for Husserl, a turning is an attempt to return to the originary moment, "back to the things themselves" (van Manen, 2014, p. 93). By remaining attentive to the lived experience of "a something," everyday events become worthy of further notice. Rather than explaining a situation or activity and moving on, the reductive method invites openness and fosters a sense of wonder and by keeping the questions open to further refection and interpretations. van Manen (2014) suggested, "[I]n wonder, we see the unusual in the usual, the extraordinary in the ordinary, … [W]onder concerns itself with the ordinary itself, and so everything that belongs to the ordinary is therefore extraordinary" (p. 223). The ordinary and everyday moments of a child's transition to school are extraordinary. More than simply being or not being ready, this childhood milestone is lived uniquely, entangled in family and teacher lives and relationships. Pedagogically, lived moments of parents and teachers preparing, arriving, separating, and greeting are a few of the moments that matter for a child becoming a student. Universally, the phenomena arising from such moments shows an intersubjective, generative, and co-constitutive nature of home and school. Still, phenomenologically, there are always more lived experiences from which further insight and understandings of any given phenomenon can arise. Remaining open is what it means to animate a phenomenological attitude.

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Appendix A: Research Ethics Approval

Notification of Approval

Date:	August 30, 2019
Study ID:	Pro00092932
Principal Investigator:	Lee Makovichuk
Study Supervisor:	Anna Kirova
Study Title:	A Child's Transition to School: A Phenomenological Study
Approval Expiry Date:	Friday, August 28, 2020
Approved Consent Form:	**Approval Date** **Approved Document** 8/30/2019 Information/consent letter for Family Participants, clean 8/30/2019 Information/consent letter for Teacher Participants, clean
Sponsor/Funding Agency:	SSHRC - Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council SSHRC

Thank you for submitting the above study to the Research Ethics Board 1. Your application, including the following, has been reviewed and approved on behalf of the committee.

- Information Letter for Participants, Version 1, July 12, 2019;
- Assent Form for Child Participant, Version 1, July 12, 2019;
- Questions Guiding Phenomenological Semi-structured Interviews, Version 1, July 12, 2019;
- Confidentiality Agreement, Version 1, July 12, 2019;

Any proposed changes to the study must be submitted to the REB for approval prior to implementation. A renewal report must be submitted next year prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Approval by the Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to access the staff, students, facilities or resources of local institutions for the purposes of the research.

Sincerely,

Anne Malena, PhD
Chair, Research Ethics Board 1

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).

Appendix B: Cooperative Partner Approval

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BOARD OF TRUSTEES
WARD A Cheryl Johner
WARD B Michelle Draper
WARD C Shelagh Dunn
WARD D Trisha Estabrooks
WARD E Ken Gibson
WARD F Michael Janz
WARD G Bridget Stirling
WARD H Nathan Ip
WARD I Sherry Adams

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
Darrel Robertson

Centre for Education
1 Kingsway NW
Edmonton AB T5H 4G9
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February 4, 2020

Dr. Denise Larsen
Associate Dean, Research
845 Education South
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 2G5

Dear Dr. Larsen:

Approved Research Project: A Child's Transition to School: A Phenomenological Study

The above noted research project application has been approved, subject to the following conditions:

- participation in the study is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw at any time;
- absence of written, informed consent will be interpreted as the absence of consent;
- personal information may only be used for the stated purpose for which the information was collected or compiled;
- anonymity of the participants and confidentiality of information obtained is assured;
- the researcher must be in compliance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and Regulation.

By acceptance of this letter, the researcher will:

- submit a final report to Research and Innovation for Student Learning and agrees to dissemination of the research results within Edmonton Public Schools;
- comply with the conditions to conduct research in Edmonton Public Schools.

Lee Makovichuk may now make the necessary arrangements to proceed with this project by contacting the principals noted on page 2 of this letter in order to obtain their approval to conduct research in their school. It is the responsibility of the researcher to provide the principal with a copy of the proposal and all related documents if requested. Please note that it is at the discretion of Edmonton Public Schools to rescind this approval at any time.

If you require further information, please contact Jan Favel, District Information Coordinator at 780-429-8191 or research@epsb.ca.

Sincerely,

Ann Parker
Director Research and Innovation for Student Learning

/jf

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

In this study, parents and educators were offered the opportunity to either tell me about or provide a written account of their lived experience. Most people chose to talk about their experiences online in real time with me. Only one person sent me a written lived-experience description.

To elicit concreteness experiences, a semi-structured interview process was used to help research participants reach into their lived memories. Not all questions were asked of all participants and some questions were asked in the moment of a particular interview to elicit more concrete details.

The following list of questions includes those that had been planned ahead of interviews and those that emerged within the interview process. The italicized questions (edited slightly for clarity) emerged from conversations with a parent and a teacher and were captured from the transcribed audio/video recordings of the online interviews. Though all questions were asked over the span of twelve interviews, not all questions were asked to all participants.

Planned and Emerging Questions from Interviews with Parents

- Describe how the day began. What were some of the things you did to ready your child? Describe how time felt.
    - *Time seems to speed past as we observe each of these milestones. Do you have a sense of a day as school got underway that comes to mind for any specific reason? As the rhythm of school days took shape, perhaps?*
    - *You mentioned his backpack. What do you remember packing for him in his backpack?*
    - *I am going back to this idea of preparing for school. Do you remember what you said to him about preparing for school?*
    - *I'm really interested to hear about your experience, as a parent as [Name] transitioned to school. What was the experience like? It's often helpful to begin with a very concrete kind of experience. Can you think of a day?*
    - *Can you describe the day? Changed how?*
    - *[Father], another father experienced challenges when taking the day off to take his son to school. Can you tell me about your experience?*

    - *You described the excitement [child] expressed. How did you feel about her going to school?*
    - *You describe the before school letter as having a tone. Can you tell how that tone felt for you?*
- Did you have a particular way, or routine, for getting your child ready? For getting yourself ready? What things were part of preparing for your child's day at school? What did you say to help your child prepare for the school day? Describe what it was like to leave home.
    - *Parents often do a lot of preparation for children going to school, right. Even before they get to school. Do you remember a time when you were preparing?*
    - *What was that like—taking a picture of him—he's ready, he has his backpack on, he's wanting you to take different images. What was that like?*
    - *Okay, he's got his backpack on and he's ready to go to school and then what?*
    - *What did the time feel like? How does that hurry up and resistance feel?*
    - *What did you do to "pack" him up?*
    - *What other ways did you prepare [child] and [child] for school?*
    - *That's one of the hopes that you had for them at school—that they would be in their community school with a core group of children. Do you have other hopes for their school life?*
    - *Do you worry for him?*
    - *You mentioned the school routines have changed what you do at home. Can you tell me more about those changes?*
- Describe what it was like to arrive at the school? How did you feel? For example, what was on your mind? What did you do? What did you say?
    - *On that open house day, do you remember noticing anything particular about the school? The space of the school?*
    - *Tell me about this experience of feeling less familiar. As the parent, all of a sudden you are looking to him for some direction. Tell me about that feeling of unfamiliarity.*
    - *You're in the space of the school and worried about if you should take off your shoes or not. So, tell me more about the space. What presented itself? What did you notice about it?*

    - *Tell me more about how that felt—what it was like for you. What went through your mind, what we're looking at and what you were trying to make sense of in that moment. Were there others in the environment that you thought were more familiar?*
    - *With the lack of explicit expectation, you were looking for what was expected? What do you think would have happened if you had done something incorrectly?*
    - *I'm going to go back to something you said earlier. Do you mind? You talked about that feeling of being closer to him in this experience, and then gratitude for being able to be there, and then this idea of embarrassment about if he is ready. Can you talk about that?*
    - *You get out of the car, and you got his bag, and then what happens next?*
    - *That's interesting. School is filled with all these rules and as parents we've experienced school and come out the other end, and those rules just kind of come with the territory of school. Yet it's a bit different experience when you're the parent and your child is starting school. How are you feeling for your child and the school rules?*
- Describe what happened next. How did you feel walking into the school/school grounds? How did your body feel? What did you think? What happened?
    - *Knowing that [child] was slow to warm up, you did lots of things to mitigate that—to manage that for him. Can you tell me about what you did?*
    - *I'm just going back to clarify a few points. You talked about the sun shining as you were walking up the sidewalk. Do you recall having an awareness of time?*
    - *Okay and when you get inside, what's the first thing you do? When the bell rings, those doors open to you, and before it rings its closed?*
    - *So, the bell rang, the door remained closed, and then, who opened the door?*
- Describe the classroom. What did you see? How did you feel in the classroom? What happened? What did you say? Describe your interaction with your child's teacher. What did you say? How did your body feel?
    - *When you arrived that day and other children are there what did you notice [child] do?*
    - *Were there other families there? Did you have any exchanges with the other parents? What did you take away from that?*

- *Can you think about that first day again. When you went into the classroom, what did you see?*
- *Tell me about your lingering. Did you notice anyone? Were you watching him? Were you watching others?*
- *Can you think of an interaction that you've had with [the teacher]?*
- *How did that feel when you found out there was help there for him?*
- *Tell me about leaving [child] with a teacher you already knew. Were there any surprises?*
- *Give me an example of a time you felt really listened too. In that conversation – where was her attention? What did she do that helped you feel listened too?*
- *Can you tell me about that day in the class? Being in that classroom in that moment, how did it feel being in that space?*
- *You said that [child] was upset on that first day of school. Do you remember anything about the teacher, how she responded to that? How did you feel about that?*
- *So, feeling apprehensive – and what was that like?*

- What was on your mind when you left your child at school? How did your body feel? Describe how time felt. What happened?
  - *So, tell me about that when you separated. How did that happen?*
  - *Tell me about the hug. How did the hug feel to you—was it a whole hug, a half hug?*
  - *When you left the classroom, what did you do?*
  - *Reading the information, did anything stick out for you? Did it give you any information about your role as a parent?*
  - *It's been sometime since he started school. What does it look like now, can you describe a day that you may not have taken him, but you helped him prepare for?*
  - *Tell me about that hug on this first day.*
  - *Tell me more about that—health and safety. That has come up in a couple of areas already—in the parking lot, at recess and now with food coming into the classroom.*
  - *Tell me about how that feels in your body. How does that feel right now as you are reliving those words? Are you feeling tense, are you feeling…—where do you feel it in your body?*

- *How is that for you when you were separating from him, knowing what you know about [child]?*
- *How was that? What was that like for you as his parent?*

- Describe what happened at the end of the school day. What did you do? What was on your mind? What did you say? Describe how time felt at the end of your child's school day.
  - *You talked about how you have a dialogue at the end of the day. Can you think of a particular dialogue that you had? Is there one that comes to mind?*
  - *How does that feel when he says he likes something? Alternately, how does it feel when he talks about things that are tricky? What tells you he doesn't understand?*

Planned and Emerging Questions from Interviews with Teachers

- Describe how the day began. Describe the classroom. What did you do in the classroom? What was on your mind? Describe how time felt before the children arrived?
  - *Do you recall a particular moment of the start of school? If you think back to September or October maybe there's a day or a moment that really comes to mind.*
  - *Can I ask you to return to that moment. Do you remember anything about how you felt just before families arrived? What it was like to be in the classroom?*
  - *Do you have a particular memory about the start of school? It may be preparing the classroom, or meeting parents, or when children arrive, or in the days that follow. Is there a moment that sticks in your memory?*
  - *Often, there are moments or experiences that remain in our memories about certain events. Can we begin with an experience you recall around a child's transition to school? It might be preparing the classroom, it might be on a first day, it might be when you met some families or a particular child.*
  - *Can I take you back to when you were setting up the classroom? You began to describe an intentional process of trying to think things through. Can you describe a day when you are setting up a classroom? Tell me what it looks like. If somebody was looking in looking at you, what would they see you doing?*

- *When you switch something out, do you have someone in mind? A child in mind? Maybe, so and so really likes this, so we're going to put this out. How do you and the children fit into adding material, or adding books?*
- *Could you describe an "enthralled" moment?*
- *Describe that moment; what are you feeling when you are on your way for a first day?"*

- Describe what happened when the children arrived. How did your body feel? What did you think? What did you say? What happened?
  - *You were saying that the first family came in and they were filling out the forms, and the boy was moving throughout the room. Then other families were arriving. What was that like?*
  - *Okay. So when the children come in and gravitate towards different spaces—was there anything that surprised you about how the children or a child used the space? Do they use them as you have imagined?*
  - *So, what does that "hold" look like? What would you do or say to a child? What would you say to a parent?*
  - *You talked about the routine that started outside with the group; can you describe a whole day with a whole group?*
- Describe a particular interaction with a child. What did you say? How did your body feel? What did you do? What did you think? How did this experience with a child make you feel?
  - *Can you tell me about when the boy was exploring?*
  - *So, the families left, and the children stayed. How did that go—with the parents leaving the children?*
  - *How did that feel—being with the children as opposed to being with the children and the parents?*
  - *How would you feel about telling me about the child who was crying?*
  - *Did you have any idea about how the other children were feeling?*
  - *Okay, and do you remember the day that he came in and just settled right in? Can you tell me about that day?*

    - *So, when the mom would leave and you took the child into the classroom holding his hand, what would you say to the child?*
    - *You have helped this process along and then the child holds your hand and goes with you into the classroom. How did that feel?*
    - *When children are upset, or when they're first making that transition, you talked about giving lots of time to the process. On the first day how would you experience that time—children are arriving, you're involved with them—and then at the end of the day—how does it feel?*
    - *So, you describe this very intentional process with children and taking time and respecting their time. I'm wondering how that time feels like for you?*
- Describe a parent interaction. What did you say? How did your body feel? What did you do? What did you think? How did this experience with a parent make you feel?
    - *Do you remember anything about a particular parent's body language, or anything that came up in those early days, about communication with parents?*
    - *How did you get mom to leave? At the end of the day when mom picked up—how did that go with her?*
    - *What's it like for you to get to know families?*
    - *What do you think? How do you think parents experience [the information you provide]? What's your impression from parents about your communications?*
    - *For each child, you call home. Can you describe a parent's response to that phone call?*
    - *In those early moments when you're noticing things about the children and you're feeling that exhaustion because of all that new information, do you share your insights with families? How do families respond to your insights?*
- Describe what happened at the end of the school day. Describe the classroom. What did you do in the classroom? What was on your mind? Describe how time felt at the end of the school day.
    - *Then you continued throughout the day and when they all left, what was it like to be in the classroom alone?*

- *The parent is asking them to leave and they are saying, "No I don't want to…" How does that fell as the teacher?*
- *As you're thinking about the year and the transition—although we don't know what's coming next year—is there anything that comes to mind that you want to do differently or the same?*
- *That idea that time felt brief at the beginning, can you tell me how that feels differently in other parts of the year?*