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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, educationalists have turned to Emmanuel Levinas when considering the relationship between ethics and education. While it is true that Levinas never spoke of ethics in relation to the practice of classroom education, nonetheless, for Levinas, ethics is a teaching, and learning can only take place in the presence of the Other. This thesis considers how, within the constraints of the Irish primary school education system, teachers can develop a Levinasian approach to teaching, that affords both them and the children they teach multiple opportunities throughout the school day to take up their ethical responsibility for each other as Other. Beginning from a Levinasian understanding of learning and teaching as constituting primordially relational and ethical events, and weaving the philosophies of Levinas, and the educationalists he inspires, into the approaches of philosophy with children, restorative practice, and PAX, this thesis suggests a unique approach to ethics in Irish primary school classrooms. The focus of this thesis, then, is on both the philosophical underpinnings that anchor teaching as a Levinasian, and a consideration of what practical approaches could be employed by the Levinasian teacher.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Teaching Otherwise Than Teaching<sup>1</sup>

At first glance, “the Enlightenment norms of reason, tolerance, civility, and faith in the self-governing capabilities of the ordinary person” (Geren, 2001, p.194) would appear to be noble ones; and these Enlightenment values did indeed give the world equality, democracy, and universal human rights (Ivic & Lakicevic, 2011). However, ignoring difference and presuming that there are certain universal truths that relate to everyone has been deemed problematic by many thinkers, including Emmanuel Levinas.

Universal issues are generally issues based on the perspectives of the dominant and most powerful in a given society and, as Mouffe (1996) points out, the underpinning philosophies of dominant discourses do not need to be problematized or called upon to explain or defend themselves. Consequently, the powerful do not need to problematize their dominant position and can believe that issues relating to democracy, equality, human rights, and ethics somehow unproblematically flow from what it means to be an essentially good or decent human being.

The construction of a generic or essential subject, which universalization demands, obstructs and penalises people who do not neatly correspond to the “natural” norm of these constructions. Within this system, universal moral<sup>2</sup> vocabulary is underpinned by “our” shared moral values and “we” thereby legitimate some moral discourses while rendering others illegitimate. This has resulted in systems, which grew

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<sup>1</sup> “Teaching can become otherwise than teaching when it is not repressive and directed to the self-same. Teaching otherwise is an endlessly open exposure, an unfolding of sincerity in welcoming the other in which no slipping away is possible; teaching otherwise is an art when it ‘keeps awake’ being as a verb” (Säfström, 2003, p. 29).

<sup>2</sup> While Levinas appears to use the terms moral and ethical almost interchangeably in *Totality and Infinity* (see pages 22, 53, 83, 84, 246, for example), in his interview with Richard Kearney (2004, pp. 80-81), Levinas speaks of what he sees as being the distinction between the ethical and the moral. For him, the moral is “interested,” operating within the realm of the socio-political as rules, codes, and duties that aim at the improvement of the human condition; whereas the ethical is “disinterested” and precedes this. From Levinas’s perspective, then, the moral presupposes the ethical. Taking my lead from Levinas, I will use the terms moral and ethical as outlined by Levinas in the Kearney interview.

up in the shadow of universal rights, often serving to occlude the very otherness of the Other.<sup>3</sup>

From Levinas's perspective, ontologically-informed ethics (the dominant ethical paradigm) offer up a politics that devises essential, universal truths, which can lead to situations where rights are based on a reductive view of the Other, with each unique existent being relegated to a group identity. To demonstrate how this problem has a real impact on people's lives, Levinas gives the example of the peace offered in Europe after World War II which, he suggests, represents a peace "where the other is reconciled with the identity of the identical in everyone, where, instead of opposing itself, the diverse agrees with itself and unites; where the stranger is assimilated" (Critchley, 1996, p. 162).

### **Research Question**

When distilled to its most basic elements, the central concern of this thesis is a consideration of how teachers, through the methodologies they employ, can create spaces where the children they teach can encounter each other as Other, and respond to each other in ethically responsible ways. This thesis, then, confines itself to a consideration of the following question: "Within the constraints of the Irish primary school system, how can primary school teachers develop a Levinasian approach to teaching that would afford both them and the children they teach multiple opportunities throughout the school day to take up their ethical responsibility for each other as Other?"

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to Biesta's (2013) differentiation of other and Other, where he "follows the convention among translators of Levinas to use Other with a capital 'O' as the translation of 'autrui'—the personal other—as distinguished from 'other' with a lower case 'o' as the translation of 'autre'—otherness or alterity in general" (p. 19), I find it useful to employ Todd's (2003c) inclusion of a third form of the word—"Other" in inverted commas—which she employs to "refer to the more sociologically driven definitions that one finds in social justice education and cultural studies literature" (p. 147), such as Travellers as "Other," lesbians as "Other," people with disabilities as "Other."

In seeking to answer this question, I propose to put Irish primary education into conversation with Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of the Other. To this end, I will use the process of writing this thesis to learn, from Levinas's "questions and his questioning" (Biesta, 2003, p. 65), how we can think differently about ethics and primary school education in Ireland. This thesis takes as its starting point, then, not an understanding of ethics as a teachable subject in the traditional programmatic sense, but the idea that ethics cannot be taught in such an applied way. Teaching as a Levinasian requires the teacher to think more in terms of creating opportunities throughout the school day where teachers and children can engage with and respond to each other ethically.

### **Why Explore This Question?**

In 1899, John Dewey wrote: "our social life has undergone a thorough and radical change. If our education is to have any meaning for life, it must pass through an equally complete transformation" (quoted in Kennedy, 2006, p. 151). Over a century later, these words resonate as if they had been written today and, in some significant ways, the Irish primary education system has not changed very much in the intervening years. Today, of the 3,300 state-funded primary schools in Ireland, 96% are denominational and, of these, almost 96% are Roman Catholic-run (Maxwell, 2018; School Days, 2014). While the Dalkey School Project was established in 1978 (Educate Together, 2014), introducing a multi-denominational aspect into the Irish primary educational landscape,<sup>4</sup> and a new child-centred curriculum was introduced in 1971 (Department of Education, 1971) and revised in 1999 (DES, 1999), it could be argued that the changes that have taken place have left the fundamental system and power structure of Irish education virtually untouched (Lodge and Lynch, 2004). Employing the parlance of

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting here that when a State-supported system of education was established in Ireland in 1831, it was overseen by a National Education Board that was comprised of members from both the Roman Catholic and Presbyterian Churches. However, the early mixed-denominational aspirations for Irish primary education were lost within a decade, after which schools were established along denominational lines (Coolahan, 1983).

Gert Biesta (2009), education in Ireland could, in many instances, be considered to largely represent “the reproduction of what [already] exists” (p. 400).

Ethical education in Irish primary schools tends to be conceived of in terms of moral education, tied to single denominational and multi-denominational understandings of what it means to lead a good or moral life (Educate Together, 2011; NCCA, 2015; NCCA, 2018; Veritas, 2015). Taking a Levinasian approach to ethical education means not only thinking very differently about what ethics in education can mean, but also demands a reconsideration of traditional conceptualizations of ethics itself.

This thesis represents an opportunity to reflect on how teachers can operate simultaneously within (as they are contractually obliged to do) and beyond (which, from a Levinasian perspective, is the ethical demand made of them) the education system. To this end, it considers how teachers can approach teaching as a fundamentally ethical relationship, through which they can create more ethical classrooms by fostering opportunities for children to encounter each other as Other. Consequently, this thesis approaches the relationship between ethics and education in Ireland differently from other approaches, not by positioning this relationship within a religious, a-religious, multi-religious, social justice, or anti-racist framework (all of which have merit), but by looking at it from the position of Levinas’s ethics understood as responsibility for the Other.

Todd (2003b) offers clear reasoning for why it is important that education be considered in terms of ethics, and she is worth quoting at length here:

Levinas’s non-systematic approach to ethics refuses a traditional application model; in seeking the meaning of ethical relationality, his work offers, rather, an orientation, an approach, a mode of engagement that opens up the potential to ‘read’ actually existing relations in terms of their engenderment of the ethical.



In other words, approaching education from a Levinasian perspective becomes a question of implication: how do subjectivity, responsibility, and communication perform in the processes of teaching and learning? What are the constitutive features of pedagogical life that give rise to ethical relationality? Such questions do not merely supply a framework for interpretation, rather, they help us think differently about the ethical significance of education itself. (p. 3)

This thesis thus seeks to challenge (in its own modest way) not only the normative narratives in Irish ethical education, which are usually conducted within a denominational framework (be that single, multi-, or anti-denominational); but it also challenges the fundamental Cartesian and humanist underpinnings of much contemporary Western education. While writing such a thesis within the discipline of education could be deemed a risky venture, writers such as Biesta, Säfström, Todd, and many others have already challenged contemporary approaches to education in their work. Säfström (2003), for instance, has questioned the humanity of the humanist underpinnings of much Western education; Todd (2001) has deconstructed the veracity of the Socratic maieutic approach that informs constructivist contemplations of education; and Biesta (2012) has problematized the child-centred approach to which most contemporary Western education is anchored.

### **Thesis Rationale**

Levinas (1982/2014) suggests that the best philosophies allow us to move beyond what philosophers could ever have imagined their theses to mean, and observes that in the wake of Heideggerian philosophising, we have been given:

a new way, direct, of conversing with philosophers and asking for absolutely current teachings from the great classics. Of course, the philosopher of the past does not directly involve himself in the dialogue; there is an entire work of interpretation to accomplish in order to render him current. But in this

hermeneutic one does not manipulate outworn things, one brings back the unthought to thought and saying. (pp. 43-44)

This thesis seeks to bring the unthought of Levinas's work into the thought and practice of teaching in Irish primary school classrooms. While Levinas never spoke of how his work could be interpreted in terms of teaching students or young children (Cheeseman, Press, & Sumsion, 2015), recent years have witnessed educational theorists such as Biesta, Chinnery, Säfström, and Todd, amongst others, arguing that, from a Levinasian perspective, the educational encounter is an ethical encounter.

It could be argued that the essentialist assumptions that underpin much contemporary educational discourse serve to exclude many children, whose "Otherness" is perceived as being problematic and something which needs to be "dealt with," even when this is done from a rights-based perspective.<sup>5</sup> This thesis takes as its starting point the hypothesis that such thinking can never fully incorporate or allow for those who lie beyond the boundaries of its norms; and that its structures, as they exist, demand the construction of a totalized and essentialized subject, stripped bare of her alterity.<sup>6</sup> It is against this rational understanding and construction of the Other, which underpins "Europe's ancient universalism" (Critchley, 1996, p. 162), that Levinas contemplated and reconstituted how ethics could be conceived. And it is from such a Levinasian standpoint that I have approached this thesis, listening, as Todd (2003a) advises, "not only to what Levinas has said, but how he says it: the deflections, omissions, repetitions, and repositionings that comprise, in part, the communicative ambiguity of which he so eloquently writes" (p. 40).

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<sup>5</sup> Todd (2011) considers how ideas such as "diversity" and "intercultural education" can serve different purposes depending on whether diversity is conceptualized as a problem that needs to be managed or as uniqueness within plurality that is understood to be an inherent part of the human condition.

<sup>6</sup> In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas defines alterity as "the radical heterogeneity of the Other" (TI, p. 36); or, as Critchley (1999) puts it, alterity is "that which escapes the cognitive powers of the knowing subject" (p. 5).

## Why Philosophy?

The choice to undertake a philosophical thesis rather than an empirical one was very deliberate. The inherent dynamism of empirical research conjures a sense of movement and physicality in terms of asking questions of, engaging with, and facing people. Philosophical research is no less dynamic. As Heidegger (1966/2017) observes, “thinking is not inactivity, but is itself by its very nature an engagement that stands in dialogue with the epochal moment of the world” (p. 60).

When undertaking philosophical research, it is useful to consider Levinas’s caution that philosophy in pursuit of reason can itself be excessively violent if it gives reason, truth, and being pride of place. The philosophical researcher, therefore, must be vigilant, never comfortable in her conclusions, aware that in the next moment the grounding upon which her positions rest could dissipate, because “philosophy is never a wisdom, for the interlocutor whom it has just encompassed has already escaped it” (TI, p. 295).

Pring (2013) highlights the importance of undertaking philosophical research in the field of education thus:

Issues which traditionally have concerned philosophers permeate every aspect of educational thinking. This, however, is not generally recognised, as is reflected in the initial and continuing education of teachers, in the development and implementation of policy and in the conduct of educational research. The result is misbegotten certainty where doubt would be appropriate, apparent clarity where there is confusion, conclusions from evidence where evidence does not support conclusions . . . . Philosophy of education needs to be reclaimed for educational research. (p. 153)

How primary education in Ireland is conceived has religious, economic, and neoliberal<sup>7</sup> underpinnings and, if we are to believe Levinas, the Irish primary education system is also always already primordially underpinned by ethical responsibility for the Other. Despite how embedded and unchanging some aspects of the Irish primary education system and its attendant values may at times feel, education is a dynamic system that is continuously reimagining itself, at times subtly and at other times more dramatically. Consequently, the philosophical interrogation of education that underpins the values, subtexts, and groundings of this system, and the place of the ethical within it, needs to be equally dynamic and ongoing.

Increasingly, within the neoliberal framework in which Irish education takes place, there would appear to be a push within the field of educational research to produce ever-increasing amounts of data, which it could be argued has led to an overreliance on statistics to make a case for everything in the field of education.<sup>8</sup> Commentators such as Suissa (2019) and Pring (2010) amongst others have argued that the neoliberal agenda in universities and teacher training colleges has resulted in a situation where:

institutional demands and priorities are, to a large extent, dictated by the funding regime of the REF [Research Excellence Framework], which now requires that academics demonstrate the ‘social and economic impact’ of their research. It

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<sup>7</sup> From a neoliberal perspective, the relationship of the citizen to the state is mediated by the market (Riddell, 2013). The shift in language from pupil to customer, for example, is part of this redefinition of the citizen (Lynch, 2013). According to neoliberal logic, state involvement in the provision of services to its citizens disrupts economic processes and therefore should be kept to a minimum, allowing market forces to operate with the least interference (Apple, 2000; Harvey, 2005). Olssen (2003) and Apple (2000) argue that, in recent years, there has been a shift away from the more traditional liberal resistance to any state involvement in the provision of services to its citizens, and that “neo-liberalism has come to represent a positive conception of the state’s role, seeing the state as the active agent which creates the appropriate market by providing the conditions, laws and institutions necessary for its necessary operation” (p. 199).

<sup>8</sup> The issue of using data as a form of “soft” governance in education, and to underpin educational policy, is an extremely interesting one. While I do not have the space within this thesis to explore this issue, it has been explored in some detail by, amongst others, Buenfil-Burgos (2000), Grek, Lawn, Lingard, & Varjo (2009), Lynch (2013), Lynch, Grummell, & Devine (2012), Ozga (2009), and Schildkamp, Karbautzk, & Vanhoof (2013).

thus is becoming practically, if not intellectually, more difficult for academics to engage in the kind of critical scholarship which develops sustained analyses of the conceptual underpinnings of our current educational institutions and practices and questions their legitimacy, rather than demonstrating or disproving the ‘effectiveness’ of specific policy-driven interventions. (Suissa, 2019, p. 514)

It is, therefore, crucial that philosophical voices be added to the numerical cacophony of empirical educational research.

### **Why Levinas?**

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas suggests that the conflicts that emerge between the self and the Other have tended to be theoretically resolved in a way that reduces the alterity of the Other to the same of the self. At a political level, evidence of such thinking can be found in totalizing projects that reduce the alterity of citizens to the generalizable universal. In contrast to such thinking, and the practices it engenders, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas presents the relationship between the self and the Other as a “non-allergic” (TI, p. 47), discursive relationship, wherein the self does not automatically reject the otherness of the Other or reduce it to the same of the self.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas presents ethics as a primordial responsibility for the unknowable “incoming” Other. While his theory is quite abstract, it reflects how the reality of the world plays out each day in our experience of, and engagement with, the Other. His representation of the ethics as emerging in the face-to-face encounter between the self and the Other reflects the simplicity at the heart of Levinas’s ethics. For Levinas, it is the responsibility of the self for the Other, which arises in this encounter, that seeds the myriad structures of our moral, judicial, and statutory codes. As Large suggests, “for Lévinas, it is this ethical relation that is the origin of a system of signs, and not a system of signs the origin of ethics” (Large, 2011, p. 246). For Levinas, a justice that unfolds in the ethical asymmetry of the self’s infinite responsibility for the

Other allows for the emergence of a different kind of politics and justice to that which emerges from a philosophy grounded in sovereign individuality and freedom, the latter of which from Levinas's perspective could, and indeed often had, resulted in tyranny.

How we perceive justice, and how we subsequently approach the Other, have significant implications for the type of society we produce. This is of crucial importance for education because our starting point for thinking about education influences the type of education we can imagine and deliver. If we are limited by the ego thinking the knowable, totalizable Other, the education that results will be one that is filtered through the self, thereby ignoring the unknowable alterity of the Other who is yet to come. If, on the other hand, we approach education from the perspective of ethics as first philosophy and infinite responsibility for the Other, the education which flows from this starting point will look quite different.

Social justice and social justice education can envisage "Otherness" as ideologically- or sociologically-constructed categories that encapsulate the "them" of the us/them dichotomy. However, as Todd (2003c) highlights, difference is not something that is group- or identity-based, but is a fundamental characteristic of the human condition. Consequently, the idea of a coherent group—Travellers as "Other," women as "Other," the LGBTQI+ community as "Other"—is, therefore, a problematic one. From a Levinasian perspective, everyone we encounter is an Other to the self, whether they belong to a sociologically "Othered" group or not because, philosophically speaking, "difference is, one might say, an ontological given" (Todd, 2003c, p. 2). Therefore, "Levinas is helpful in fleshing out pedagogical encounters, for he centres otherness at the very heart of teaching-learning" (Todd, 2001, p. 437).

### **The Purpose of Education**

Many contemporary education systems (and the theories they inform, and are informed by) are "founded on the discourse of modernity and its self-understanding has been

forged by that discourse's basic and implicit assumptions" (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p. 2). In other words, contemporary education systems could be described as modernist institutions underpinned by the Enlightenment value of rationality. Within modern Enlightenment discourses, the purpose of education has largely been concerned with the self-realization of the individual citizen. This political objective belies its neutral appearance, and it could be argued that such an approach to education dovetails with neoliberal visions of, and new managerialist approaches to, education. In general, such discourses are underpinned by the humanist subject of the Enlightenment project who, to use a Levinasian phrase, is considered to be "human through consciousness" (Levinas, 1981/2009, p. 117).<sup>9</sup>

According to humanist thinking, "it is through knowledge that subjects can enter into ethical relations with one another; thus every ethical relationship is a result of knowledge rather than the other way around" (Säfström, 2003, p. 21). In this way, the world and the Other can become knowable to the self as subjects. This developmental and staged view of knowledge is in the tradition of Piaget, whose theories continue to anchor much educational policy and thinking today. Säfström (2003) suggests that the humanist discourse that underpins education as we have come to know it in Western societies draws on a conceptualization of a humanity that is based on an *a priori* version of what humanity should look like in a bid towards reproducing it. How to "be" human within such a system is predetermined.

Säfström and Månsson (2004) state that the primary role of traditional education is the socialization of young people, and they suggest that:

socialisation is . . . a cognitive and controllable process aimed at the production and reproduction of certain social agreements of how human beings are

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<sup>9</sup> *Otherwise than Being* (Levinas, 1981/2009) is hereafter cited with the abbreviation OtB.

supposed to live together. Its objective ideals consist of assigning a framework of action to each and every member of a given society. (p. 355)

The role of the teacher within such a system is to guide pupils towards becoming rational social agents who exist within a preordained and predictable notion of what constitutes humanity. Teachers within such a system teach the “‘secrets’ of humanity,” in other words, “the necessary knowledge through which the subject becomes more fully human” (Säfström, 2003, p. 21). Within such a system, nothing can legitimately exist outside of the predefined norms of what constitutes valid (and validated) humanity. For Säfström (2003), education systems underpinned by such modernist, instrumental, and humanist notions of teaching represent “a non-human and non-relational conception of teaching” (p. 23).

Biesta (2006) suggests that, from the perspective of traditional education, where “it is possible to know and articulate the essence or nature of the human being and to use this knowledge as a foundation for our educational and political efforts” (Biesta 2006, p. 5), a humanist approach to education cannot allow for the radically unknowable alterity that the incoming Other will represent. In this way, Biesta (2006) suggests, humanism is “not sufficiently human” (p. 40), because it only allows for a consideration of existents from the position of what already exists and not from that, which is yet to come.

Classroom teachers every day witness how education is not a completely determined causal process, as evidenced in their different responses to different students on the same topic, which can bring their teaching in a different direction than what they had planned. It is also evident at the one-to-one level, where interventions that have worked with one child do not necessarily work with another child. In this way, teachers daily experience how “proven” solutions to educational “problems” are not necessarily transferable from one situation to another or from one child to another. As Biesta



(Winter, 2011)<sup>10</sup> reminds us, understanding and approaching education as a causal process

radically reduces the complexity of the educational process . . . . This requires that we control *all* the factors that potentially influence the connection between educational inputs and educational outcomes. This can be done, but it is a huge effort, which not only raises the question whether it's worth the effort . . . and also whether the effort is desirable, and when you take it to its extremes it's quite obvious that the effort is ultimately not desirable. But it is a slippery slope, and in a lot of countries education is rapidly moving in this direction and is becoming oppressive, not only for those at the receiving end—students—but perhaps more so for those who have to work under such oppressive conditions, teachers, school leaders and administrators. (p. 541, original emphasis)

### **Witnessing the Deconstruction of Socratic Maieutics**

Biesta (2013) suggests that “if there is one idea that has significantly changed classroom practice in many countries around the world in recent decades, it has to be constructivism” (p. 44). Simply put, constructivism is the idea that people construct their own knowledge by bringing forth what already exists within them: “as Socrates himself remarks to Meno, ‘there is no teaching, but only recollection’ (Plato 1937: 82a, 361)” (Todd, 2001, p. 456). Although the constructivist “turn” in education, according to Todd (2001) and Biesta (2013), is largely a twentieth century phenomenon, such a facilitative approach to teaching can trace its roots back to the learning paradox of the Socratic dialogue, which is recorded in Plato’s *Meno*, and recalls how Socrates uses the learning paradox to demonstrate the impossibility of teaching.

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<sup>10</sup> In this thesis, the words quoted in Winter (2011) are the words of Gert Biesta, as recorded in his interview with Winter.

During his encounter with Meno, Socrates suggests that the role of a teacher is a maieutic one. In other words, a teacher performs a similar role to that of a skilled midwife—just as the midwife helps the woman birth the baby already within her, the teacher helps the child bring forth pre-existing knowledge that already exists within her. From a Socratic perspective, who the individual teacher is is not important because she brings nothing new or unique to the educational setting with regard to what the child learns. The skill of the teacher is one of a skilled facilitator/questioner, who stimulates and brings to the fore existent, dormant knowledge: “the maieutic method erases the significance of the Other and claims that learning is a recovery contained within the I, rather than a disruption of the I provoked by the Other in a moment of sociality” (Todd, 2003c, p. 30). Within such a framework, the individual teacher is replaceable in the teaching situation by another, equally skilled, teacher-facilitator. From this perspective, the Other as teacher does not disrupt the self as pupil, but turns the self’s focus inwards in search of what already exists within her: “this primacy of the same was Socrates’ teaching: to receive nothing of the Other but what is in me, as though from all eternity I was in possession of what comes to me from the outside. . .” (TI, p. 43, original ellipses).

Todd (2003c) challenges Socrates’ claims to ignorance and non-teaching, however, suggesting that contrary to his arguments, Plato’s account of the conversation with Meno demonstrates how Socrates does, in fact, bring something new to the encounter which is beyond that which Meno and the boy already possess. Socrates’ skilled and provocative questioning is not neutral but introduces something new into the dialogue of which Meno and the boy were not already in possession: “the object lesson Socrates devises suffers under the weight of its own intentionality to instruct: a naked didacticism and demand for alteration are revealed under the guise of the question” (Todd, 2003c, p. 25). Hence, it could be argued that the maieutic foundation upon

which the constructivist model of education has been built is blind to its own intentionality.

### **The Constructivist Approach to Meaning-Making**

The midwife model is often a cornerstone both for progressive and critical approaches to education . . . . This appears to be a model of limited pedagogical intervention, beginning from students' own interests and building from there. But, what is omitted from this account of midwifery or facilitation is how the questions always come via the Other, via an Other that is not reducible to the Self. This epistemological emphasis on self-knowledge blankets over the dialogical relation as a social and ethical relation between two non-synchronous subjects. (Todd, 2001, p. 445)

Constructivism has developed in many different directions, and has “become theoretically multiple and open” (Biesta, 2013, p. 44). Consequently, constructivist classrooms can look quite different from each other.<sup>11</sup> However, underpinning all constructivist epistemologies is the belief that what is other than us can be grasped by us, after which it no longer lies beyond our knowledge but has been brought within the fold of our understanding. In this way, objects of thought are constituted as and from pre-existing themes within our consciousness. Todd (2001) highlights how such learning “neither dislocates or interrupts, it merely gives definition to what is there” (p. 446). Biesta (2013) suggests that this is problematic because “one could argue that the very point of education is precisely *not* to repeat what is already there but to bring something new to the scene” (p. 47, original emphasis).

Biesta (2013) suggests that the paradigmatic shift towards constructivism has fundamentally altered how the teacher and her role in education are contemplated,

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the radical constructivism of von Glasersfeld, the cognitive constructivism of Piaget, and the social constructivism of Vygotsky.

heralding a shift in focus from teaching to learning, emphasizing student activity and child-centeredness. For him, education “seems to have changed its meaning to such an extent that the teacher has become at most a facilitator of learning and in some cases just a fellow learner” which, it could be argued, has “contributed to what we might call the demise, the disappearance, or, in a more post-modern mode, the end or even the death of the teacher” (Biesta, 2013, p. 46). Biesta is not alone in this concern. In her 2001 article, Todd suggests that we “re-center the importance of teaching” in education (p. 438). Biesta (2015) emphasizes that we should not view this problem simply in terms of having either the learner or the teacher at the centre or outside of the centre of education, but that we should move away entirely from such dichotomous ways of thinking.

A Levinasian approach to education embraces the risk involved in not knowing what the future will offer and what ethical demands the future child as Other will place on the teacher and the other children in the classroom. This unpredictability does not render teaching defunct but, rather, demands that teachers consider approaching their teaching from a perspective where not everything can be planned for or known in advance. As Lingis (1978/2001) reminds us, in his introduction to *Existence and Existents*,

the real future is what is to come of itself, and that it escape our grasp even while being sensed as essential to it. The future is what can surprise us. It is then not what we apprehend already, but that of which we are apprehensive, that which threatens and promises. (p. xiv)

When teaching is approached in this way, the Other can be ethically encountered in the classroom because, from a Levinasian perspective, the pretence of a cohesive rationality has always been played out against a background of unpredictable alterity.

### **Why Explore This Question Now?**

The contemporary Irish classroom looks very different than it did twenty years ago. The significant increase in global migration, resulting from the forces of global capitalism, together with advances in modern technology, have utterly changed how local communities now look (Bauman, 1998). As a result, the children in our classrooms are negotiating their subjectivities in this increasingly complex world, where radically different (even oppositional) forces are at play between school, home, popular culture, digital culture, and society, each exerting the forces of its own delineated knowledge, values, and norms on the child.

In addition to these forces, Irish educational aspirations are ever-increasingly being linked to the global economy, which often involves changing educational policies to suit European and global economic agendas. This has led to a shift in how we calculate the effectiveness and success of Irish education because, as Buenfil-Burgos (2000) puts it, “no one would call into question that globalization is a key concept in contemporary educational policies” (p. 1).<sup>12</sup>

The new managerialist turn in Irish primary education is set within the unique character of denominational education in Ireland. The powerful, dominant, and enduring pedagogical position of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland has gone largely unproblematized for almost two centuries. This has resulted in a grafting of its belief systems onto the State’s educational system, so that over time ethics in education came to be defined within (or against) the parameters of Roman Catholic morality and its claims to universal rationality and morality. This has ensured its taken-for-granted nature for most of the Irish primary education system’s history. This predominance of the Roman Catholic Church in the primary education system has delimited how

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<sup>12</sup> Drudy (2009), Galvin (2009), and Lynch, Grummell, & Devine (2012) offer explorations of the impact of new managerialism in Irish education; and Buenfil-Burgos (2000), Apple (2000), and Lingard, Martino, & Rezaei-Rashti, (2013) amongst others have looked at how global accountability in education is impacting on how education is considered and practiced in different countries.

educators can re-think both education and ethics, as Roman Catholicism provides a constant backdrop against which all arguments for educational reform have to be made.

In recent years, the Irish primary education system has found itself in the double bind of constituting a system that is constrained by its ecclesiastical legacy and the demands of an increasingly secular society, within the parameters of growing new managerialism within the sector. This, combined with the shift in the Church's position vis-à-vis the State and its citizens, has compelled the people of Ireland and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to reflect on the position of the Roman Catholic Church in the Irish primary education system.

These two influences can create internal conflict in Irish primary classrooms regarding their demands on teachers. Although the scope of this thesis does not permit a full discussion of new managerialism and the influence of the Roman Catholic Church in Irish primary education, their influence is something that will impact on any reimagining of Irish primary school education, including rethinking ethics in education, and therefore they warrant at least a brief examination.

### **New Managerialism**

There has been a discursive shift in relation to Irish education in recent years, which has become increasingly tailored to meet the needs of the global economy,<sup>13</sup> wherein investment in education is anchored to economic functionality to the detriment of considering the role of education beyond this narrow function: “underpinning this

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<sup>13</sup> I acknowledge that conceptualizing education in terms of its economic worth has been a feature of Irish education since the late 1950s, when the theocentric paradigm began to give way to an economy-centred one wherein children were recast as “human capital” (see Hyland’s (2014) reflection on her involvement in the production of the 1965 Investment in Education Report, for example). I also acknowledge that even prior to the foundation of the state in 1922, Irish civil servants had a long history of engaging with, and drawing from other countries’ educational policies (Ó Buachalla, 1988). However, fuelled by the extent of the growth in the reach and impact of globalization in recent decades, and the development of a self-consciously new managerialist approach in education, Irish primary education is at the mercy of global and European forces in ways that eclipse the influences it experienced in previous centuries.

position is a vision of students as human capital . . . . in effect, education is seen as simply one more product like bread, cars, and television” (Apple, 2000, p. 60).

According to Lynch (2013), new managerialism is a mode of institutionalizing the neoliberal agenda in the public sector. Simply put, new managerialism refers to the “application of managerial thought and techniques to public administration” (Simons, Olssen, & Peters, 2009a, p. 14), which provides an analytical lens through which public policy problems can be interpreted in terms of the managerial problems of economic objectives, efficacy, and clients. The rise of new managerialism since the 1980s has seen a shift in how education is conceptualized and framed (Apple, 2000; Bailey, 2015; Galvin, 2009; Lynch, 2013), which has led to the “reconstituting of the educational person” (Lynch, 2013) from pupil to customer/client.

Within this neoliberal narrative, education is reframed as a marketable good with an attendant economic value and worth vis-à-vis the future economy (Simons, Olssen, & Peters, 2009a & 2009b). When it is applied to education, new managerialism also serves to “redefine what counts as knowledge, who are the bearers of such knowledge and who is empowered to act—all within a legitimate framework of public choice and market accountability” (Lynch et al., 2012, p. 4). Within the redrawn parameters of the new managerialist education system, which is relevant to and serves the needs of the economy, teachers’ roles vis-à-vis data-collection and reporting has increased, resulting in the creation of a “culture of self-display, fabrication and of course competition” (Lynch, 2013).

Naseem and Hyslop-Margison (2007) observe that “by blaming educational failure on ‘bad teaching’ or ‘failing schools’, any analysis of the structural inequities denying many students access to intellectual capital consistent with academic success is avoided” (p. 106). This is reflected in how recent years have witnessed a situation where Ireland’s positioning on PISA (Programme for International Student

Assessment), for example, has come to represent, almost to the exclusion of everything else, the state of the Irish education system. Newspaper articles such as Flynn and Faller (2012) and Holden (2012) demonstrate how such thinking was adopted by the popular media and used to judge teachers' "failures" when Ireland fell down the PISA ranking.

Such reimagining of education also impacts on what kind of educational research is valued and funded. Increasingly, the role of funded educational research is evolving into one where "research [has] become reduced to more research for the sake of research to be used by politicians defining to what end it will lead . . . legitimizing an already politically decided view on what education is and what it should be good for" (Biesta & Säfström, 2011, p. 545).

From a Levinasian perspective, teachers cannot plan the ethical significance of their future encounters with children in their classes. However, teachers find themselves less and less free to act beyond a normative education system that demands an ever-increasing amount of "deadening accountability" (Slattery, 1995/2013, p. 285), wherein every minute of the teaching day must be pre-emptively documented and subsequently reported on. When education is approached in this way, where the uniqueness of each child is sacrificed to the data she represents, the children we teach risk becoming increasingly faceless, dehumanized, and replaceable.

### **Denominationalism**

For many reasons, discourses about ethical education and ethics in education in Ireland has, historically, been trapped in an argument that inevitably finds its way back to religion.<sup>14</sup> In recent years, there has been some acknowledgement that the educational

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<sup>14</sup> Such as the colonization of Ireland, the Penal Laws that subjugated Roman Catholics and outlawed many aspects of practicing their religion, including having any role in education, the Roman Catholic Church's role in the emergence of an education system in Ireland, and the postcolonial association between religion and nationality, to name but a few.



landscape needs to change if it is to take account of the religious, cultural, and sub-cultural diversity it is witnessing. However, it would appear that within Roman Catholic schools these shifts have been framed within their traditional teaching, wherein their inclusion of the religious “Other” represents a concession delivered from the dichotomous position of the normative and powerful “us” (Roman Catholics) and the different and subaltern “them” (members of all other religions).<sup>15</sup> This position can be seen in the treatment of “other” religions in the recently revised religious curriculum for Roman Catholic schools (Veritas, 2015).

In Roman Catholic schools, values are officially dictated by Roman Catholic moral teaching, much of which is positive. However, when it comes to children who have been constructed as “Other,” this is not always so (see Bailey, 2019, for example). Consequently, commentators such as Coolahan, Hussey, and Kilfeather (2012) have highlighted the need to safeguard the right to ethical education for children who do not wish to participate in religious education programmes in denominational schools.

In 2011, the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism was established to engage those concerned in debate about patronage, to assess parental preferences about school provision, and to explore the possibilities and practicalities of divesting patronage. The work of the Forum was informed by an Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) report that determined that “the State should ensure that there is diversity in provision of school type . . . which reflects the diversity of religious and non-religious convictions now represented” (IHRC, 2011, p. 104). The *Forum on Patronage and Pluralism Report* (Coolahan et al., 2012) recommendations resulted in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) beginning work on the development of a curriculum and guidelines for an Education about Religion and Beliefs and Ethics programme (NCCA, 2015). This programme is envisaged to be supplementary to

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<sup>15</sup> This issue is explored in depth in O’Higgins-Norman (2003) and O’Sullivan (2005).

existing religious education programmes with the aim of providing “consistency, structure, support and a curricular space to allow for learning and discussion in this area” (Quinn, 2014, p. 14).

A process of divesting patronage has also begun that has seen and will continue to see a number of schools change from a single-denominational to a multi-denominational ethos (Quinn, 2014). However, it should be stressed that, to date, the patronage of only three denominational schools has been divested to non-denominational patrons—two from Church of Ireland patronage and one from Roman Catholic patronage (DES, 2018; Maxwell, 2018; Rowe 2015).

As we are currently at a time of flux in relation to ethical education in the Irish primary school system, it is pertinent to reflect on what ethical education can mean, and offer alternative narratives to those that have historically existed and dominated in Ireland. There is some evidence of this happening across the primary education sector with Roman Catholic schools introducing a revised religious education curriculum (Veritas, 2015), with the development of the Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics programme (NCCA, 2015), and with the Community National School’s new ethical curriculum (NCCA, 2018). However, it will be some time before the impact of these filters into the education system and can be assessed in any meaningful way. In the meantime, while the issue of ethical education (in the programmatic sense of the word) is of particular interest to me in my praxis as a primary school teacher, what I would like to consider in this thesis is not ethical education as an applied curricular subject but, in Levinasian spirit, ethics as something that permeates every moment, action, and decision across the school day and the curriculum.

### **The Irony of Posing a Finite Question to Consider Infinite Ethics**

Derrida (1978) considers the problem posed by the finite nature of research, which can never do justice to the question it asks, because a question in itself is totalizing no

matter how open it tries to be. As Derrida (1978) highlights in the opening lines of *Violence and Metaphysics*, the questions put to philosophy are questions which philosophy cannot answer. An immediate and obvious problem arises, then, when undertaking an exploration of Levinasian ethics within the constraints of a thesis. As understood by Levinas (although this might be contested philosophically), ethical responsibility for the Other exists before and beyond ontology, in the realm of the infinite. A thesis, on the other hand, is finite and ontological. It could, therefore, be logically argued that undertaking a thesis to explore Levinas's ethics of the Other is doomed to failure from the outset as it is attempting to ontologically frame that which is beyond ontology. However, as Levinas observes,

the fact that philosophy cannot fully totalize the alterity of meaning in some final presence or simultaneity is not for me a deficiency or a fault. Or to put it another way, the best thing about philosophy is that it fails. It is better that philosophy fail to totalize meaning—even though, as ontology, it has attempted just this—for it thereby remains open to the irreducible otherness of transcendence. (Kearney, 1984, p. 58)<sup>16</sup>

From a Levinasian perspective, by posing and answering a research question, I am seeking to capture and totalize that which is beyond my grasp. Undertaking research, however, can offer an opportunity to put into question that which appears apparent and unproblematic and, to quote Levinas, “what I am interested in is precisely this ability of philosophy to think, to question itself and ultimately to unsay itself” (Kearney, 1984, p. 58).

My research question, then, can only ever be incomplete due to the fact that “the question is always enclosed; it never appears immediately as such, but only through the

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<sup>16</sup> In this thesis, the words quoted in Kearney (1984) and Kearney (2004) are the words of Emmanuel Levinas, as recorded by Richard Kearney in his 1981 interview with Levinas.

hermetism of a proposition in which the answer has already begun to determine the question” (Derrida, 1978, p. 99). It is with knowledge of these constraints that I approach my research.

### **Organization of Thesis: Chapters and Themes**

In Chapter Two, Levinas’s ethics of the Other will be explicated under the themes of knowledge, subjectivity, relationality, communication, and responsibility. These themes will also be employed to frame Chapter Three when looking at how educationalists have interpreted Levinasian ethics. Chapter Four will then look to the classroom practices of philosophy with children, restorative practice, and the PAX Good Behavior Game (PAX). Finally, the reader will be brought into the Irish primary school classroom in Chapter Five, with a consideration of how these three existing approaches to teaching can be employed in order to facilitate opportunities for the development of an ethics of the Other. Chapter Five will again employ the themes used in Chapters Two and Three of knowledge, subjectivity, relationality, communication, and responsibility. Structurally, then, this thesis is divided into three broad areas

- Levinas’s ethics of the Other
- Educationalists’ interpretation of Levinas vis-à-vis education
- The creation of classroom environments where children can encounter and respond to each other as Other, through the employment of philosophy with children, restorative practice, and PAX methodologies

At times, especially towards the beginning, it may feel as if this thesis is very far away from the Irish primary school classroom. However, this is because the structure of this thesis is based on a narrative that tracks a trajectory from the personal (reading *Totality and Infinity*), through the philosophical (explicating Levinas’s ethics of the Other), to the professional (engaging with educationalists that have read Levinas), to

praxis (how a Levinasian-infused teaching could be delivered at the level of the Irish primary school classroom).

Although this thesis is educational, its philosophical roots demand an explication of Levinas's work, which at no point references classroom practice. In order to present the thesis in a way that offers a coherent narrative arc, it is necessary to begin not in the classroom, but with the philosophies of Emmanuel Levinas. While the absence of an educational focus in Chapter Two may at times feel counterintuitive in terms of educational research, this chapter is vital for setting the philosophical scene from which the rest of the thesis draws its meaning and purpose.

### **Personal Statement**

Levinas suggests that “works signify their author, but indirectly, in the third person” (TI, p. 67). Therefore, because this work will signify me, it is necessary to briefly position myself before proceeding any further.

When I first encountered *Totality and Infinity*, I had just retrained as a primary school teacher, having worked in the voluntary and community sector for a number of years with people who were constantly being “Othered,” due to their existence beyond the delimiting definitions of what is deemed to constitute normative existence and behaviour. I was immediately excited by the possibilities that Levinas's thinking afforded me as a new teacher, and endeavoured to approach my teaching from an ethical stance as close to Levinas's philosophies as possible. By situating my thinking and my own personal philosophies within a legitimate philosophical framework, Levinas offered me a radically different way of looking at the world and my place in it; and this served to propel me further in my thinking regarding how I can do what I do better.

During my work in the community and voluntary sector, I frequently encountered situations where, in the pursuit of securing social justice and human rights, people forced ill-fitting, often uncomfortable identity categories upon themselves for

political expediency in the fashion of Spivak's (1985) strategic essentialism. While my initial education as a social scientist exposed me to traditional and sociological considerations of "Otherness," it was not until I encountered Levinas's consideration of the Other that I could identify why I found the idea of "Otherness" problematic.

To some extent, each child comes into being as a pupil in my classroom through their relationship with me, my knowledge, and my practice. As Todd (2001) observes, teachers "require students to make symbolic attachments and meaning out of the curriculum they present, and in doing so can not escape a certain degree of coercion" (p. 438). If I take a traditional, rational approach to teaching, the learning with which the children in my class engage becomes a consequence of me and my teaching. Children within such classrooms are forced to filter their Otherness through what I offer them as knowledge and how they should "be" at school, trimming away what is excess, which is often read as wrong. They learn to take their cue from me and my knowledge, which they internalise and reproduce; thereby (re)validating what is held within my self, and the education system that binds both them and me, performatively re-inscribing it for the next generation of pupils.<sup>17</sup>

This is not what I want my teaching to represent. As a teacher I do not want to reduce the student to a substantive being neatly represented in a concept such as "the child as pupil," but to allow for her being to take the form of a messy, unpredictable, unique, and ever-changing becoming. Such a practice is anchored to a "pedagogy [that] is not about handing down truths to the next generation, but about creating opportunities for children, students, newcomers to respond and, as a result, come into presence"

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<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that I, as a teacher, can ever know what a child will take from my teaching. While it does not fall within the parameters of this thesis, I would like to draw attention here to how Todd (2001), to very interesting ends, juxtaposes Levinas's ethics and psychoanalysis, highlighting how we can never know what a pupil will take away from our encounter with her. She quotes Phillips who, drawing on "Proust's legendary madeleine," poetically demonstrates how a subconscious observation during a lesson can, in a dream, allow a pupil to access levels of their unconscious previously unexplored, "open[ing] up vistas of previously unacknowledged personal history" (Phillips, 1998, cited in Todd, 2001, p. 447).

(Biesta, 2003, p. 64). I want my teaching to allow for the constant shifting and moving of each child's subjectivity in ways I do not know and cannot predict or unproblematically reduce to (my) understanding. I want "the possibility for teaching otherwise, understood as a process in which an ego is sobering up from its being for itself and awakens to humanity, as a being for the other" (Säfström, 2003, p. 28).

Naturally, I do not want to disadvantage the children in my class vis-à-vis other children who go through the same education system. To this end, I want to ensure that all of the children I teach can read, write, compute maths to the best of their uniquely individual abilities, and to apply this knowledge across the curriculum so that they can engage with the demands of the "real world" in which they live and which they must learn to navigate. However, I do not want this to be the only philosophy underpinning my teaching. Despite what often feels like working within an education machine that views children as an interchangeable "universal child," children will always exist messily and uniquely in my classroom, with their own temporality and history and their own internal lives, all of which are inaccessible to me and cannot be reduced to my knowledge. It is this increasingly neglected aspect of their existence that I believe interventions such as philosophy with children, restorative practice, and PAX can release and develop in infinite and unknowable ways.

I can never know what each September will bring as the seats in my classroom fill up with all the wonderfully unique existents who will sit before me for the coming year. As I look into each of their faces, I can never know in advance what these children will offer me, or what demands they will make of me. As a teacher who has read Levinas and incorporated his thinking into her praxis, I endeavour to offer the children in my class opportunities not only to think for themselves and question what I tell them, but also to engage ethically with me and the other children in the class, to face

each other as Other, and to accept responsibility for each other which, for Levinas, is a responsibility that exists prior to everything else.

Levinas continues to help me navigate the Irish education system as it currently is from a more optimistic vantage point, as well as allowing me to imagine how it could be experienced differently. This thesis looks to Levinas in its pursuit of an approach to teaching that would create more ethical classroom environments, by bringing a Levinasian approach to ethics into Irish primary school classrooms. It is hoped that teachers who find themselves pushing against the boundaries of a largely denominational, and an increasingly new managerialist, education system will take comfort, refuge, and strength from what is written here.

### **Conclusion**

It could be argued that contemporary Irish education is predominantly modern in its content (Slattery, 1995/2013) and utilitarian in its purpose (Lynch, 2013), where economically marketable outcomes would appear to be prized above all else. Evidence of this can be found in the increasing momentum of new managerialism within Irish education, wherein the Europeanization and globalisation of educational policies are making it more and more difficult for individual teachers to pursue imaginative and discursive ways of working with children. Facilitating an ethics of the Other within the Irish primary education system might appear paradoxical when thought of in terms of the almost entirely denominational make-up of the system, wherein ethics is taught from the vantage point of a pre-defined religious morality. However, the approaches discussed in this thesis suggest that ethics is approached in an implied way, which allows it to be adopted into any education system, at no cost to the school, and without adding an additional subject to an already overloaded curriculum.

The philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas is wonderfully rich and, I believe, is worth contemplation and explication by Irish primary school teachers. This thesis



vocalizes an alternative narrative to the dominant educational narratives that are currently at play in Ireland—one that is not anchored to the job market, the economy, religion, or data production—if, for no other reason, than to prove that such narratives still have a place in educational research and practice in Ireland.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Beyond Horizons, Ideologies, and Concepts

I cannot, nor would I even try to, measure in a few words the oeuvre of Emmanuel Levinas. It is so large that one can no longer glimpse its edges. And one would have to begin by learning once again from him and from Totality and Infinity, for example, how to think what an ‘oeuvre’ or ‘work’—as well as fecundity—might be. (Derrida, 1995/1997b, p. 3)

Derrida made this observation in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, which he delivered at Levinas’s funeral in 1995, highlighting how the work of Levinas cannot be reduced to one theme. Levinas encourages his readers to consider the place of ethics differently from his predecessors and, throughout his work, he seeks to offer an alternative view of ethics which includes the Other’s voice without first filtering her through ontology or the self. In this chapter, I will explore how, in seeking answers to what he saw as the ethical problems of the situation of the Other vis-à-vis the oppositional position she occupies within dualistic thinking, Levinas employs the “phenomenological method” (TI, p. 28)—which, he stresses, is not the same as the phenomenological reduction—to problematize the centrality of ontology in traditional philosophical conceptualizations of ethics.

In this chapter, I will begin my exploration of Levinas’s work by briefly positioning Levinas in the Western philosophical tradition. I will then consider how Levinas troubles the notion of totality and, how, in suggesting that ethics is prior to ontology, he breaks down claims of the centrality of ontology and the *cogito* to existence. I will then explore the idea of the Levinasian Other, before considering Levinasian ethics, using the central themes of this thesis—knowledge, subjectivity, relationality, communication, and responsibility—to frame this section. I will conclude

this chapter by considering how the presence of the third party brings the Levinasian relationship between the self and the Other on from constituting a purely interpersonal relationship to one that informs justice. This chapter draws primarily on Levinas's first major work *Totality and Infinity*, while also referencing other works of his considerable corpus.

### **Levinas and Traditional Philosophy**

The world into which Emmanuel Levinas was born, in 1906, was dominated by rational, Enlightenment principles, according to which many philosophers and scientists saw their role as discovering and revealing truth through reason, knowledge, and measurement. Reason and knowledge were assessed against standards arrived at through formal logic, and these standards subsequently served as norms against which everything else could be perceived and measured.

In *Totality and Infinity*, his first major work, Levinas problematized what he considered to be the Other-reducing ontologies which had come before him. In so doing, he questioned the very foundations upon which modern Western philosophical considerations of the ethical had been established, and challenged the paradigmatic narratives that anchored such concepts as subjectivity, being, reality, and truth. While *Totality and Infinity* can be read as a critique that rejects the totalizing forces of the philosophies that preceded it, Levinas acknowledges that as well as critiquing the philosophical tradition, he also draws from it.

For Levinas, the problem with Western ontology is that, in its teleological pursuit of synthesis and its purposeful moving towards a cohesive end, it had reduced the Other to the self. The primacy of unity of previous philosophies had, from Levinas's perspective, relegated existents to the realm of totality. Throughout his work, Levinas seeks to consider the possibility of a relation between the self and the Other wherein the Other is not brought within the fold of the self's existing knowledge. For

him, the relationship between the self and the Other is one of absolute separation wherein the Other can be neither known nor anticipated by the self.

The separation that the Levinasian Other and the self experience manifests itself as a distance that cannot be breached without compromising the alterity of the Other. If the distance is traversed and the self and the Other become a “we,” the otherness of the Other is lost, as the self absorbs the Other into the realm of the self-same. For Levinas, then, it is within the space created and maintained by separation that a non-reductive relation with the Other is possible.

### **Levinas and Phenomenology**

Levinas’s work is essentially phenomenological in character, and his perception of himself as a phenomenologist is unambiguous. At the outset of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas remarks that in the chapters that follow “the presentation and the development of the notions employed owe everything to the phenomenological method” (TI, p. 28). And, as late as 1981, in an interview with Richard Kearney, Levinas remarked, “I remain to this day a phenomenologist” (Kearney, 2004, p. 66).

While the world into which Levinas was born was dominated by Enlightenment principles, the emergence of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology in the early twentieth century marked what was to become a paradigmatic shift in traditional Western philosophical thinking. Indeed, Levinas (1963/1997) credits Husserl as being the first philosopher to “[bring] into question the Platonic privilege, until then uncontested, of a continent which believes it has the right to colonize the world” (p. 292).

In a radical break with his forefathers, Husserl championed the idea that we do not only conceptualize the world and those in it, but that how we experience these is of primary significance to how we conceptualize them. For Levinas, the continued centrality of the *cogito*, however, renders Husserl’s phenomenology Other-reducing, as within the sphere of pure consciousness nothing exists beyond or transcends the realm

of intentionality. Therefore, from Levinas's perspective (1973/1995), Husserl's phenomenology offers us a philosophy "in which we consider life in all its concreteness but no longer live it" (p. 155).

Ultimately, for Levinas, the unchallenged centrality of intellect in Husserl's work continues to feed into modern Western philosophical notions of the intersubjective relationship, which is anchored to consciousness. For Levinas, it was Heidegger who brought Husserlian phenomenology beyond the realm of abstract theory, bringing "the phenomenological method to life and [giving] it a contemporary style and relevance" whilst maintaining the integrity of Husserl's method (Kearney, 2004, p. 67). From quite early on, then, the phenomenology to which Levinas subscribed owed more to a Heideggerian interpretation of Husserlian phenomenology than to Husserl's work itself (Derrida, 1978). For Levinas, while Husserl questioned the centrality of the pure *cogito* in Western philosophy, to his mind *Being and Time* went further still, representing "the fruition and flowering of Husserlian phenomenology" (Kearney, 2004, p. 67). In Levinas's early work, Heidegger provided the lens through which Levinas could problematize what he considered to be the overly-theoretical and ahistorical explorations of consciousness in Husserl. In his interview with Kearney (2004), Levinas summarizes what he contends to be the main difference of style between Husserl and Heidegger as follows:

If it was Husserl who opened up for me the radical possibilities of a phenomenological analysis of knowledge, it was Heidegger who first gave these possibilities a positive and concrete grounding in our everyday existence; Heidegger showed that the phenomenological search for eternal truths and essences ultimately originates in *time*, in our temporal and historical existence. (p. 68, original emphasis)

Moyn (1998) suggests that part of Levinas's intellectual and philosophical legacy is that prior to 1933, "Levinas had been perhaps the most important interpreter and naturalizer of the early philosophy of Martin Heidegger in France" (p. 26). In 1932, Levinas remarked of Heidegger: "no one who has ever done philosophy can keep himself from declaring before the Heideggerian corpus, that the originality and power of his effort, born of genius, have allied themselves with a conscientious, meticulous, and solid elaboration" (Levinas, 1932/1996, cited in Moyn, 1998, p. 34).<sup>18</sup> However, after Heidegger joined the National Socialist Party in 1933, Levinas was forced to reassess his philosophical allegiance to Heidegger. As Wild (1969/2011) wrote in the introduction to the English translation of *Totality and Infinity*, while "without Husserl and Heidegger [*Totality and Infinity*] could not have been written, it is highly critical of Husserl and constitutes one of the most basic attacks on the thought of Heidegger that has yet been formulated" (p. 20).

From Levinas's perspective, "the struggle to *be*" (Kearney, 2004, p. 76, original emphasis) is "the first truth of ontology" (Kearney, 2004, p. 75) and because, for him, ethics is prior to ontology, ethics is prior to and presupposed by Heideggerian Being. Levinas, therefore, challenges the "ontological privileging of 'the right to exist'" (Kearney, 1984, p. 60), which he considers to lie at the centre of Heideggerian philosophy.

### **Thinking Otherwise**

Levinas continuously challenges the predominance of the theoretical and the ontological presence of being which he asserts has dominated Western philosophy since its Greek birth. He contests the primacy of ontology within the Western philosophical tradition, with its attendant synthesizing and totalizing notion of truth as presence: "perhaps the

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<sup>18</sup> Moyn (1998) highlights that "Levinas omitted this paragraph in the postwar reprint" (p. 34).

most essential distinguishing feature of the language of Greek philosophy was its equation of truth with an intelligibility of presence” (Kearney, 1984, p. 71).

Levinas reflects in *Totality and Infinity* that, since Hegel, the Other had been characterized as a problem in Western philosophy where she had come to represent “the negation of the same, as Hegel would like to say” (TI, p. 305). For Levinas, in the wake of Hegel’s (1807/1997) paradigmatic master/slave dialectic, the approach to the Other had become one of caution (even fear), with encounters between the self and the Other being philosophically framed as constituting something negative, which resulted in either domination or submission to domination. From Levinas’s perspective, within this system, the Other is assimilated into that to which the self belongs, and is thereby relegated to the realm of the same. This understanding of the relationship between the self and the Other, to Levinas’s mind, had led to a rise in an individuality anchored to the Enlightenment principles of rationality, autonomy, and individual freedom.

Throughout his writing, Levinas points out that an ethics grounded in such philosophy could have violent and tyrannical consequences. To his mind, the atrocious inhumanity that World War II inflicted upon people marked as “Other” evinced the possibility that Enlightenment philosophies could coexist with, and could even be called upon to justify, such behaviour (Levinas, 1934/1990; 1947/2007; 1989). In the wake of the Holocaust, Levinas’s work sought to show how the privileged position that the Enlightenment’s *cogito* had been afforded in Western philosophy needed to be reconsidered, as the morality it promoted had utterly failed in its ethical responsibility to the Other.

The social, historical, and personal context from which Levinas’s work emerged,<sup>19</sup> and the *zeitgeist* of the post-war period, in particular the emergence of a

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<sup>19</sup> All of Levinas’s Lithuanian family were killed during World War II, and his wife and daughter were hidden away in a monastery until the war ended. In 1940, Levinas, who had enlisted in the French army

French Jewish philosophy during this time, constitute the background against which his ethics of the Other emerged and developed. As Todd (2003b) puts it,

writing his major philosophical contributions as well as his religious commentary in the shadow of the Holocaust and grave personal loss, Levinas's work . . . bears a distinctive weight, indeed a heaviness, with respect to posing the non-determinate conditions of responsibility that stretch beyond Husserlian intentionality and Heideggerian being. There is present in his work an exigency to attend to suffering, injustice, and violence, and his account of the ethical becomes a labour born not only of philosophical interest, but human necessity.

(p. 2)

For Levinas, the origin of our existence is not to be found in Aristotle's metaphysics, Descartes' *cogito*, Husserl's intentionality, or Heidegger's Being because, as philosophies anchored to consciousness, thought, and intellect, these represent "opinion" (TI, p. 47). To Levinas's mind, such prioritizing of the ontological, which is captured succinctly in the axiomatic Cartesian adage *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am), has resulted in the absurdity of the posterior becoming anterior. For Levinas, when a self meets an Other at the level of cognition, "one being limits another" (TI, p. 109) within the pre-existing themes of the mind. Levinas acknowledges that while thought evinces the event where the self and the Other meet, for him, thought is posterior to this event, because the fact that I think always already presupposes my prior existence. For Levinas, then, when contemplating the relation between the self and the Other, "the terms must be reversed" (TI, p. 47), because an ontological relationship between the self

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in 1939, was captured and imprisoned in the labour camp, Fallingsbotel, where he remained until the end of the war. During his imprisonment, he began to write what would later become *Existence and Existents*, in which many of the themes of his subsequent work *Totality and Infinity* can be found. In the preface to *Existence and Existents*, Levinas explains how "these studies [which had] begun before the war were continued and written down for the most part in captivity" (Levinas, 1947/2001, p. xxvii).



and the Other is a relationship involving knowledge of the Other, rather than a relationship with the Other *qua* Other.<sup>20</sup>

### **Troubling Totality**

From Levinas's perspective, "the irrefutable evidence of totality" (TI, p. 24) has dominated Western philosophy, resulting in the history of modern man being monopolized by totalizers who justify their desire for detached rationality, order, and control as the necessary precautions to be taken to prevent a descent into the chaos that unbridled subjectivity would herald. For Levinas, to structure the world so that an individual can be known, identifiable, and graspable is to totalize. The totalizing consciousness against which Levinas argues is loosely what we now think of as "essentialism," or any kind of identity category, whether essential or not. Simply put, a totality is contained within the supposition that a concept can contain all of that which it conceives, whereby reality and truth constitute a reflection of shared experience and knowledge. For Levinas, however, such totalities theoretically construct identities, the reality of which will always overflow any thought I could have of them.

From Levinas's perspective, a totality produces a space of "commons," where the desire for control and harmony demands that we conform to a shared idea of the identity that occupies the common space. Existing within a totality in this way creates a situation whereby "common sense recognizes the prototype of being, and which, for the philosopher, confers its prestige on totality. The subjectivity of knowledge cannot break with this totality, which is reflected in the subject or reflects the subject" (TI, pp. 220-221). For Levinas, this totalized subject—this subjectivity within totality—is not the only conceptualization of subjectivity available to us. While this reflects subjectivity drawn from how it is objectively represented to us by others in terms of

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<sup>20</sup> In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas tells the reader that the Other *qua* Other is the Other.

identity (and, having been internalized, is performatively reproduced by ourselves), this totalized subjectivity differs from how we subjectively live in the world.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas suggests that from the perspective of the totalizer, because the objectivity of totality is deemed to be more important than the particularity of subjectivity, the neutral impersonality of a dispassionate, generalizable universality has been championed above the unforeseeable uniqueness of the existent. Levinas argues that the policies born out of such thematization of people are not simply experienced theoretically, but are lived in an embodied way. For Levinas, the predictable neatness inherent in the structure of a totality belies the unpredictable alterity of lived reality. The cohesion suggested by such totalities, he suggests, can never be anything more than unsatisfactory theoretical representations of an infinite reality that cannot be confined in this way, because alterity is a fundamental characteristic of the human condition.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas endeavours to unpick the seemingly unproblematic abstract universality that underpins Hegelian totality and the philosophies it inspired. From Levinas's perspective, such theories are Other-reducing because they are underpinned by a belief that a unifying social consciousness can emerge within a totality and, consequently, such theories have resulted in the alterity of the Other being sacrificed to the needs of a generalized universal. This has led to what Moyn refers to as "the hypostatization of 'the European notion of man'" (Moyn, 1998, p. 38), where the Rational Man of Western civilization has been set up as a distinct entity against which other "forms" of man are to be judged.<sup>21</sup> This philosophical

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<sup>21</sup> Hypostasis is a concept that Levinas (1947/2001) introduced in *Existence and Existents*, as "the transmutation . . . of an event into a substantive" (p. 71). In an interview with Philippe Nemo, Levinas (1982/2014) speaks of the hypostasis of existents as "the passage going from *being* to *something*, from the state of verb to the state of thing. Being which is posited, in thought, is 'saved.' . . . For the ego that exists is encumbered by all these existents it dominates" (pp. 51-52, original emphasis). For Levinas, then, we are not "given" Being, but "arise in" being (Bernasconi, 1978/2001p. xi).

conceptualization of man could be, and indeed repeatedly has been, rationally employed to justify such barbaric acts as colonization, racial segregation, and the Holocaust.

Levinas challenges traditional Western philosophy, which he believes represents a totalizing force wherein the infinite alterity of the Other is reduced to the totality of a coherent whole. Building on Husserl's thesis that it is through experiencing the Other that we know of her existence, Levinas develops what Wild calls a "*phenomenology of the other*" (p. 13, original emphasis), where the Other is met at the level of the sensed rather than filtered through the *cogito*. In this way, Levinas deviates from Husserl, for whom representational intentionality continues to anchor the relationship between the self and the Other to the *cogito*. As we will see in this chapter, contrary to Husserl's view that the Other is always consciously intended in me and, therefore, "it is always the same that determines the Other" (TI, p. 124), for Levinas, the encounter between the self and the Other does not result in a disclosure of the Other to the self. Levinas believes that to approach the Other in anticipation of her disclosure implies interpretation, which anchors the initial encounter to the *cogito* and, for Levinas, this cognitively-mediated encounter is subsequent to the initial ethical encounter of the face to face.

### **Metaphysical Desire**

According to Levinas the glance *by itself*, contrary to what one may be led to believe, does not *respect* the other. Respect, beyond grasp and contact, beyond touch, smell and taste, can be only as desire, and metaphysical desire does not seek to consume, as do Hegelian desire or need. This is why Levinas places sound above light. (Derrida, 1978, pp. 123-4, original emphasis)

The observable and knowable world of rationality is always already saturated in an alterity it can neither see nor describe. Rather than taking this to mean that it does not exist, Levinas spoke to its existence without tying it to any definition. We sense clues

to the existence of alterity, however, which Levinas refers to as metaphysical Desire.<sup>22</sup> In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas draws a distinction between desire conceived of as want or need and metaphysical Desire. He suggests that “in metaphysics a being is in a relation with what it cannot absorb, with what it cannot, in the etymological sense of the word, comprehend” (TI, p. 80); and it is the presence of this infinite, unknowable Other who exists beyond the self, that evokes metaphysical Desire. For Levinas, subjectivity is constituted through metaphysical Desire, which is the external stimulus that draws us out of ourselves and into contact with the Other.

Physical needs such as hunger, thirst, and intellectual yearning create a desire that draws the self into the exteriority of the world, where this desire can be sated by interacting with that which is other than the self (food, drink, knowledge). Consumption of the other through labour or thinking results in the absorption of this other into self. Consequently, through labour, the other “remains within the same” (TI, p. 41). Within such a totality, even when our labour does not result in the object bending to our will, such opposition remains attached to my totalizing horizon, whereby even that which resists my labour is still implicated in it by its very resistance. For Levinas, both animal existence and economic existence are thus located in the realm of the same: “in laboring possession reduces to the same what at first presented itself as other” (TI, p. 175).

For Levinas, when we consider desire beyond the physical, such totalizing thinking does not suffice. He suggests that metaphysical Desire does not originate in a need or a lack within self, but originates in what is beyond the self. The pursuit of this insatiable Desire results in a deepening of the Desire rather than a satisfying of it, because this Desire “nourishes itself, one might say, with its hunger” (TI, p. 34). For

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<sup>22</sup> In *Totality and Infinity*, when Levinas speaks of metaphysical Desire he uses a capital D to differentiate it from other forms of desire.

Levinas, this conceptualization of Desire takes it out of the realm of the negative, the finite, of lack, and shows it to be positive in its infinity. Its insatiability (which, Levinas points out, is not the same thing as an infinite hunger) results not from the finitude of she who desires, but from the infinitude of the Other who evokes the Desire. For Levinas, metaphysical Desire constitutes “the ‘measure’ of the Infinite which no term, no satisfaction arrests” (TI, p. 304). In other words, that which I desire metaphysically overflows my idea of it. Metaphysical Desire is thus beyond and “above” Being (TI, p. 63).

The simple satisfaction of physical desire is linked to happiness in interiority—I desire something, I get it and internalize it, I no longer experience lack, I am happy. When desire is experienced in this way, it remains at the level of the totalizing I, who takes that which is other into the self. Metaphysical Desire fundamentally differs from other forms of desire because it transcends both Being and the happiness that can be experienced at the level of interiority and the self. When we experience metaphysical Desire, the satisfaction and happiness associated with other forms of desire are not enough. This Desire urges us to go further, beyond our own need to achieve happiness and calls on us to risk our happiness when faced with our ethical responsibility for the Other: “in Desire the being of the I appears still higher, since it can sacrifice to its Desire its very happiness” (TI, p. 63). In this way, Levinas shows us how happiness and metaphysical Desire are separate from each other. Metaphysical Desire brings us beyond happiness in desiring what is beyond that which can be achieved at the level of the I. As with other forms of desire, metaphysical Desire brings us out of ourselves, beyond our interiority, but the exteriority into which it leads us is not the way of the same but is the space of the Other. Indeed, for Levinas, the object of metaphysical Desire is the Other, where this Desire is “absolutely non-egoist” (TI, p. 63).

## The Levinasian Other

For Levinas, because the Other is not a thing or an object, she cannot be contained within the self through labour or thought and, therefore, the Other does not constitute the other of physical desire. For him, because she is first encountered in the realm of the infinite, prior to ontology and therefore prior to being, the Other is not a being in the traditional philosophical sense. Additionally, Todd (2001) highlights that the Levinasian Other “does not simply mean a sociological other who is marginalized or maligned; nor does it simply signify another person who, as a subject, resembles oneself” (p. 437). From a Levinasian perspective, we should think of the Other in terms of my relationship to her rather than a collection of identity-markers. The Levinasian Other is beyond consciousness and thematization in this way, because “the other withdraws from the theme” in a “movement without movement” (Derrida, 1995/1997a, p. 23).

For Levinas, just as Cartesian Infinity breaches the totality of the conscious mind (Descartes, 1637/1968), the reality of the Other (the Other *qua* Other) perpetually breaches any thought I have of her. This is because the Other and the self are not in common with each other and do not constitute a totality—the Other “escapes my grasp by an essential dimension even if I have him at my disposal” (TI, p. 39). From Levinas’s perspective, if I filter the Other through my consciousness, I reduce her to ontological categorization. When I seek to incorporate the Other into my consciousness in this way, I deny her an alterity that my consciousness cannot contain or imagine. In so doing, I reduce the Other to an other who exists for my appropriation, and absorb her into the self. For Levinas, then, the self can never know the Other, because to know the Other means to reduce the Other to the self. If this is not to happen, Levinas argues, I must simultaneously remain separate from the Other, yet open to her teaching.

From a Levinasian perspective, the alterity of the Other will always represent something uniquely new and absolutely different to anything already known by the self. The Levinasian encounter between the self and the Other differs significantly from the Hegelian encounter after which the Other has either dominated or been subjected to domination, and has thus been enclosed within the realm of the same. For Levinas, to see the Other as a mere reflection of the self in this way is to reduce the Other to the self, thereby stripping the Other of the very Otherness that constitutes her as Other. For Levinas, when I am open to the infinite possibilities that the Other represents, “I don’t take [my] own interiority for the totality of being,” which “implies a soul capable of containing more than it can draw from itself” (TI, p. 180).

### **The Levinasian Ethical**

Levinas introduced his idea of the ethical in the 1951 text *Is ontology fundamental?* where he outlines that any relationship that involves understanding is not ethical but ontological. Critchley observes that, in this text,

we begin to get the full articulation of the break with Heidegger and the first announcement of ethics. But importantly ethics is not a substantive term; there’s not *an* ethics in Levinas. Ethical is a term used to describe a relation to another, a relation that cannot be reduced to comprehension. (2015, pp. 14-15, original emphasis)

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas takes up the subject of the ethical again, emphasizing the distinction between ontology and ethics. For him ontology is located on the plane of totality because, in trying to make sense of the Other, ontology reduces alterity to the held in common of the generalizable and, in so doing, ontology “reduces the other to the same” (TI, p. 42). Consequently, Levinas problematizes the primacy of an ontologically-mediated ethics, and argues for a radically metaphysical understanding of ethics that originates in the pre-ontological space where the self faces the Other.

For Levinas, to approach ethics in the traditional way, where ontology is thought to precede ethics, demands a consciousness that produces a totality for the Other to inhabit before she is ever encountered. Transcendence, on the other hand, demands separation, whereby the self and the Other are not conceived of as part of an englobing whole that is capable of being thought about: “transcendence is not a vision of the Other, but a primordial donation . . . . transcendence is not an optics, but the first ethical gesture” (TI, p. 174). Transcendence, for Levinas, is thus beyond ontology and connected primordially to the source of the ethical.

For Levinas, ethics is a relationship with the transcendent alterity of the Other which is beyond the self’s knowing grasp. Using the logic of Descartes’ third *Meditation* to support his argument, where “the being infinitely surpassing its own idea in us . . . subtends the evidence of the *cogito*” (TI, p. 54, original emphasis), Levinas concludes that ethics is first philosophy because, if the infinite subtends thought (and, for Levinas, because the infinite is to be found in my ethical responsibility to the Other), using Cartesian logic, ontology presupposes my ethical responsibility for the Other.

Because the themes of knowledge, subjectivity, relationality, communication, and responsibility provide the leitmotif that echoes across this thesis, connecting Levinas’s ethics and the ethical work of the primary school teacher, Levinas’s ethics of the Other will now be explicated using these five themes. In this way, the Levinasian ethical provides an anchor for the philosophical consideration of these themes in Chapter Three and their more practical consideration in Chapter Five.

### **Knowledge**

For Levinas, when I seek to know that which is other than the self, I totalize it by confining it within the categories of my existing knowledge. Levinas suggests that this happens because when I engage in the process of getting to know something new I incorporate it into my particular system of knowing, thereby distilling it through what is



already known to me. In this way, I make familiar that which is unfamiliar and foreign to me. I then believe that I know something new about the other's reality, which I have, in fact, absorbed into and refracted through my current perception of reality, thereby totalizing it within the pre-existing categories of my own thought. What is other to the self is thus comprehended through the egocentric self, and becomes knowable to me through its incorporation into what is already known by me.

Such knowledge of the Other leaves us with a synthetic being that can be generalized and understood. This, Levinas suggests happens for at least two reasons. Firstly, when we grasp for the Other, we reduce the Other to the same of the self. And secondly, any concept we form of the Other will constitute speaking of the past as if it were present, because "the object of knowledge is always a fact, already happened and passed through" (TI, p. 69). As Critchley (2015) puts it, "the relationship to the other person is not reducible to comprehension" (p. 14) because a totalized Other can only ever exist within the realms of the theoretical and the past.

From Levinas's perspective, I can neither know nor explain the alterity of the Other, because the moment I grasp for the Other in thought, her alterity disappears. For Levinas, when I conceptualize and interpret the Other, the knowledge I gain about her is always mediated by me and, hence, is correlative to and limited by my existing knowledge. From his perspective, the ideas I form of the Other come not from the Other, but from that which already exists and is known to me within the ontological categories of my mind because "knowledge is always adequation (an equating) between thought and what it thinks" (TI, p. 60).

Consequently, knowledge of the Other constitutes a reflection of the self, bound within the realm of the same. The Other, as a "contemplated being" (TI, p. 95) can then satisfy a desire to normalize and categorize her within predefined categories, thereby rendering her alterity intelligible within a totalized whole of the self's making. As soon

as the Other has been reduced to a graspable concept and is understandable to me in this way, her alterity disappears into the totalization of the thematic.

Levinas contends that when we see each other as conforming to thematic definitions and identities we limit each other because “totality absorbs the multiplicity of being” (TI, p. 222). Thematic identity, for Levinas, represents “a whole in which . . . exteriority vanishes” (TI, p. 26). Identity negates the possibility of legitimate destinies or subjectivities beyond that which is already known, because it “has more to do with the ways in which we identify with existing orders and traditions than with ways of acting and being that are ‘outside’ of this” (Biesta, 2013, p. 18). Consequently, the concept of thematic identity is problematic for Levinas because when the Other is contained within the confines of an identity category, she is reduced to a generality and confined to a pre-existing theme. Identity, then, “is an explanatory concept” (Winter, 2011, p. 537), which allows the self to fit the Other into that which is already known to the self, thereby denying the Other her alterity. Such cognitive thematization totalizes the Other in its consideration of the individual not as a singularly unique existent, but as a collection of identifying markers that are considered to be shared by others, providing a frontier against which the other it projects can be defined “as ‘such and such a type’” (Levinas, 1984/1996, p. 166). Consequently, Levinas suggests that “definition, far from doing violence to the identity of the terms united into a totality, ensures this identity” (TI, p. 222).

Levinas suggests that “the idea of being with which philosophers interpret the irreducible alienness of the non-I is thus cut to the measure of the same” (Levinas, 1986, p. 346). What he is suggesting here, is that to meet the Other in consciousness (as modern philosophy suggests), is to impose *a priori*, meaningful categories on her, to presuppose a knowledge of the her based on already existent knowledge, and to totalize

her from within the interiority of the self in an attempt to contain her within a knowable identity that makes sense to the self.

From Levinas's perspective, "an interlocutor arises again behind him whom thought has just comprehended—as the certitude of the *cogito* arises behind every negation of certitude" (TI, p. 295). Here Levinas is suggesting that, the Other *qua* Other will always escape the confines of reductive descriptions and classifications, because behind any identity categories constructed for her, the Other *qua* Other will always stand, rich in her alterity. Any knowledge gleaned from such identification and classification, therefore, will not be of the Other, but of the self.

### **Subjectivity**

Since the Enlightenment and its heralding of our dependence on scientific proof, society had sought objective evidence to underpin knowledge and truth and, within this narrative, subjectivity had largely been discredited as capricious and unreliable. Levinas suggests that the presupposition of the primacy of scientific rationality and objectivity over the subjective also underpins much modern philosophizing.<sup>23</sup> Levinas states at the outset of *Totality and Infinity* that what follows "does not present itself as a defense of subjectivity, but it will apprehend the subjectivity not at the level of its purely egoist protestation against totality, nor in its anguish before death, but as founded in the idea of infinity" (TI, p. 26).

Throughout his work, Levinas challenges the "traditional ontological versions of subjectivity" (Kearney, 1984, p. 63), within which the self-sufficient *cogito* has been elevated above all else as the origin of subjectivity. He upends this ontological approach to subjectivity by arguing that, rather than representing something wholly egoist and interior, subjectivity is produced in the "non-allergic" relationship between

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<sup>23</sup> It should be highlighted here that a way of conceptualizing subjectivity, which is closer to Levinas's understanding, had already emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in the work of Kierkegaard.

the self and the Other (TI, p. 47). For Levinas, the primordial condition of an existent is not that of an internal, conscious ego, but of a sensible, embodied subject, who exists in a world with others. It is this condition of existing with and for the Other that results in her coming into being as a conscious self: “I am defined as a subjectivity, as a singular person, as an ‘I’, precisely because I am exposed to the other” (Kearney, 1984, p. 62). In this way, for Levinas, subjectivity is forged in the self’s response to the ethical demands posed by the Other, in the face-to-face relationship.

Biesta (Winter, 2011, p. 537) highlights that the death of the modern idea of the subject does not equate to the death of the possibility of subject-ness, but merely the death of our ability to speak definitively about any subject or claim to definitively know her. For Levinas, the presence of the Other is necessary if the self is to move beyond the interiority of the pure ego and come into the world as a subject. For him, subjectivity emerges “as welcoming the Other, as hospitality; in it the idea of infinity is consummated” (TI, p. 27). And, because from a Levinasian perspective, “the idea of totality and the idea of infinity differ precisely in that the first is purely theoretical while the second is moral” (TI, p. 83), subjectivity thus moves from constituting a purely egoist concern to an ethical one as it is forged in the moment when a self faces an Other. As Chinnery (2003) interprets it, “the crucial feature of Levinas’s ethics is his claim that responsibility is constitutive of subjectivity and not the other way round . . . . responsibility for the other is the very nature of subjectivity itself” (p. 8).

### **Relationality**

For Levinas, approaching the Other in a way that seeks to know and, therefore, absorb her produces numerical rather than radical multiplicity and, for him, “numerical multiplicity remains defenceless against totalization” (TI, p. 220). For Levinas, as soon as we are together in a way that forms a unit, our alterity is compromised and we become thematics in a generalizable world. We become *for* the universal, the

generalizable, the totality. Levinas argues that this is our philosophical inheritance because “since Parmenides across Plotinus we have not succeeded in thinking otherwise. For multiplicity seemed to us to be united in a totality, of which the multiplicity could be but an appearance—moreover inexplicable” (TI, p. 104).

My ethical relationship with the Other is understood by Levinas as a relationship with the transcendent Other, who “introduces into me what was not in me” (TI, p. 203). For Levinas, then, my relationship with the Other is prior to ontology because if I were to filter this encounter through my ontological lenses, I would not be going beyond the realm of the same, but would be experiencing the Other within the limits of the pre-existing self. And, as Levinas reminds us, “ethics, where the same takes the irreducible Other into account, would belong to opinion” (TI, p. 47). For Levinas, it is in my relation with the Other that the self can emerge and, therefore, the Other precedes me or, more precisely, my self (consciousness) presupposes the Other.

For Levinas, the ethical relationship between the self and Other is fundamentally “a relationship of discourse” (TI, p. 71) and, for him, “the essence of discourse is ethical” (TI, p. 216). Speaking and listening, then, are central to Levinas’s ethics of the Other, for whom ethics is speech—although not speech simply reduced to what is said. For Levinas, it is the very fact of speaking and the condition and relationship that this presupposes that constitutes ethics as speech. As Large (2011) succinctly puts it, “ethically, then, what is significant about language is not the words spoken, nor the ideas conveyed by them, but the relation to the Other” (p. 244). In this way, it is not language that produces the Other, but the Other that creates the conditions for language. Yet, it is also language that creates the space for the self to meet the Other, in a way that does not strive to capture her alterity within essentializing and totalizing thought.

## Communication

Throughout *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas problematizes what he considers to be the privileged position afforded to the sense of sight in Western philosophical discourse from Plato to Heidegger. This endorsement of sight, for Levinas, had privileged the objectification of existents, adequating what is to what is visible. Levinas suggests, however, that when one's gaze fixes on the Other, it fixes her, captures her in a moment that has passed as soon as it is glimpsed. Levinas contends that when the Other is captured by sight in this way, she is objectified and limited to the horizon of the same: "in fleeing itself in vision consciousness returns to itself" (TI, p. 191).

Levinas argues against this traditional position, suggesting that the Other is "absolutely exterior to every image he would leave" (TI, p. 296). This, for Levinas, is because even if the self had a capacity for panoramic vision, the Other would always offer more than the self could perceive because only one façade of the Other could ever be visible to the self at any time: "the revelation of matter is essentially superficial . . . for beneath form things conceal themselves" (TI, p. 192).

For Levinas, the primordial relationship between the self and the Other is brokered through language because, stripped of her voice, the Other does not exist as Other but only as something which exists within, and is filtered through, the self. It is the language that emerges in the face-to-face encounter between the self and the Other (wherein the Other represents herself in her own words) that the Other is encountered by the self, not as an other object of the self's thought, but as an infinite and unknowable Other. Thus, the ethical language of which Levinas speaks requires proximity.

Although, as Todd (2003a) clarifies, the proximity of which Levinas speaks,

is not a self-interested pleasure but a space/time of communication between two where the approach of the other signals the beginning of subjectivity itself. It is not, then, that two subjectivities participate in proximity, as if one decided to

become closer to the other; rather proximity is prior to subjectivity itself, inaugurating its very possibility through difference. (p. 39-40)

When the relation between the self and the Other takes place in language, the Other can speak her own truth thereby presenting herself in “another plane” (TI, p. 192), which is beyond my vision. In speaking for herself, the Other provides me with language and signifiers of her own choosing when attending to her manifestation and, as a consequence, she remains “uncontained by my thought” (TI, p. 99). In this way, through her own language, the Other is not simply presented as an image or series of signs for the self’s appropriation because, as Levinas tells us, “language is exceptional in that it attends its own manifestation. Speech consists in explaining oneself with respect to speech; it is a teaching” (TI, p. 98). For Levinas, then, it is hearing that is the first ethical sense, and sight is the first theoretical sense (Derrida, 1978, p. 123).

Levinas emphasizes, however, that this presence of the Other in language is not the ontological presence of previous philosophies, but implies a certain absence. For Levinas, the presence of the Other as Other does not imply her presence as a theme within the self’s *cogito*. For him, it is the fact that the Other is speaking (the act of signifying) that is more important than the signification this act produces, because it constitutes a “signifying before we have projected light upon it” (TI, p. 74). The discursive language of this face-to-face encounter is not a language that seeks to fix the signified through the enactment of the signifier, but offers both the self and the Other the ability to constantly disrupt any stable meaning of the signifier through the right to respond, which their interactive and dynamic discourse offers:

The sign does not signify the signifier as it signifies the signified. The signified is never a complete presence; always a sign in its turn, it does not come in a straightforward frankness. The signifier, he who emits the sign, *faces*, despite the interposition of the sign, without proposing himself as a theme. He can, to

be sure, speak of himself—but then he would announce himself as signified and consequently as a sign in his turn. The Other, the signifier, manifests himself in speech by speaking of the world and not of himself; he manifests himself by proposing the world, by *thematizing* it. (TI, p. 96, original emphasis)

Consequently, from Levinas's perspective, the signified exists within the realm of the ontological and hence represents a totality that will always fail to accommodate the infinite possibilities of the signifier: "insofar as ontology equates truth with the intelligibility of total presence, it reduces the pure exposure of saying to the totalizing closure of the said" (Kearney, 2004, p. 79). For Levinas, because it is through discourse that the self and the Other can face each other in a moment where there exists no security between the signifier and the signified, the saying exists within the realm of the ethical: language "at each instant dispels the charm of rhythm and prevents the initiate from becoming a role. Discourse is rupture and commencement, breaking of rhythm which enraptures and transports the interlocutors" (TI, p. 203).

For Levinas, "language is not enacted within a consciousness; it comes to me from the Other and reverberates in consciousness by putting it into question" (TI, p. 204). In this way, it is "discourse [that] conditions thought" (TI, p. 216) and, hence, discourse is presupposed by thought. Such discourse differs from Socratic dialogue (which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three) in the sense that Socratic dialogue rests on the belief that such a method brings forth that which already exists in those with whom one dialogically engages. For Levinas, ethical discourse has no such objectives. Rather than placing the ego and the self at the centre of ethics, what Levinas proposes is that the Other takes centre stage; or, more precisely, my relationship with the Other, and the discourse within which it takes place, are central to his ethics.

For Levinas, the interlocutor with whom I converse remains "forever outside" of me and beyond the realm of the same, because "the exteriority of discourse cannot be



converted into interiority” (TI, p. 295). While conversation “cannot renounce the egoism of its existence” (TI, p. 40), this egoism does not necessarily reduce the Other to the self due to the fact that, in conversation, the distance between the self and the Other is maintained, thus preventing the subsumption of the self and the Other within a totality. The Levinasian conversation therefore does not seek to reduce the self and the Other to a common theme, but represents a space wherein our presentations of our selves do not seek to rest on the common ground of a shared theme, but allows for the alterity of the Other to be encountered.

As already stated, the Other manifests herself to me in speech by thematizing the world (TI, p. 96). In this way, signification comes not from my consciousness but from the words of the Other, so that “signification is in the absolute surplus of the Other with respect to the same who desires him” (TI, p. 97). As Large (2011) puts it,

in speaking to the Other, I am not stating a common theme that would be the same to us both, but responding to the difference between us. It is this saying that would be the foundation for the truth of philosophy and not the other way around. (p. 244)

### **Responsibility**

From the perspective of Western metaphysics, freedom has typically been anchored to autonomy. In contrast, Levinasian responsibility is anchored to a vision of subjectivity that is fundamentally heteronomous. Such an approach challenges the fundamental conception of the autonomous and free subject, on which modern Western societies have been built. From Levinas’s perspective, it is not my autonomy that is central to my subjectivity and humanity, but my obligation to the Other because, “as soon as I acknowledge that it is ‘I’ who am responsible, I accept that my freedom is anteceded by an obligation to the other. Ethics redefines subjectivity as this heteronomous responsibility, in contrast to autonomous freedom” (Kearney, 2004, p. 72).

Responsibility, from a Levinasian perspective, is non-transferable and is unique to each individual encounter between a self and an Other. As Biesta interprets it, “the subjectivity of each single subject who comes into the world” matters (Winter, 2011, p. 539) and this, he says, “is why the idea of ‘coming into the world’ needs to be complemented by the notion of ‘uniqueness’” (p. 539). Biesta goes on to clarify that the uniqueness of the Levinasian Other is not a uniqueness that is tied to a different but knowable identity (observed and articulated by a third party), but “uniqueness-as-irreplaceability” (Winter, 2011, p. 539). Biesta highlights how the uniqueness of the Levinasian Other differs from more traditional notions of uniqueness that are:

based on an instrumental relationship with the other: we need others in order to articulate that we are different from them, but that’s all that we need the other for. Uniqueness-as-irreplaceability, on the other hand, brings in a different question: not what *makes* me unique, but *when does it matter* that I am I? (Winter, 2011, p. 539, original emphasis)

Biesta suggests that, from a Levinasian perspective, it matters that I am singularly and irreplaceably I when I am called upon by the Other to give an account of myself. It matters that I am I when I am addressed by the Other in this way, because it is me as an unique *ipseity* that the Other is addressing, as opposed to “me in my social role (which would be my identity)” (Winter, 2011, p. 539). From Levinas’s perspective, then, I am irreplaceable in my responsibility for the Other, whether or not I choose to take it on, because uniqueness-as-irreplaceability “articulates a first person perspective” (Winter, 2011, p. 539).

The futural nature of the Other who is yet to come makes any possibility of predicting what she will ethically demand of me impossible. Hence, the incoming Other always already makes demands on ethicality that current theories, philosophies, and morality inevitably fail to meet, because what she will demand of me will always

overflow what I (or current moral codes) already contain. As Derrida (1996) puts it, “we have a relation to things as they are for which a determinate or constative truth, a constative presence, is impossible” (p. 87).

For Levinas, we cannot predict how to behave ethically because ethics implies a response rather than a predetermined behaviour. We do not know the detail that our yet-to-be-encountered, ethics-informing relationships will present to us. Due to this unpredictability, anticipating the ethical demands that the futural Other will make can only ever be abstract and totalizing, based on what has been rather than what is yet to come. This is why Levinas argues that our approach to the ethical must always remain open and allow for the shifting positions that such unpredictability heralds.

### **Justice and the Third Party**

At first glance it might appear that due to the transcendent, face-to-face nature of the Levinasian ethical, it cannot be the basis of politics or justice, which by their nature are finite, universal, and ontologically-grounded and -mediated. One might be tempted to ask how it is possible to move through our lives and the multiplicities we encounter in ways that maintain such one-to-one, relational ethics as Levinas suggests. Levinas acknowledges that “this is the great objection to my thought. ‘Where did you ever see the ethical relation practised?, people say to me. I reply that its being utopian does not prevent it from investing our everyday actions of generosity or goodwill towards the other” (Kearney, 1984, p. 68). Critchley (1996) highlights that,

far from a blindspot in Levinas’s work, one finds . . . an attempt to traverse the passage from ethics to politics . . . . Levinas endeavours to build a bridge from ethics, conceived as the nontotalizable relation with the other human, to politics, understood as the relation with the third party (*le tiers*), that is, to all the others that make up society. (p. 161)

While Levinas advocates ethics that is prior to ontology, he does acknowledge that our existence is soaked in ontology because we cannot but negotiate the world ontologically. When challenged by Kearney (2004) that ethical responsibility to the Other is a “purely negative ideal impossible to realize in our everyday being-in-the-world” (p. 79), Levinas responds that:

this is a fundamental point. Of course we inhabit an ontological world of technological mastery and political self-preservation. Indeed without these political and technological structures of organization we would not be able to feed mankind. This is the great paradox of human existence: we must use the ontological *for the sake of the other*; to ensure the survival of the other we must resort to the technico-political systems of means and ends. (p. 79, original emphasis)

This “great irony” of the self’s ethical responsibility for the Other lies in the fact that ethics is betrayed at the moment of its utterance by the need to demand justice for the Other, which requires that the Other is re-presented by the self for the sake of the Other. This paradox occurs for the simple reason that more than two people exist in the world. Hence, the face-to-face relationship with the Other is always already interrupted by the presence of a third party. Consequently, as Perpich (2005) puts it, Levinasian “ethics is ethical only where it is always already disposed of what is proper to it, already open to its other in calling for universality, thematization, law, justice” (p. 334).

This aspect of Levinasian thought represents a breach of the prior to/post dichotomy, because ethics is prior to ontology, yet the ethical moment of the face-to-face relationship is contemporaneous with the arrival of the third party, who brings with her a demand for justice, which is imbued with thought and representation. So, while ethics is prior to ontology, ontology in the form of justice is immediately implicated in it. In other words, the ethical demand of the face-to-face relationship that I not reduce

the Other to totalizing concepts, and the conditions within which this responsibility emerges, means that in order to demand justice for the Other I must resort to a justice wherein the Other must be grasped for in thought:

The problem of the relation of ethics to politics is announced in Levinas's texts by the entrance of the third party, *le tiers* . . . . The third is not a mirror-image or copy of the other; he is not merely another other, a new instantiation of the same kind or genus. . . . the third is conceived as other than the Other, the other *of* the Other, in a redoubling of asymmetrical, irreducible alterity. (Perpich, 2005, p. 326)

From Levinas's perspective, when the self and the Other are facing they cannot be totalized because their relationship is one "which no one can encompass or thematise" (TI, p. 295). However, the formation of the structures, which underpin the communities and societies in which the self and the Other live with each other's Other, results in the generalization of the self and the Other. This is due to the Other and the self being encompassed within the totalizing gaze of the third party: "with the entry of the third, ethics is thus joined, prior to every origin, to everything that would betray it: thematization, universality, ontology, totality, the State" (Perpich, 2005, p. 330). In pursuit of a common vision, singularity is thus lost within the "community of genus which already nullifies alterity" (TI, p. 194), and results in a situation whereby "the State awakens the person to a freedom it immediately violates" (TI, p. 176). Therefore, ethics and politics are, paradoxically, incommensurable yet simultaneously presupposed by each other. As Critchley (1996) puts it,

Levinas does not want to reject the order of political rationality and its consequent claims to universality and justice; rather, he wants to criticize the belief that *only* political rationality can answer political problems and to show how the order of the state rests upon the irreducible ethical responsibility of the

face to face relationship . . . . ethics leads back to politics. (p. 161, original emphasis)

For Levinas, it is not a case that ethics comes first and politics follows. For him, the co-presence of the Other and the third party from the very beginning means that politics presupposes this ethical relationship. To assume ethical responsibility is not a case of phenomenologically bracketing prejudices so that a pre-ontological neutrality can be arrived at. For Levinas, ethical responsibility exists before any prejudicial categories even emerge, prior to the possibility of ontological categories of gender, race, or other identities. Therefore, an ethics that is prior to such a need to neutralize pre-existing prejudices is foundationally and fundamentally ethical, leading to a different starting point for concepts such as justice, rights, and egalitarianism. “Indeed,” as Critchley (1996) suggests, “one might go further and claim that the ethical is ethical for the sake of politics, that is, for the sake of a transformed conception of politics and society” (p. 161).

### **Can There Be An Ethical Justice?**

As we have seen, for Levinas, when I face the Other I do not absorb her into the same of the self, nor do I seek to make sense of her. From his perspective, it is due to the presence of a third party that this demand is made of me. Consequently, a problem arises immediately I face the Other, due to the fact that the presence of the third is contemporaneous with the presence of the Other. As Derrida puts it,

the third arrives without waiting. Without waiting, the third comes to affect the experience of the face in the face to face. Although this interposition of the third does not interrupt the welcome itself, this ‘thirdness’ (tertia-litt) turns or makes turn toward it, like a witness (terstis) made to bear witness to it, the dual (duel) of the face to face, the singular welcome of the unicity of the other. The illeity of

the third is thus nothing less, for Levinas, than the beginning of justice, at once as law and beyond the law, in law beyond the law. (1995/1997a, p. 29)

Levinas argues that justice shaped by an ethics of the Other leads us to surrender our happiness and rethink our freedom in the face of our ethical responsibility for the Other. The legal and political promise of justice is something that can be given to someone, but the ethical promise of justice is something that is never given, but is always pending, aware that a rupture will come but not yet aware from where or what form it will take. Therefore, Levinasian justice is always uneasy, anticipating its pending alteration, and thus infinitely open to reconstitution. From Levinas's perspective, ontologically-informed morality offers up a justice that can devise universal moral truths, leading to a situation where rights are based on a reductive view of the Other with each existent relegated to a group identity. Consequently, Levinasian justice is restless and contingent, and can never be just one thing. The justice that Levinas champions is not a justice shaped by universal and rational moral thought. It is a justice shaped by ethics.

In his analysis of Levinasian ethics, Derrida suggests that an irreconcilable problem exists between the abstract justice of the laws of the land and singular justice for the Other of Levinasian ethics. Derrida (1995/1997b) considers an alternative way of looking at what he terms the "hiatus" or the "lacuna" (p. 45) between the Levinasian ethical and the political that governs the lives of existents as they live them. Derrida (1995/1997b) suggests that justice originating in the ethical moment of the face-to-face relationship immediately betrays its own ethical demand, thereby creating a double-bind. He proposes that we go beyond thinking of the ethico-political relationship as a foundationalist one (where a Levinasian-inspired politics is thought of in terms of a politics "founded" on transcendental ethics) and he suggests a more "suspensive"

(Derrida, 1995/1997b, p. 45) approach to this “problem,” where neither ethics nor justice would be allowed primacy over the other.<sup>24</sup>

For Levinas, it is due to the presence of the third party that this paradox (or, as Derrida puts it, this “intolerable scandal” or “double-bind”) arises and renders the self’s ethical responsibility for the Other a failure at the moment of its inception: “even if Levinas never puts it this way, justice commits perjury as easily as it breathes; it betrays the ‘primordial word of honor’ and swears (jurer) only to perjure” (Derrida, 1995/1997a, p. 34).

Perpich (2005) argues that, while Derrida accuses Levinas’s ethics of containing a purity that is corrupted from the moment of its ethical conception, purity is not something Levinas ever claims for ethics in either *Totality and Infinity* or *Otherwise than Being*. Perpich (2005) highlights how purity conceived of at the political level can and, indeed, has led to genocide and apartheid, and at a theoretical level can lead to ontological essentialism; and she concludes, contrary to Derrida’s “rhetoric of purity” (p. 334), that “both the political and the ontological projects connected with purity are explicitly rejected by Levinas” (p. 332). Indeed, Perpich (2005) suggests that Levinasian “ethics can be ethical only by being impure” (p. 334), because the Levinasian ethical can be only ethical when it has betrayed itself in seeking justice for the Other which, in turn, demands a totalization of the Other. From Levinas’s perspective, then, this paradox must persist between the ethical relationship with the Other and her demand for justice because,

in the measure that the face of the Other relates us with the third party, the metaphysical relation of the I with the Other moves into the form of the We, aspires to a State, institutions, laws, which are the source of universality. But

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<sup>24</sup> Perpich (2005) understands this suspensive relationship to mean “as permitting no resolution that would establish the primacy of one term over the other” (p. 326).



politics left to itself bears a tyranny within itself; it deforms the I and the other who have given rise to it, for it judges them according to universal rules, and thus as in absentia. (TI, p. 300)

In other words, while politics is inevitable, for Levinas politics “left to itself” or left to reason alone, runs the risk of becoming totalizing and tyrannical: “reason makes human society possible; but a society whose members would be only reasons would vanish as a society” (TI, p. 119). Infinite responsibility for the Other creates a tension in the dispassionate laws of the land, and Levinasian justice resides in this tension between totalizing laws which are applied universally (laws which delimit subjectivities) and the infinite responsibility that the self bears for the Other. As Levinas reminds us, equality “cannot be detached from the welcoming of the face, of which it is a moment” (TI, p. 214). Therefore, for Levinas, justice, equality, and politics must acknowledge the primordial responsibility of the self for the Other, if laws are not to become tyrannical and totalizing. Consequently,

when it is suitably reformulated, Derrida’s paradox, far from leaving the relationship between ethics and politics at an impasse, yields a deeper understanding of the sense in which, for Levinas, ethics is already, at its inception, non-identical, open, and thus ‘hospitable,’ and politics is always-already ‘beyond politics,’ as a ‘justice beyond justice’ which is radically futural. (Perpich, 2005, p. 327)

It is the breach of the ethical relation of the face to face, which the third party represents, that saves this relationship between the self and the Other, not only from solipsism, but also from “a certain violence” that such solipsism represents because, as Perpich (2005) observes, “the absence of the third would be the absence of justice” (p. 326).

## Conclusion

Prior to Levinas, ethics had been largely viewed through ontological lenses, which presupposed morals and ethics to be the production of thinking, rational beings who could abstract and theorize their existence. Levinas argues that it is in the space prior to such abstraction that ethics emerges. Modern conceptualizations of ethics, from Levinas's perspective, concealed something in the unquestionable dominance of the *cogito* and its ability to know the Other for whom moral codes were developed. Levinas challenges this by suggesting that the thinking we do about ethics results not from reason, but from an *a priori* ethical responsibility for the Other, and that it is this pre-ontological responsibility for the Other that causes us to thematize and analyse said responsibility. Simply put, for Levinas, ethics presupposes the Other *qua* Other, and not the Other as mediated through the *cogito*.

As we have seen in this chapter, from a Levinasian perspective, the Other overflows language, overflows thought, overflows the confines of the Greek traditions within which she is theorized and contemplated.<sup>25</sup> When the self faces the Other, she does not demand that the Other give an account of herself “in a borrowed light” of ontology (TI, p. 67) and, therefore, the Other remains unmediated by context and signification.

For Levinas, the primordial relation is the face-to-face relation between the self and the Other, prior to the Other-reducing tendencies of ontology and the *cogito*. Levinas suggests that when I encounter the Other at the level of the sensed, prior to ontology, the Other can reveal herself to me through what she says rather than through what I already think. For Levinas, however, in sensing the Other who faces me I do not need to make sense of her. This conceptualization of the meeting of the self and the

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<sup>25</sup> While the dominant tradition of Greek thinking seeks to conceptualize the Other as such, it should be highlighted that some aspects of this tradition are more open to radical alterity.

Other places it not in the finite realm of the pre-existing identifiable and familiar, but locates it elsewhere, beyond the known and the graspable, beyond the self, in the realm of the infinite. While Levinas speaks of infinity and of the Other, for him neither infinity nor the Other can ever truly become an object, because the moment the Other is objectified in thought, she disappears. For Levinas, when I intellectualize ethics I reduce the Other to graspable knowledge and, in so doing, I am in danger of excluding the very origin of the ethical—the Other.

For Levinas, the observable responsibility laid down by society's moral codes can never tell us the whole story of our ethical responsibility for the Other. Levinas deviates from modern Western philosophy in his development of an ethics of the Other because, for him, ethical responsibility for the Other is not a construct of thought born of ontology, but exists ever before this responsibility is given any thought at all. This chapter has sought to demonstrate how Levinas went beyond ontological understandings of ethics in an attempt to get to the heart of what it means to be ethical, which for him precedes why we develop moral codes in the first place.

Levinas highlights how the ethical moment of the face-to-face encounter between the self and the Other is contemporaneous with the co-presence of the third and, therefore, our ethical responsibility for the Other is betrayed at the moment of its inception by the synoptic gaze of the third party. Nonetheless, while this betrayal is contemporaneous with its demand and while, as Derrida (1995/1997b) highlights, Levinas's questioning of Western traditional ontology, philosophy, and metaphysics is doomed to be announced from the confines of the Greek language of its origin, Perpich (2005) demonstrates how neither of these renders Levinasian ethics politically irrelevant.

For Levinas, the moment a third person enters the relationship and objectifies the self and the Other into a unifying and nullifying "you," the need arises to protect the

Other from violence and injustice. Paradoxically, then, in order to protect the Other from the violence and injustice that the third party represents, I must commit the first violence against the Other by confining her to, and representing her as, a theme.

However, Levinas stresses throughout his work, just because it is inevitable that I betray my responsibility for the Other from the moment of its inception, this does not negate an ethics understood as pre-ontological responsibility for the Other. This is because the co-presence of the third party means that the original encounter is that which motivates justice.

In his 1981 interview, Kearney (2004) questions Levinas as to whether the ethical relation he advocates is “entirely utopian and unrealistic” (p. 83). Levinas answers that, simply because his ethics is utopian does not preclude it from informing our everyday experiences, and he suggests that our ethical responsibility is in evidence every time we step aside and utter the words “après vous, monsieur.”

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Educating Beyond Education**

The central concern of this thesis is to consider how teachers can create spaces for the children in their classes that allow them to face and respond to each other as Other. Having explored Levinasian ethics of the Other in Chapter Two, this chapter, acts as a bridge between the philosophies of Levinas and the practice of classroom teaching, by looking at how educationalists have engaged with Levinas in their contemplation of education.

From Levinas's perspective, the ethical encounter is the primordial teaching and learning encounter, because it is only through engagement with that which is infinitely other than the self that any learning can ever take place:

The relation with the Other, or Conversation, is a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching (enseignement). Teaching is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain. (TI, p. 51)

Because, for Levinas, "to approach the Other in conversation . . . means to be taught" (TI, p. 51), his work can provide an ethical and philosophical base from which educational theorists and practitioners can problematize and deconstruct the established and proven norms that underpin much contemporary educational practices and discourses. While Levinas never wrote about ethics in relation to the education of young children, in recent years a number of educational theorists have contemplated what his ethics of the Other can offer teachers. As Todd (2001) observes, "Levinas is helpful in fleshing out pedagogical encounters, for he centres otherness at the very heart of teaching-learning" (p. 437). In this chapter, I contemplate what the Other-centeredness of Levinasian ethics can mean for education and for classroom practice.

Taking its lead from the previous chapter, this chapter will again look at the themes of knowledge, subjectivity, relationality, communication, and responsibility, and consider them from a Levinasian educational perspective. I will begin my exploration of the theme of knowledge in education by, firstly, considering the constructivist approach to knowledge-making from a Levinasian perspective, before turning my attention to the Socratic underpinnings of this approach. I will further consider this theme by problematizing the idea that teachers can objectively know the curriculum they deliver, the children they teach, or what constitutes ethics in relation to education.

When discussing subjectivity, I will consider what teaching in the absence of identity might look like. I will then explore what thinking subjectivity through a Levinasian lens might represent for education, before briefly turning my attention to the violent nature of coming into subjectivity.

Relationality will be considered from the position that both ethics and education are always relational. My consideration of communication will include contemplation on the use and function of language in teaching. Finally, I will turn my attention to the issue of responsibility in education, drawing on Chinnery's (2003) astute metaphor of the improvising jazz musician when considering the improvised nature of teacher responsibility in education.

## **Knowledge**

### **Reasonable Knowledge, Knowing, and Meaning-Making in Education**

As we saw in Chapter One, the constructivist teacher brings nothing new or unique to the teaching situation, but merely (if skilfully) facilitates the unearthing of knowledge that always already exists within the child. For this to work, constructivist education must rest on a presumption that knowledge and truth already exist within the child prior to the educational encounter. In this way, constructivist approaches to education

advocate a practice that performatively reproduces itself though the reduction of the Other to the same.

Within such a system, it is believed that the more a teacher knows, the better equipped she will be to facilitate the maieutic birthing of the child's knowledge, armed with a commitment to the belief that the pre-existing truth behind the mysteries of the universe is accessible with enough knowledge. As Vansieleghem (2011) puts it, education "appears as a theory and a practice that is submitted to a tribunal which constitutes a particular line of reasoning that precedes the individual child" (p. 4).

Biesta (2015) suggests that a "strong tendency in contemporary conceptions of learning is to see learning as an act of *comprehension*—that is, as an act of sense making, of understanding of and gaining knowledge about the world 'out there'" (p. 236, original emphasis). From this perspective, the world "out there" exists as a set of objects that are other to the self and, through comprehension, can be absorbed into the self and calibrated with what is already existent within the self as knowledge. This acquisition of knowledge is ongoing, with "each hermeneutical cycle adding to and modifying our existing understanding, thus providing a new starting point for the next cycle, and so on" (Biesta, 2015, p. 236).

A relationship with the world within such a hermeneutic cycle, which constantly returns the self to the self is, from a Levinasian perspective, fundamentally egocentric. From an educational perspective, the child approaches the world and what it has to offer her as an adventure, the aim of which is the acquisition of knowledge. Having completed this Odyssean voyage,<sup>26</sup> the child returns to herself, having absorbed and appropriated what the world and its inhabitants have to offer her. When teaching and learning are approached in this way, the child is merely collapsing what is other into the

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<sup>26</sup> Central to the Levinasian Other is the Judaic idea of going on a journey from which there is no return (Abraham), as an alternative to the Greek journey from which the traveller returns (Odysseus). For further discussions on this metaphor, see Crichtley (2015), Derrida (1978, 1991, 1995/1997b), and Levinas (1986, 1982/1994).

same of the self: “in this regard we could say that learning as comprehension puts the self at the centre and makes the world into an object of the self’s comprehension” (Biesta, 2015, p. 236-237).

Constructivist models of education are at odds with Levinasian considerations of education because, for Levinas, learning can never come from the same of the self, but can only come from encounters with that which is beyond the self’s comprehension and knowledge. For Levinas, learning as comprehension, contrary to its understanding of itself, does not represent a journeying towards a pre-given *a priori* truth, but represents a method of totalizing that which is, and which will always remain, beyond comprehension (see, amongst others, Biesta, 2015; Säfström, 2003; Todd, 2003c). From a Levinasian perspective, then, learning as comprehension is limiting in its egocentric placement of the individual child as the focal point of learning, with the world at her disposal for objectification purposes. Any relationship within such learning situations constitutes the child grasping for that what is beyond her, constantly asking “how can I understand?” rather than considering “what is this asking from me?” (Biesta, 2015, p. 237).

While Biesta (2015) argues that “learning as comprehension puts us in a very particular way ‘in’ the world and in relation to the world” (p. 237), he does not deny that, at times, there is a place for this way of being in the world and this type of learning, for example, the acquisition of knowledge-based skills by pilots, surgeons, plumbers, and so forth. However, he suggests that this should not be the only way we conceive of how we are in, and relate to, the world; otherwise, we limit how we existentially are in, and relate to, the world. Drawing on Levinas, Biesta (2015) suggests that we should think in terms of “knowing as an ‘event’ of reception rather than an ‘act’ of construction” (Biesta, 2015, p. 238). From a Levinasian perspective, we should consider, then,



whether it might be the case that the idea of teaching only has meaning if it carries with it a certain idea of ‘transcendence,’ that is, if we understand teaching as something that comes radically from the outside, as something that transcends the self of the ‘learner,’ transcends the one who is being taught.

(Biesta, 2013, p. 46)

### **Knowing the Children We Face**

Since the Enlightenment, advances in the physical and biological sciences, social and political sciences, and much philosophy have taught us that, with enough knowledge, we can grasp a concept, even a difficult one, unpick it, internalize it, and reckon it with what we already know. In so doing, we can expand our knowledge so that what is grasped no longer lies outside or beyond us, but is encompassed into our understanding. In this way, objects of thought are constituted as, and from, pre-existing themes within our consciousness.

Levinas suggests that any knowledge we acquire regarding the Other in this way will merely reflect a vision of her that is gleaned not from the Other, but from our pre-existing and delimiting knowledge. This, for Levinas, is because to anticipate the Other is to have a presentiment of her, which originates in the mind of the self and remains tied to the limits of what the self is already capable of thinking: “knowing is always convertible into creation and annihilation: its object lends itself to a concept, is a result” (OtB, p. 87).

As we saw in the previous chapter, Levinas problematizes the very possibility of ever knowing the Other. However, much of our education system centres on the “commonsense appeal” (Todd, 2003c, p. 8) of teachers getting to know the children they teach; and having a vision of who they will become: “who educators think students should become frequently defines the aims and purpose of educational practices” (Todd, 2001, p. 431). As teachers, we often believe that we can get to know the children we

teach by paying attention to how they present themselves to us, looking at their behavioural and academic histories, listening to previous teachers' and other external support agencies' experiences and knowledge of them, familiarizing ourselves with their family backgrounds, and so forth. All this knowledge can then be incorporated into how we approach teaching these children.

Teachers are also presented with institutional frameworks and structures that inform them of how best to meet the needs of the children they will teach. Teachers know what is best for pupils from an educational perspective as reflected in the curriculum; what behaviour is acceptable and unacceptable as outlined in codes of behaviour, anti-bullying, and discipline policies; and how best to deal with difference and "Otherness" from governmental directives and from the vast corpus of national and international research and data. All these directives, knowledges, and data are considered to inform a teacher's knowledge of a child ever before she is encountered.

Whatever the motive, however noble, when a teacher seeks to know a child in these ways, she reduces the child to historical, cultural, and social markers which, while they might form part of the child's experience, do not represent the child herself. As Säfström's (2003) observes, the security that this knowledge creates "is based on a non-human relation in which the subjects involved in the process of teaching are subordinated to the rationality inscribed in knowing the other" (p. 22).

In this way, when a teacher seeks to know a child, she is defining the child against the boundaries of the horizon of the self. Consequently, from a Levinasian perspective, the knowledge she acquires strips the child of her alterity by reducing her to the same of the self. Even if our aim is to empathize with the child, Todd (2003c) suggests that:

the main problem with empathy is that it assumes that we can simply (and comfortably) take the position of the other, thereby denying both the

situatedness of one's own seeing and thinking and that of the other's. Visiting is therefore *not* to see through the eyes of someone else but to *see with our own eyes* from a position that is *not* your own—or to be more precise, in a story very different from one's own. (p. 116, original emphasis)<sup>27</sup>

When teaching is approached in traditional ways, problems arise for the child as Other. When teachers confine the incoming child to what is knowable to them in the present (in anticipation of what will be demanded of them in the future), teachers delimit their capacity to ethically respond to the demands that the child will make of them.

For Levinas, the initial relationship between the self and the Other does not constitute one wherein the Other can be reduced to a comprehensible identity understood by the self. Consequently, from a Levinasian perspective, when the teacher as self faces the child as Other, she does not, and cannot, know her. Yet education systems, curricula, and teachers are constantly asked to know and predict the child who is yet to come, in the belief that this is the best way to anticipate and provide for a child's educational, social, moral, material, and futural needs. However, such prediction is impossible for the Levinasian teacher, for whom, teaching is risky, as it holds both promises and threats that can never be anticipated.

### **Knowing the Content We Teach**

An approach that is epistemologically underpinned by rational, essential truths is steeped in power relations, wherein some have the power to ascertain what constitutes true and valid knowledge (teachers) and others have to subscribe to such assertions if they are to experience success (children). The epistemological anchor of this approach also supports the belief that “it is possible to have perfect knowledge about the

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<sup>27</sup> While the subject of empathy in education is an important and not unproblematic one, the limits of this thesis do not allow for a discussion on this subject. For an interesting explication of empathy, see Todd (2003c).

relationships between interventions and their effects” (Biesta, 2010, p. 496). Such beliefs are underpinned by the assumption that, just as is the case in scientific research and intervention in the physical sciences, that when educating children “interventions are causes and results effects and that, under optimal conditions, the causes will necessarily generate the effects” (Biesta, 2010, p. 496).

Such deterministic thinking, however, does not transfer easily to the school situation, existing as it does within the messy diversity of human relations. As Biesta (2010) reminds us, “the dynamics of education are fundamentally different from the dynamics of, say, potato growing or chemistry” (p. 497). Therefore, it could be argued that to think that an intervention will be received across gender, social class, ethnic, economic, cultural differences, and the unique *ipseity* of every existent in the same way, producing calculable outcomes, seems somewhat naïve as it ignores the inherent risk of education.

From a Levinasian perspective, there is always a risk taken when we teach—a risk that the child will not learn in the way envisaged by our planning, a risk that the connections the child will make will not be those we predicted, a risk that the child will learn nothing at all. From a Levinasian perspective, then, teaching is a risky business that is full of unpredictable surprises. However, as Lingis (1978/2001) reminds us in his introduction to *Existence and Existents*, “not all surprises are calamities” (p. xxiv).

### **Subjectivity**

Education has long been charged with the task of forming and shaping subjectivity and identity. However, the prevailing view of education as a project of producing rational autonomous subjects has been challenged by postmodern and poststructuralist critiques of substantial subjectivity. In a similar vein, Emmanuel Levinas inverts the traditional conception of subjectivity, claiming that we are constituted as subjects only in responding to the other. In other

words, subjectivity is derivative of an existentially prior responsibility to and for the other. His conception of ethical responsibility is thus also a radical departure from the prevailing view of what it means to be a responsible moral agent.

(Chinnery, 2003, p. 5)

In *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, Biesta (2013), drawing on Levinas, suggests that it is subjectivity rather than identity that “is the educational question” (p. 142).

Biesta asserts that issues of identity belong in the realms of sociology and psychology, not education; and he considers “what it would mean to contribute educationally to the creation of human subjectivity or subject-ness” (p. 23), and “what it means to educate with an orientation toward and an interest in the event of subjectivity” (p. 23).

Biesta (Winter, 2011) also suggests that educators should consider education in terms of the emergence of subjectivity rather its development, as the idea of the development of subjectivity is anchored to an *a priori* idea of how the world should be. From a Levinasian perspective, subjectivity is not conceived as a generalizable subjectivity but is more “a question of *my* unique subjectivity as it emerges from my singular, unique responsibility. The question of uniqueness, however, is again not a question that can be answered by looking at the characteristics that make me different from everyone else” (Biesta, 2013, p. 20-21, original emphasis). Uniqueness, as we saw in the previous chapter, is beyond classification of this kind.

Biesta (2013) suggests that “the interest in the subjectivity of those we educate is perhaps a modern interest, as it is connected to notions of freedom and independence that gained prominence in the educational thought and practice from the Enlightenment onward” (p. 18), and that it is important to distinguish between “subjectification” and “socialization” in education. From Biesta’s (2015) perspective, education functions in three domains—qualification, socialization, and subjectification—which constitute not

only the “functions of education, but also as three *domains of educational purpose*” (p. 235, original emphasis).<sup>28</sup>

Simply put, qualification is the acquisition of knowledge relevant to a particular field in order to know how to perform in that field—learning Irish grammar so that one can speak Irish; learning how to perform an appendectomy in order to become a surgeon; learning to read an aeroplane’s instruments in order to become a pilot. Socialization refers to how children acquire the knowledge of how to behave in a way that is deemed socially acceptable in a given society. For example, on fieldtrips children are encouraged not to litter as littering is seen as unacceptable behaviour; and children are told not to bully others based on their perceived difference, because this is contrary to school policy and Irish equality legislation. On a more subtle, but equally powerful level, some schools may only expose children to storybooks and non-fiction literature that depict Caucasian, able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgendered people, which reinforces racial normality of whiteness, heteronormativity, and ableism. Such socialization can impact on what Biesta (2015) calls subjectification, which he describes as being concerned with “the ways in which students can be(come) subjects in their own right and not just remain objects of the desires and directions of others” (Biesta, 2015, p. 235). From Biesta’s perspective, then, education is not only about qualification and socialization, but also crucially constitutes the event of subjectivity and, he cautions that,

if this dimension falls out—if it disappears from the scene, if it is no longer considered to be relevant, then we have ended up in an *uneducational* space.

The art of teaching, in my view, is precisely that of finding the right balance between the three dimensions, and this is an ongoing task, not something that

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<sup>28</sup> In *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, Biesta (2013) provides definitions and a comprehensive discussion of these three domains (p. 18).

can be pre-programmed or sorted out by research. (Winter, 2011, p. 541, original emphasis)

Biesta (2015) highlights how individual teachers, therefore, need “to take explicit responsibility for the potential impact of their work in each of the three domains” (p. 235). These three domains are interconnected and interdependent, even in situations where an education system, a school, or an individual teacher chooses not to acknowledge it. Hence, Biesta (2015) urges those involved in designing and delivering education to find:

*a meaningful balance* between the three domains, bearing in mind that what can be achieved in one domain often limits or disturbs what can be achieved in the other domains. The latter can be seen, for example, in the negative impact an excessive focus on achievement in the domain of qualification can have on the formation of the personhood of the student (which has to do both with socialization and with subjectification). (p. 235, original emphasis)

Biesta (2013) also problematizes the idea of individuality that anchors child-centred education, which he asserts, “tends to depict the human subject too much in isolation from other human beings” (p. 18). A Levinasian understanding of subjectivity, then, contrary to many traditional interpretations, is not tied to ideas of identity or individuality because, from a Levinasian perspective, “subjectivity is an ethical event” (Biesta, 2013, p. 22), not a state of being.

Subjectivity, from a Levinasian perspective, emerges in the face-to-face relationship between the self and the Other. Consequently, the Levinasian teacher needs to consider how the children in her class will be enabled to come into being as subjects of their own learning and making, rather than being reduced to constituting objects of the educational system’s intentionality.

## **Implications for Education: Thinking Education through Levinasian Subjectivity**

Echoing Levinas, Biesta (2013) argues that subjectivity is better thought of in terms of an ethical event rather than identity, and he suggests that one should “think of education as a process that in some way contributes to the creation of such subjectivity” (p. 25). This way of thinking, Biesta argues, turns “traditional educational thinking on its head by not starting from what the child is to become, but by articulating an interest in that which announces itself as a new beginning, as newness” (Winter, 2011, p. 538).

When viewed in this way, traditional approaches to teaching that anticipate who will populate classrooms, become increasingly problematic. From a Levinasian perspective, because such an idea of coming into subjectivity always occurs in the presence of an Other, it is always relational, whether or not this is acknowledged by the teacher or educational administrators.

Consequently, a teacher can never know in advance what, if anything, a child will take from her teaching, “yet this risk is necessary in order for the event of subjectivity to be able to occur, because as soon as we try to produce subjectivity, as soon as we try to control the emergence of subjectivity, it will not occur” (Biesta, 2013, p. 25).

## **The Violence of Coming into Subjectivity**

Todd (2001) highlights that, “insofar as education is a socializing institution *par excellence*,” as educators we should concern ourselves not only with “the violence *in* education, but the violence *of* education” (p. 433, original emphasis). What Todd is drawing attention to here is that the self to which the child can return, having encountered the education system, is not the same self from which she emerged. Through her discourse with teachers, other children, adults, and texts, the child’s sense of self is disrupted and called into question as she comes into herself as a subjectivity



and, as a result, she cannot return to the more innocent self who first came to school. In this way, the educational encounter contains an inherent coercion and violence.

For Levinas, while learning from the Other is potentially traumatic, the face-to-face encounter does not threaten the *ipseity* of the I, but offers the self an opportunity to learn from the alterity of the Other. Additionally, “this view of learning from implicates the subject in a relation to the Other that is not predictable or calculable; that is, the subject cannot know beforehand how she will respond” (Todd, 2003c, p. 10). In other words, the self cannot predict, in advance of facing the Other, what kind of subjectivity will emerge as a result of the encounter. In this way, the coercive nature of education and its role in the formation of children’s subjectivities has the potential to be more or less traumatic, more or less violent. As Todd (2001) puts it, “the question is not so much whether education wounds or not though its impulse to socialize, but whether it wounds excessively and how we as teachers might open ourselves to non-violent possibilities in our pedagogical encounters” (p. 448).

### **Relationality**

Drawing on Levinas, Säfström (2003) suggests that education is primarily a relational activity rather than a rational one, where both teachers and children come into being as moral subjects when they meet each other as Other in educational settings. The resultant relation is one “that signifies an immediate ethicality in which no slipping away is possible, as an openness in which an exposure to an other is the condition for teaching as well as for the coming into being as moral subjects” (Säfström, 2003, p. 20).

Although Levinas speaks of ethical responsibility as arising in the face-to-face encounter between the self and the Other, as Derrida (1978) puts it, “the ego and the other do not permit themselves to be dominated or made into totalities by a concept of relationship” (p. 117). It could, therefore, be argued that contemplating the Levinasian ethical relationship (which inevitably totalizes said relationship) is doomed to failure

from the outset as the ethical relationship exists prior to all ontological constructions and is thus not representable in a thought: “there is no way to conceptualize the encounter . . . [because] concepts suppose an anticipation, a horizon within which alterity is amortized as soon as it is announced precisely because it has let itself be foreseen” (Derrida, 1978, p. 118).

Our inevitable failure to capture a specific ethical relationship in language or thought, however, does not mean that we should not theoretically contemplate how such relationships might emerge in the classroom. As teachers, our concern for the ethical inevitably encompasses the concrete realm of the classroom, and is connected to how we can create environments that do not foreclose possibilities for opportunities for ethical encounters between the self and the Other to arise. We also need to consider ways to ensure that these encounters and relationships are less rather than more violent, coercive, and traumatic for the children we teach.

### **The Ethical Is Always Relational**

For Levinas, ethics is primordially relational, although he does caution that the ethical relationship constitutes a “relation without relation” (TI, p. 71). Bennington (2000) highlights that the Levinasian ethical is “endlessly singular;” in other words, it is “happening each time *now*” (p. 33, original emphasis). Considering ethics in Irish primary education from a Levinasian perspective, then, can pose a problem because the Irish education system is underpinned by an understanding of itself as permanent, structured, systematic, and replicable. As a system, it must have some idea in advance, what it will deliver. This becomes an even more considerable issue within an education system that is increasingly insistent that teachers deliver a strictly defined curriculum

within a rigidly codified system.<sup>29</sup> Within such a system, the uniqueness of each child can be lost in an appeal to the generalized and reproducible, and yet, from a Levinasian perspective, a pre-ontological “responsible mode of relationality” (Todd, 2003c, p. 136) continues to be demanded of each teacher by the presence of each child as Other.

From a Levinasian perspective, our ethical responsibility for the Other demands that we go beyond that which we have historically encountered and responded to, and open ourselves up to listening to the Other who is always already yet to come. While institutions often look to the past for guidance when predicting future ethical responsibility, this can result in the production of stock responses for teachers to adopt. However, as Chinnery (2003) highlights, “such is not the nature of . . . classroom practice” (p. 13).

The fact that, in the past, we have encountered others for whom we are ethically responsible, may create in us a desire to provide justice for the Other who is yet to come. However, the futural nature of the Other leaves us with the problem of how to provide justice when we do not know what the ethical demands of the incoming Other will be. Our current understanding of our future ethical responsibility, therefore, always already predicts its own failure in ethical terms. Unless we want to relegate the future alterity of the incoming Other to the oblivion of a totality dictated by current and past knowledge, we must acknowledge the inevitable failure of current moral codes as adequate responses to futural ethical demands. Developing our understanding of education from a Levinasian perspective, therefore, entails approaching ethics from an always new, always unknown starting point.

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<sup>29</sup> Galvin (2009); Lynch (2013); Lynch, K., Grummell, B., & Devine, D. (2012); amongst others, provide explorations of the increasing new managerialist demands on Irish teachers to produce ever-increasing amounts of data and codes.

## **Learning Is Always Relational**

To consider education from a Levinasian perspective means to see it as being primarily relational rather than primarily rational. Many relationships are at play for children in school: relationships with their class teacher and other teachers, with other children, with the texts they are exposed to and, less overtly, but equally significantly, with the Department of Education and Skills (DES), the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), European and global education policy makers, and the global market, amongst others. In placing children in a position where they are facing the teacher, facing other children, facing the texts and curricula which they will be taught, the teacher is confronting children with “the pain of having to accept difference” (Todd, 2001, p. 441). In facing all of these others that overflow the self, the classroom is constantly bringing the child more than she can contain which can, at times, be difficult and painful.

As we saw in Chapter Two, for Levinas, it is our ethical responsibility for the Other that informs moral codes, justice, human rights, and so forth. Levinasian ethics takes place in the face-to-face relationship and the codes, which our ethical responsibility for the Other drives us to create, are consequences of the presence of a third party. Justice in the form of moral codes, no matter how egalitarian they strive to be, will always represent a betrayal of ethics. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, this betrayal is inevitable and necessary.

Universal, all-encompassing moral codes are too big to detect the ripples of the ethical demands that occur at the level of the face-to-face encounter. Grand egalitarian and human rights codes are smooth, predictable, logical and, consequently, inadequate for the task of dealing with the bumpy, messy, unpredictable, and illogical nature of interpersonal human relations, which happen on the much smaller plane of the face-to-face relationship between the self and the Other. Consequently, as Todd (2003c)

suggests, it is due to the primordial appeal to responsibility, which the Other represents, that we are able to resist universal moral codes, which demand that we behave in a way that we consider to be theoretically moral, but existentially unethical. From a Levinasian perspective, people behave ethically towards each other every day in the absence of formal knowledge of codified and programmatic morality. Indeed, such ethical gestures often occur in “those *moments of relationality that resist codification*” (Todd, 2003c, p. 9, original emphasis).

Standards are regular and static. This allows for that which they are standardizing to be compared, generalized, and their outcomes predicted. Neat mathematical formulae can be applied when dealing with standards, because their creation is anchored to the belief that a certain input will result in a certain output. However, as Todd (2001) points out,

if educators demand that students make relationships to the curriculum, and if these relationships are always uncertain and open to failure, then the place of ethicality in education lies in the failure of the demand for learning, what Britzman (1998: 140, n16) refers to as ‘social, ontological, and epistemological breakdown.’ It is here, in the moments in which students struggle for meaning, struggle to make sense out of and symbolize their relationship to curriculum, in which teachers are called upon to be receptive, that a non-violent element to the teaching-learning relationship may be allowed to enter. (p. 439)

Given that constructivist education appears to emphasize the maieutic role of the teacher, the question arises as to whether who the individual teacher is has any impact on what is learnt by the child. Contrary to this, a Levinasian teacher considers that her presence as Other constitutes a teaching that only she can bring to the encounter (TI, p. 98). From Levinas’s perspective, when a self encounters an Other, what the Other offers overflows the self, and could never have been contained within the self.

Therefore, from a Levinasian perspective, the alterity of the Other is vital to the educational relationship. Who the teacher as Other is to the child as self dictates what will be taught and what will be learned in each unique educational encounter. Once a different teacher faces even the same child, a different and unique relationship will emerge, which will occasion a different and unique responsibility on the part of the teacher, and this will result in different teaching and different learning occurring. In this way, no two classrooms can ever look the same, and no two relationships between a teacher and a child can ever look the same. Consequently, as Todd (2001) remarks, from a Levinasian perspective, “teachers and students [are] incredibly vulnerable to each other” (p. 446); and who the teacher and the child are is therefore central to the educational encounter and the knowledge produced. Crucially, then, from a Levinasian perspective, a child is not interchangeable with all other children, and a teacher is equally not interchangeable with all other teachers.

### **Communication**

Learning, understood as listening and attending to the Other, is a central theme across Levinas’s work. And, as we saw in Chapter Two, from Levinas’s perspective, hearing is our primary sense in the pre-ontological ethical moment. For him, it is through listening that we emerge out of the realm of the same and open ourselves up to the possibilities of that which is radically external and transcendent to the self. From Levinas’s perspective, learning can only occur when I face the Other and listen to her, because “listening is eminently a learning from the Other” (Todd, 2003c, p. 136).

Transcendence and unknowable otherness are crucial for ethical communication because, in the absence of the unknowable alterity of the Other, communication would merely result in the solipsism of the self conversing with the self: “communication would be impossible if it had to begin in the ego” (OtB, p. 119). In *Violence and Metaphysics*, Derrida (1978) observes that for Levinas, “the ego is the same” (p. 116),

and that any difference understood from this position can only ever represent an illusion because it is contained within the possibilities of, and delimited by, existing knowledge. Hence, “the ego cannot engender alterity within itself without encountering the Other” (Derrida, 1978, p. 117).

Not all listening is learning, however. As Levinas reminds us, “to communicate is indeed to open oneself, but the openness is not complete if it is on the watch for recognition” (OtB, p. 119). Here Levinas highlights the importance of how we engage in the act of listening, which can be ethical and Other-centred or self-centred and reductive. The distinction here centres on whether the listener is “part of the ethical project of listening, an act that lies prior to any understanding” (Todd, 2003c, p. 127), or whether she is simply listening for reverberations and echoes in what the Other says that enhance and reproduce that which already exists within her. As Todd (2003c) puts it, when we “seek out the ‘truth’” when we are listening to the Other, we make the words of the Other “our own” (p. 131). From a Levinasian perspective, then, an ethical response to the Other does not involve listening with the purpose of understanding, but listening *attentively*, in other words, attending to the Other through listening.

Communication is also central to education, proof of which “can be gleaned from the fact that most if not all education operates through communication” (Biesta, 2013, p. 25). As evidenced by the centrality of formal assessment and examinations in education, educational communication is deemed to be successful within education systems when knowledge and information have been neatly and transparently communicated from the teacher to the child in a transferable manner (Biesta, 2013).

Such an understanding of educational communication considers knowledge to be clearly communicated to the teacher through initial teacher education, the curriculum, textbooks, continued professional development, and school policies, all of which have been communicated by the relevant government department or agency which has, in

turn, been in communication with national and international research, data, and policy. All of this knowledge is then to be cleanly communicated to the children without significant alteration of content, using agreed-upon methods.

In reality, however, communication is messy and nuanced, and no-one involved in the process remains untouched or unchanged by it. As Levinas (1947/2001) remarks, “speech detaches itself from him that utters it, flies off” (p. 19) in ways that the speaker cannot anticipate or control. In other words, that which is being communicated is always altered in the communication process, thereby rendering it unstable. Consequently, a Levinasian understanding of any communication process does not consider it to constitute the neat transmission of unaltered information because, in reality, communication is an unwieldy human process: “communication is an adventure of subjectivity, different from that which is dominated by the concern to recover itself, different from that of coinciding with consciousness; it will involve uncertainty” (OtB, p. 120).

### **Risky and Ambiguous Communication**

In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas urges us to run the risk of communication:

“communication with the other can be transcendent only as a dangerous life, a fine risk to be run” (OtB, p. 120). But, as (Todd 2003a) clarifies, this is not a beseechment to run any and every risk but, rather, to take a *fine* risk when communicating with the Other. The emphasis for both Levinas and Todd is on the words “fine” and “risk,” which “take on their strong sense when, instead of only designating the lack of certainty, they express the gratuity of sacrifice” (Levinas, 1998, p. 120).

Todd (2003a) observes that fineness suggests fragility and vulnerability that warrant protection, and she explains the term “fine risk” as being:

equated with leading a life that ventures forth in to an unknown (an unknowable) encounter with an other. What makes a risk fine has to do with a relationship in



which the self seeks a radical openness toward the other and is susceptible to being moved by the approach of the other. (p. 33)

Central to the Levinasian encounter between the self and the Other, then, is a passivity which allows us to listen to the Other's representation of herself in a space that is prior to and devoid of ontological thematization and identification. This engagement with that which is beyond the self can be violent as it challenges the self's sense of itself, security, identity, and knowledge. However, as Todd (2003c) reminds us, "a relation to otherness is a prior condition of learning and understanding . . . there are moments of nonviolence that interrupt this process to be found in various modes of relationality that constitute one's response to difference," and that modes of relationality include "empathy, love, guilt, and listening" (p. 14).

### **Language**

In *Violence and Metaphysics*, Derrida (1978) argues that violence is inherent in language. However, the language of which he speaks is not the language of the ethical encounter but the language of representation when, in the presence of a third party, the self is forced to thematize the Other for representation to the third. Hence, Derrida asserts that "if all justice begins with speech, all speech is not just" (Derrida, 1978, p. 132). Indeed Todd (2003a) "challenges the notion that any *type* of communication in and of itself can ever 'be' ethical to begin with" (Todd, 2003a, p. 40, original emphasis).

For Levinas, language involves "the risk of misunderstanding . . . the risk of lack of and refusal of communication" (OtB, p. 120). For him, when we face the Other, we listen without reason, thereby "running the risk of suffering without reason" (OtB, p. 50). It is only when we run this risk, however, that we allow for the possibility of meeting the Other ethically, of being open to learning from the Other, of encountering

the Other in a way that does not reduce her to the self. Therefore, from a Levinasian perspective, there can be no learning in the absence of risk.

The Levinasian teacher communicates thought and the curriculum to the students in a way that acknowledges this unknowable and risky quality of language and hence allows the children to sit with what she offers them without expecting that by so doing a convergence between the children and the curriculum will ever take place. Indeed, she communicates with the children in the knowledge that their discursive relationship is bringing all of those involved along, not towards a pre-existing knowledge or truth, but in an unknowable direction. As Todd (2003c) suggests, “difference emerges *as* (and not simply in) a communicative encounter” (p. 130, original emphasis).

### **An Ethics of Listening**

Adopting an understanding of education as being primarily relationship-centred rather than child-centred, displaces the individual child at the centre and puts relationships at the heart of teaching and learning. A central feature of all educational relationships is communication. Such an approach makes radically different demands of the teacher than those with which she might be familiar. As Weems (2007) suggests,

teaching responsively situates teachers in the position of not just recognizing difference, but learning from difference that is fundamentally mindful that our institutional role as teachers positions us as non-innocent authorities in pedagogical relations. Thus, ignorance and humility are necessary components if we are listening to learn rather than listening to correct or persuade. (p. 46)

When education is approached in this way, pedagogy can become more respons(e)able, with the communicative child learning not only to give an account of herself, but to listen to the Other, thus developing “a network of obligation” (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013, p. 63, citing Readings). Such a focus on communication and

relationships could foster “a pedagogy of listening” (Dahlberg et al., 2013, p. 64, citing Rinaldi).

### **Responsibility**

In his article, *Teaching Otherwise*, Säfström (2003) re-imagines the teacher-pupil relationship from a Levinasian perspective. He discusses some of the conditions for understanding teaching as “an act of responsibility to the other, rather than an instrumental act identified through epistemology” (p. 19), arguing that traditional approaches to education inhibit the formation of an ethical relationship between the teacher and the student. For this relationship to be an ethical one, Säfström (2003) argues, the teacher must risk the vulnerability necessary in the Levinasian ethical encounter, where “meeting the other means to take responsibility for that other from a position of vulnerability” (p. 19).

### **The Improvised Nature of Levinasian Ethical Responsibility**

When considering Levinasian responsibility in the classroom setting, Chinnery (2003) very interestingly employs the metaphor of improvised jazz, with its emphasis on “receptivity and the capacity to respond to the moment” (p. 7). From a Levinasian perspective, the teacher does not approach her responsibility to the children who sit in her class simply from the position of a rational, moral, autonomous agent armed with a list of policies, codes, and proven practices. From a Levinasian perspective, every encounter between the teacher and the child is completely unique and can never be fully anticipated or replicated. Therefore, teachers need to recognize the central role that spontaneity and improvisation must play if they are to take up their responsibility for the child as Other.

However, as Chinnery (2003) stresses, such “spontaneity does not mean that anything goes” (p. 13). Chinnery (2003) observes that when jazz musicians improvise,

it is not in a purely autonomous way or as if they had never before played jazz. They listen to and respond to each other, are present in the sense that they are attentive to what others are playing, and cannot simply play what they feel like playing as if the other musicians do not exist or as if they have no previous knowledge of jazz. They are in possession of a repertoire on which they can draw when responding to their fellow musicians. In this way, while there is space for new and unique riffs and previously unheard of pieces to emerge, there is also a bank of existent riffs, on which musicians can draw. Drawing parallels with teaching, Chinnery (2003) observes that,

in terms of ethical responsibility, however, one's repertoire would clearly not be a storehouse of ethical 'knowledge,' for ethics always exceeds what can be thematised or known. Rather, repertoire would have more to do with the capacity for vulnerability and exposure to the other, to the pains and pleasures of human life . . . . Acquiring the capacity for surrender and spontaneity is no easy task. (p. 13)

Taking a Levinasian approach to ethical responsibility, then, demands that a space be created where a multitude of voices can be heard, which results in something that sounds more like an improvised jazz riff than a Wagnerian symphony. Chinnery (2003) highlights that teachers need to be aware of the subtle distinction between the need to "cultivate passivity [which] means [to] remain open and vulnerable to the other; and . . . surrendering all that one knows" (p. 13). Having mastered the skill of passivity, she cautions, it is equally important that the teacher not become overly "attached to the idea of oneself as improviser" (p. 14). In order to take up their responsibility and listen to the child as Other, then, teachers should approach every teaching moment as an unplanned-for one.

## Conclusion

Biesta (2013) encourages us to think about education from a perspective that turns “traditional educational thinking on its head by not starting from what the child is to become, but by articulating an interest in that which announces itself as a new beginning” (p. 143). This chapter employed the themes of knowledge, subjectivity, relationality, communication, and responsibility in order to consider the possibilities that a Levinasian approach to ethics could have for education beyond traditional thinking.

Children in Irish primary school classrooms are not only expected to acquire curricular knowledge and moral knowledge, they are also expected to learn how to become subjects of learning as they come into their subjectivity in a more general way. However, as Todd (2001) cautions, “if pedagogy is about the becoming of the subject, then it can become a tool for the most oppressive ends” (p. 435). Therefore, it is important that teachers are aware of their role in this process and endeavour to ensure that their teaching is less rather than more violent.

As we saw in this chapter, for Biesta (2013), education worthy of its name “is not only interested in qualification and socialization but also in subjectification, that is, in the possibility of the event of subjectivity” (p. 139). Challenging traditional ideas of subjectivity is central to Levinasian thought, and as Todd (2003c) puts it, “Levinas attempts to articulate the inarticulable conditions of subjectivity without relying on a master discourse or overarching theory to do so” (p. 107). Much modern, contemporary education is underpinned by aspirations of autonomy and rationality, which are informed by *a priori* ideas of what constitutes a good and proper human being, and a vision of who we, as educators and society, would like the child to become.

From a Levinasian perspective, the Other is always radically outside of and beyond the self, and can never be contained within the self, knowledge, or the language

of the self. While the alterity of the Other may well be what brings about subjectivity, this does not mean that the Other is somehow ever contained within the self. Just as the subjectivity that is brought forth in the face of the Other is not *of* the Other, neither is it something that is already within the self, waiting to be unearthed.

Having considered Levinas in relation to education in this chapter, Chapter Four will look at three pre-existing educational approaches: philosophy with children, restorative practice, and PAX. Chapter Five will then consider these in relation to how they can enhance the teaching encounter in terms of creating spaces where the children can face each other ethically, thereby increasing the opportunities children have to respond ethically to each other during the school day.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Teaching as a Levinasian

The main motivation of this thesis is to consider how, within the limits of an almost exclusively denominational primary education system, which is becoming increasingly data-driven, policy-driven, and market-focussed, teachers can create spaces where children are offered multiple opportunities throughout their school day to face and respond to each other in ethically responsible ways. In Chapter Three, we considered how some educationalists have incorporated Levinas's ethics of the Other into their philosophies and theories. This chapter moves further towards the Irish primary school classroom in its exploration of philosophy with children, restorative practice, and PAX.

Critchley (1999) highlights how, "for Levinas, the construction of a system, or procedure . . . is itself [both] derived and distinct from a primordial ethical experience" (p. 3). This means that the Levinasian teacher is compelled to work within an educational system that is at odds with the ethical experience that she wants to promote. Consequently, she is simultaneously limited by, and teaching beyond the education system that binds her. Additional difficulties arise for the Levinasian teacher because the ethical demands that the Other makes of the self are immediately betrayed due to the co-presence of the third party. Therefore, any attempts at ethicality in teaching will always be impure and corrupted from the outset; and will also always represent a betrayal of the Other. While Levinasian teachers know that this is the faulty starting point from which they must begin to think of their teaching, this does not stop them from endeavouring to ensure that their teaching strives to be as ethical as is possible.

Levinas (Kearney, 2004) emphasises how the fact that the ethical is always betrayed by our existence within multiplicities does not place it beyond our daily existence and experience. As we saw in Chapter Two, from Levinas's perspective, traces of the ethical can be found in everyday encounters, witnessed in acts of

generosity and selflessness when we engage with each other. Indeed, Levinas suggests that the simple utterance of the phrase “après vous, monsieur” is evidence of someone taking up her ethical responsibility for the Other. When we respond to each other in such ways, we are tapping into the ethical vein that runs through all intersubjective encounters. Therefore, while Levinasian teachers are faced with the impurity that living in a world of multiplicities occasions, this does not foreclose their ability to create “conditions for ethicality” (Todd, 2001, p. 436).

When considering how Irish primary school teachers might take a Levinasian approach to ethics in their teaching, I take my lead from educationalists such as Biesta, Chinnery, Säfström, Todd, and Vansieleghem. Biesta (2012) makes the point that children do not interact with the world through thinking and feeling alone, but that “it is through action and initiative rather than through thinking or feeling that we connect most directly and immediately with the world” (p. 92). This chapter and the next suggest that philosophy with children, restorative practice, and PAX are useful when considering teaching from a Levinasian perspective. This is because they can present opportunities for teachers and children to take action and initiative with regard to how they take up their responsibility for each other as Other through the teaching and learning that happens in the classroom.

A significant benefit these three approaches have for the Levinasian teacher is that they easily lend themselves to adoption into the classroom in ways that are not programmatic, hence opening up their possibilities in terms of creating an implied approach to ethics in education. As already discussed in Chapter Three, creating ethical classrooms requires teachers to consider a more implied approach to ethics that permeates all curricular subjects and non-curricular activities, as opposed to simply approaching ethics as an applied curricular subject that teaches children how to be morally good. Todd (2001) is worth quoting at length on this point:



Shifting the focus from education as a scene where one ought not apply this or that principle, to a scene where the *conditions* or *contingencies* of ethicality may be found, means no longer simply thinking about ethics *through* education. This means exploring the day-to-day details of pedagogical encounters to see what they might offer in putting forth an understanding of education as a site of *implied*, rather than *applied* ethics. To explore this idea of implied ethics more fully necessitates reading teaching-learning encounters for the way they promote conditions for ethicality as they promote conditions for being, both of which involve relationship between the Self and Other. (p. 436, original emphasis)

Taking such an approach to ethics in education differs significantly from more established considerations of teaching ethics in the Irish primary education system, which tends to be linked to the applied teaching of morality through religious programmes, citizenship programmes, self-awareness and self-development programmes, and applied ethics programmes. As Vansieleghem (2011) highlights, such programmatic teaching of ethics and morality is anchored to “the traditional idea that education leads to humanity and that an arsenal of educational methods and programs needs to be provided in order to achieve this aim” (p. 2). While such programmatic approaches have merit, they do not necessarily create spaces for the self to face the Other in a Levinasian sense because, as evidenced by their curricular aims and objectives, they have decided in advance what ethical responses will look like in the classroom.

In contrast, when teachers seek to adopt an implied approach to ethics, they can employ existing programmes in looser and improvised ways, responding in the moment to the unforeseen ethical demands of the Other. Similar to the improving jazz musician of Chinnery’s (2003) analogy, who approaches the unknown futural improvised encounter with a store of pre-existing knowledge and techniques, Levinasian teachers

approach each teaching encounter with familiarity of a number of different methodologies, knowledges, and approaches to teaching and classroom management. As with the improvising jazz musician, Levinasian teachers can apply these skills and knowledges in unplanned and improvised ways in response to each situation, rather than adopting and applying them as a set of pre-established, rigid methodologies.

### **What's In A Name?**

Prior to exploring philosophy with children, restorative practice, and PAX, it is useful to briefly reflect on how different phrases and terms are utilized within these fields of study.

Philosophy for Children (P4C) refers to the programme developed by Matthew Lipman. The change in preposition from *for* to *with* was identified by Vansielegem and Kennedy (2011) as representing a generational and ideological shift. Biesta (2011) offers the phrase “educational use of philosophy” when exploring this topic, and the term “philosophy for children” (without capitalization) has been reclaimed by Vansielegem (2013), for whom this phrase no longer refers “to a particular movement or content, but to the possibility to rethink it” (p. 10).

As a general rule of thumb, the term “restorative justice” is used in relation to the criminal justice system, whereas “restorative practice” tends to be used in other settings, such as schools (Hopkins, 2004). Terms such as “restorative approach” (McCluskey, Lloyd, Stead, Kane, Riddell, & Weedon, 2008) and “restorative encounter” (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010) are also employed by writers and practitioners. Restorative practice is often reduced to the acronym RP (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010).

Pax is “a Latin word that means Peace, Productivity, Health, and Happiness” (Embry, Fruth, Roepcke, & Richardson, 2016, p. 18), and the PAX Good Behavior Game aims at increasing these elements in the classroom. The PAX Good Behaviour

Game is also referred to as “PAX GBG” (Domitrovich, Pas, Bradshaw, Becker, Keperling, Embry, & Ialongo, 2015) or simply PAX (Embry et al., 2016).

To an extent, the nomenclature is somewhat unimportant, as diverse methodologies and practices would appear to persist under all of the phrases mentioned above. Different authors employ different terms and, therefore, it is necessary to interpret what is signified by the context rather than solely relying on the preposition (philosophy for/with children), the noun (restorative justice/practice/approach), or the abbreviated form (PAX/PAX GBG) for guidance.

### **Philosophy with Children, Restorative Practice, and PAX**

Biesta (2012) suggests that teachers need to consider “the educational ‘task’ as seen from the side of the child as one of *engagement with the world*” (p. 93, original emphasis). Philosophy with children, restorative practice, and PAX have been chosen as examples of approaches that can be employed by the Levinasian teacher in the development of an ethical classroom because they can be adopted into any educational setting in flexible ways that can transform classroom practice from being individual-, economy-, and subject-centred to becoming relationship-, world-, and Other-centred. In this way, they offer teachers ways of “exploring the day-to-day details” (Todd, 2001, p. 436) of classroom practice from a Levinasian perspective.

The preceding chapters considered Levinasian ethics and its interpretation vis-à-vis education. Chapters Four and Five take the reader from the philosophical towards a more practical consideration of the concepts discussed in the thesis thus far. The preceding chapters have been located very much in the realm of the abstract. This chapter, in order to prepare the reader for the next chapter, takes a very different approach because, while some consideration is given to the philosophies that underpin these approaches, much of what is discussed is very practical, especially when compared to the focus and tone of the previous chapters.

Similar to the jazz musician, who has learned jazz standards that can be reproduced as the composer intended, the explication of philosophy with children, restorative practice, and PAX that this chapter undertakes outlines these approaches in a very programmatic way. However, just as the improvising musician draws on her existing knowledge of the jazz standards in new and innovative ways, similarly the Levinasian teacher, having familiarized herself with these standard teaching methodologies and classroom management approaches, can draw on them in new and improvised ways. To this end, what is outlined in this chapter offers the reader a practical understanding of philosophy with children, restorative practice, and PAX as “methodological standards,” from which the next chapter will draw.

### **Philosophy for Children**

Vansielegem and Kennedy (2011) argue that philosophy for children should not be seen as “a well-defined occupation and more or less precisely circumscribed activity, but rather as a concept that is created and that remains subject to the constraints of renewal, replacement and mutation” (p. 180). Following along the lines of Reed and Johnson (1999), they divide this field of interest into a first and second generation. As this model offers a coherent approach for exploring philosophy with children, I will employ it to structure my exploration of this topic.

#### **The First Generation**

Pioneered by Matthew Lipman, and taking its lead from the shifting philosophical horizons of its time, Philosophy for Children emerged onto the North American educational landscape in the early 1970s as an alternative, experimental pedagogical practice. Lipman considered existent educational systems to be instrumentalist and extrinsically focussed, and he was concerned for the dissipating inquisitiveness and wonder he observed as children move through their schooling (Lipman, Sharp, &

Oscanyan, 1980). Within such systems, Lipman (1996) argued, schooling did not teach children to think as well as they could, and produced “cognitive lethargy” (p. xii). Philosophy for Children aimed to counter these problems, while simultaneously representing a “potential productive investment in society” (Vansieleghem, 2013, p. 2), as it was considered to develop autonomous, democratic citizens capable of critical thinking. This functional purpose of Lipman’s Philosophy for Children still anchors much understanding of its purpose in education today.

Through his rethinking of the purpose and function of education, and the role of the child within it, Lipman (1996) saw Philosophy for Children as representing an educational solution to the problematics raised by theorists such as Vygotsky and Dewey. Philosophy for Children is thus an attempt at the application of their theories as practice at the level of the primary school classroom (Cam, 1995). By advocating an adventurous school experience with an emphasis on discovery learning, rich in significant, meaningful experiences, with the child at its centre (Lipman et al., 1980), Philosophy for Children proposes a radical rethinking of traditional pedagogical methodologies and the dichotomous teacher/pupil relationship. In this way, it promotes a shift “from an approach that emphasises the role of the teacher and is based on knowledge transfer to an approach that puts the child at the centre and emphasises learning by discovery and experiment, and the construction of knowledge” (Vansieleghem, 2005, p. 19).

### **Philosophy for Children’s Pedagogical Methodology**

For Lipman, the goal of Philosophy for Children “is not to turn children into philosophers or decision makers, but to help them become more thoughtful, more reflective, more considerate, and more reasonable individuals” (Lipman et al., 1980, p. 15), thereby grounding philosophy in children’s experience and environment and taking it out of a purely theoretical sphere.

Philosophy for Children is underpinned by a “specially written curriculum” (Murriss, 2008, p. 668), which provides teachers with philosophical novels and accompanying textbooks to guide their lessons. This methodology is centred on “a pedagogical tool that functions as a model for critical thinking by describing ‘real life’ children engaged in critical dialogue about philosophical issues, with the goal of stimulating the same sort of dialogue among groups of students” (Vansieleghem & Kennedy, 2011, p. 173). The programme’s texts are seen by many as representing a favourable approach because, as Conlan (2013) puts it, “everyone can relate to the medium of story” (p. 20).

In constructing the Philosophy for Children programme, Lipman (1996) saw the need to design “a brighter, more readable version of philosophy, in which the great ideas would continue to sparkle yet would provide, as nothing else can, the much needed strengthening of children’s reasoning, concept-formation, abilities, and judgement” (p. xv). While such a narrative approach potentially provides a site for ambiguous understanding, the standardised text books and clearly stated objectives of Lipman’s Philosophy for Children have been criticized for limiting the potential of such an approach. As Murriss (2008) highlights, “much specially written P4C material is didactic, prescriptive and sometimes even moralising” (677); and while the methodology represents a significant departure from how education in schools had been historically performed and can disrupt the teacher/pupil relationship, the location of power regarding who directs the children’s learning remains largely untouched. This is especially true when Philosophy for Children is taught as a discrete curricular subject with allocated curriculum time in class timetables.

Säfström (1999) suggests that, generally speaking, schools are seen as social institutions where one can study contending worldviews. Although this may be an extremely simplified picture, one can

nevertheless conclude that the main focus on curriculum theory has been the interest in ‘structures’ rather than ‘subjects’ or ‘unity’ rather than ‘difference.’ (p. 222)

For Lipman, if Philosophy for Children were simply to be incorporated across the curriculum in an implied way, rather than representing a discrete curricular subject, it would mean “that the new thinking activities to be introduced [would] be virtually transparent or ‘content-free’” (Lipman, 1996, p. xviii) and, for Lipman, content-free means meaning-free. Therefore, Lipman (1996) argues that Philosophy for Children should be included in education as an applied curricular subject. This emphasis on “structures” and “unity” are problematic from a Levinasian perspective as the outcomes of the philosophical encounters have been decided in advance.

### **Communities of Inquiry**

Lipman (1991) contends that we cannot have “education for inquiry unless we have education *as* inquiry” (p. 15, original emphasis). Consequently, central to the practice of Philosophy for Children is the development of the class as a community of inquiry, where the children “can learn from one another as well as from the teacher and the text” (Lipman, 1996, p. 33). This Vygotskian-inspired, interactive, and collective pedagogical strategy derives from the belief that thinking is improved by social contact and dialogue, and is approached from a position of “tentativeness, open-mindedness, non-dogmatism and humility towards knowledge” (Murriss, 2008, p. 679). This aspect of the first generation of philosophy with children is in line with the centrality of communication and relationality in Levinas’s ethics. However, the potential of this approach is cauterised, from a Levinasian perspective, by a reliance on pre-existing knowledge of what constitutes morality, and its overt purpose in terms of developing rational, democratic, critical thinkers.

Communities of inquiry employ a Socratic method of dialogue to collectively consider philosophical problems. This methodology is grounded in the belief that it is through active and participative engagement in the practice of philosophy that one learns to philosophize—“*how* we think is as important as *what* we think” (Murriss, 2008, p. 669, original emphasis). To this end, children are encouraged to think for themselves and to form and hold opinions within a setting where there is an agreed understanding that every position is open to being questioned (Lipman, 1996). Research has shown that such a dialogic exploration of themes can improve children’s skills in the areas of critical reflection, autonomous and higher order thinking, self-correction, and problem-solving; and that it can also help children become more logical and rational (SAPERRE, 2014; Splitter and Sharp, 1995). However, as Murriss (2008) cautions, “what it means to learn to ‘think for yourself’ through ‘thinking with others’ can easily become social conformity” (p. 676).

Additionally, Vansieleghem (2005) suggests that, “although one is inclined to applaud Philosophy for Children’s emphasis on critical thinking, autonomy, dialogue and participation, there is reason for scepticism too” (p. 20). This aim of the first generation, which can be assessed within and against pre-existing criteria, is at odds with the unknowable demands that the incoming Other will make of us. In this way, the first generation of philosophy with children offers some tools to the Levinasian teacher, but its potential is limited by its definitive objectives in terms of the type of person it is hoped the child will become. As we will see in the next section, the second generation of philosophy with children offers more potential for the Levinasian teacher in terms of creating ethical opportunities in the classroom.

### **The Second Generation: Rethinking Philosophy for Children**

Van der Leeuw (2009) observes that “every generation has to find answers, because the world is changing and widening” (p. 178). It makes sense, then, that a generation after



its inception, Philosophy for Children would take a different form, echoing intergenerational differences. Reflecting the changing philosophical landscape, which witnessed an increasing deconstruction of metanarratives, the second generation of philosophy for children grew out of the first generation as a “form of self-correction” (Vansieleghem and Kennedy, 2011, p. 177).

Vansieleghem (2005) identifies this “turn” as occurring in the mid-1990s, with one of its main features constituting a refocusing of discussions towards the practice of philosophy for children in different contexts. In this way, Philosophy for Children did not remain immune to the ontological and epistemological shifts that postmodern discourses in education heralded. While some practitioners remain loyal to the original Philosophy for Children programme, many others have moved beyond its limits, and recent years have witnessed a fundamental transformation of what philosophy for children can mean.

When teachers buy into the original Philosophy for Children, they buy into the complete package as it were, having “in effect lost the power to question the concept as a whole” (Vansieleghem, 2005, p. 20). Vansieleghem (2005) suggests that it demands a certain autonomous, communicative disposition of the child, whose role is predetermined (autonomous critical thinker preparing for participation as an active citizen in a democracy). Ironically, Philosophy for Children “cannot be a basis for democracy and freedom” (Vansieleghem, 2005, p. 20), however, because the aim of constructing this type of child serves to exclude those children who (will) lie beyond these exclusionary boundaries.

Lipman’s resources, which strongly emphasize “analytical reasoning as a guarantee for critical thinking” (Vansieleghem and Kennedy, 2011, p. 177), are anchored to modernist concepts such as reason, democracy, and equality. Hence, Philosophy for Children’s philosophical and methodological positioning is underpinned

by a drive towards universalization and generalization in its pursuit of consensus. Such a stance is critiqued by a new wave of educational theorists and philosophers, who consider that these constructions exclude that which they construct as other. From the second generation's perspective, the dialogic and thinking strategies of Philosophy for Children can, in the words of Vansielegem (2005),

produce discourses of exclusion as well as inclusion . . . . They exclude other voices, voices that have nothing to do with participation and autonomy . . . . Philosophy for Children cannot be seen as an experience of freedom because every act, every thinking process is determined by a future goal—namely creating autonomous, self-reflective citizens. (p. 25)

In contrast to this approach, second generation thinkers argue that education should be about creating spaces where children can encounter the Other and be exposed to the world as it is, without decisions being made in advance regarding how far discussions can go. Such spaces allow children opportunities to consider myriad perspectives and acknowledge their own social and relational positionings within the world, before coming up with new ideas about how things could be thought of differently. As Vansielegem (2005) observes, “after all, the possibility of bringing about new relations and new realities begins with the realisation and recognition of the reality of this necessarily relational position” (p. 29).

This emphasis on relationality and otherness in the educational experience echoes the centrality of the relationship between the self and the Other in Levinasian approaches to education. This aspect of second generation approaches to philosophy with children can provide Levinasian teachers with starting points in their development of classrooms that allow for the Other to be encountered and heard. Additionally, second generation thinkers' resistance to setting down parameters for the philosophical

discussions in advance of their taking place also dovetails with a Levinasian insistence on the unknowability of what the incoming Other will bring.

Second generation thinkers such as Haynes and Murrin (2011) and Van der Leeuw (2009) have argued that having a discrete philosophy class in schools does not meet the needs of the society in which we live. For them, philosophy with children should not be considered in terms of upskilling children so that they can reach consensus, or simply be viewed as a future-proofing tool that helps children meet specific democratic and economic needs of the society in which they live. Rather it can be woven into the very fabric of children's learning. They argue that philosophy with children is better conceived of as an implied approach to teaching that permeates the whole school day and culture, rather than constituting an applied curricular subject. And, as discussed in Chapter Three, approaching ethics in an implied way is more conducive to creating a Levinasian classroom than simply teaching children how to be ethical in a more applied or programmatic way. As Biesta (2013) puts it,

if teaching is not going to abandon the ethical significance of its role in 'bringing more than I contain,' then perhaps the work of an implied ethics resides in teachers being able to live both within and beyond their means, both within and beyond their capacities, simultaneously. (p. 41)

As discussed already, in order to respond to the children in their classrooms in improvised ways, Levinasian teachers need to acquire knowledge of the curriculum and teaching methodologies in order to improvise with them. To this end, second generation (more than first generation) understandings of philosophy with children are more conducive to a Levinasian understanding of the relationship between ethics and education. Not only does this relationship-centred, communicative approach allow the Levinasian teacher to respond ethically to the child as Other in her class, it also allows

her to respond in improvised ways when the Other speaks. The next chapter provides practical examples of how this might look in Irish primary school classrooms.

As already suggested, the act of teaching within an education system, no matter how Levinasian it tries to be, is always bound by the curriculum, the teacher, the expectations of the education system, and the need to develop ways of getting children to attend to their learning. Consequently, we cannot speak of ethical education or Levinasian education without acknowledging the impossibility of thinking of either in pure or totally achievable ways (although, as we saw in Chapter Two, ethical purity is not something that Levinas recommend we pursue). Therefore, when approaching teaching, we need to think of how we can be more rather than less Levinasian, more rather than less ethical.

In discussing philosophy with children, this section has explored how knowledge can be approached in more improvised and open ways. The following sections on restorative practice and PAX consider the much thornier issue of classroom management. Planning classroom management is necessary if any learning is to take place, if bullying and aggressive behaviour are to be reduced, and if children and teachers are going to exist as peaceably and ethically as possible with each other. Therefore, while the idea of managing or controlling children's behaviour may seem to be utterly at odds with ethicality, this issue needs to be contemplated by teachers. Simply ignoring it is not an option for the Levinasian teacher, who needs to consider how this can be done in ways that are more rather than less Levinasian, more rather than less ethical. Before beginning our discussion on restorative practice and PAX, it is useful to briefly consider the inescapability of conflict in education.

## **Inescapable Conflict**

Diversity in schools is generally understood as difference in sociological terms of ethnicity, culture, religion, and so forth.<sup>30</sup> Recent years have witnessed a shift in education in Ireland towards including and recognising children from diverse social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds who had previously been systematically “Othered” within the education system. This shift is reflected in legislation such as the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (Government of Ireland, 2004), policy recognition for the need to include Traveller children and children from “Other” cultural and ethnic backgrounds (NCCA, 2006), and an anti-bullying policy that demands that all schools include a clause in their policies on identity-based bullying, explicitly naming transphobic and homophobic bullying (DES, 2013). Underlying such policies is a presumption that diversity brings with it increased instances of conflict, prejudice, and bullying. From this perspective, conflict is considered to be a by-product of diversity, which must be minimized if not eradicated; and schools, consequently, are required to develop policies to address the conflict that diversity heralds.

From a diversity perspective, “although some lip service might be paid to ‘personal difference’ . . . the term nonetheless refers to an abstract individual that happens to embody recognizable cultural differences. So while differences might be ‘personal,’ they are in no way conceived as unique or particular” (Todd, 2011, p. 103). Such an understanding of difference is at odds with Levinasian understandings of alterity. For Levinas, each existent is uniquely singular and cannot be generalized in any way without stripping her of that which makes her unique. Consequently, Todd (2011) suggests that the idea of plurality represents a more useful concept when considering difference as it “subverts conventional understandings of ontology insofar

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Todd’s (2011) exploration of European documents on diversity in education.

as it grants a central place to the uniqueness of persons as they come together in specific contexts” (p. 104).

Conflict is inevitable, not due to the existence of sociological differences between groups of people, but as a consequence of existing as unique *ipseities* who encounter the otherness of the world and the alterity of the Other within it (Todd, 2011). However, conflict is not inevitably damaging and destructive. The primary school classroom is one of the spaces where children learn how to exist with alterity and, consequently, teachers need to provide children with opportunities where they can learn to deal with the inevitable conflict that living in the world with Otherness occasions, without resorting to violence, intimidation, or bullying. Teachers also need to consider how they will deal with situations when conflict escalates into destruction or violence; and how they will deal with the subsequent relationship breakdowns, which result from destructive responses to conflict in ways that are less rather than more violent. When teachers engage in such thinking, they are “exploring the day-to-day details of pedagogical encounters to see what they might offer in putting forth an understanding of education as a site of *implied*, rather than *applied* ethics” (Todd, 2003c, p. 29, original emphasis).

Biesta (2012) suggests that when we engage with the world in an active way we will “encounter *resistance*” in the form of the otherness of the world and the otherness of those with whom we share it (p. 94, original emphasis). How we respond to this resistance will affect, not only how we come into our own subjectivity, but will also determine whether our responses are world-destructive or self-destructive. In the context of schooling, seeking to overcome or conquer the resistance that the alterity of the Other represents can result in violence, bullying, disrespect, disruption, and prejudice. Biesta (2012) refers to this response to otherness as world-destructive. Children can also respond to otherness in the opposite way, by withdrawing and shying

away from that which is other than the self. This is also a denial of the Other, but one that Biesta (2012) identifies as self-destructive. In the school context, this can present itself as disengagement, refusal to participate, and isolation.

Creating a Levinasian classroom demands that teachers occupy “the frustrating ‘middle ground’” (Biesta, 2012, p. 95) between these two extremes by continuously offering children possibilities to engage with the Other in ways that are neither world-destructive nor self-destructive. The middle ground represents spaces of dialogue between the child as self and the world as other and, as Biesta (2012) highlights, “if education has an interest in the ways in which the self can come into the world, then the middle ground between world-destruction and self-destruction is truly an educational space” (p. 95).

For Biesta (2012), then, education is tasked, not only with delivering a curriculum and “doing pedagogy,” but also, importantly, with what he considers to be “a fundamental educational responsibility,” (p. 96)—the responsibility to present otherness to children not as something that is an inconvenience that must be mastered or ignored, but as something that is essential to both learning and coming into one’s own subjectivity. To this end, the teacher is tasked with “helping the child to stay in the difficult and frustrating middle ground so that they can endure the frustration and engage with the difficulty and ‘work through’ the experience of resistance rather than shying away from it” (Biesta, 2012, p. 96).

Biesta (2012) suggests that “educational ‘work’ only really begins with the experience of resistance. It is after all only when children or students resist that they appear as subjects in the educational relationship rather than as (willing) objects of educational interventions” (p. 97). Therefore, the Levinasian teacher needs to consider which educational interventions she can avail of, and whether these facilitate children existing as subjects of their learning or objects of educational projects. I will now turn

my attention to two approaches that can allow teachers to work in ways that consider teaching from the perspective of “dialogue over destruction or withdrawal” (Biesta, 2012, p. 99), namely restorative practice and PAX.

### **Restorative Practice**

Restorative practice in schools has grown from “the huge upsurge of interest in restorative justice” that many countries have experienced in recent years (McCluskey et al., 2008, p. 199). For most restorative justice practitioners and theorists “the basic tenets centre on the importance of repairing harm and restoring relationships” (McCluskey et al., 2008, p. 199). According to Drewery and Kecskemeti (2010), while the adoption of restorative justice approaches into educational practice has its roots in seeking methods for dealing with discipline and behaviour management, as it evolved in school settings it moved beyond this limited disciplinary and behavioural purpose. Therefore, “to see RP as primarily about behaviour management is a narrow interpretation of the power of the concept of restoration as a social practice” (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010, p. 202).

From the perspective of the Levinasian teacher, a safe school is not a school without conflict. Conflict during the school day is inevitable due to the difference that the Other represents to the self; and it is this conflict that allows learning to happen. Sometimes, however, this conflict can become destructive and aggressive. Consequently, teachers need to consider how they will deal with violent conflict when it arises.

When harm has been done to relationships, restorative practice offers approaches that differ significantly from more traditional punitive approaches for addressing behavioural issues. It provides techniques for moving forward in ways that do not focus on blame, shame, and pre-determined retribution, but facilitates the possibility of reducing rather than increasing the damage to relationships by offering all



of those involved the opportunity to listen to each other. In this way, restorative practice in education can provide a useful approach for the Levinasian teacher as it focuses on repairing relationships.

It can be easy for teachers to focus on the restorative aspect of restorative practice, and simply see it as offering techniques for repairing relationships after conflict has occurred. However, as we will see in this chapter, restorative practice in schools has moved beyond simply constituting a model for dealing with the aftermath of serious or violent conflict, and towards focussing most of the teacher's and children's energy on developing relationships.

In this way, restorative approaches in education are not simply reactive, but are primarily proactive in their focus on reducing incidents of violent, bullying, or damaging behaviour when disagreements occur during the school day. This is an important point when considering the employment of restorative practice techniques when working towards the development of a Levinasian classroom. This is because restorative practice provides space for children to listen to each other's different standpoints, and to deal peaceably with conflict and resistance that such difference will inevitably give rise to. Restorative practice, therefore, does not wish to eliminate all conflict but acknowledges that conflict will always arise when difference is encountered, and that conflict does not always have to result in negativity, bullying, or physical violence.

### **Origins of Restorative Practice**

In the early 1970s, at around the same time as police officer Terry O'Connell was pioneering a new approach for dealing with criminal behaviour in Australia, the Canadian probation officer, Mark Yantzi, was arranging for perpetrators of vandalism to meet their victims and listen to the impact that their crimes had on them (Hopkins, 2004). As this model for dealing with criminal behaviour developed and was

incorporated into criminal justice systems across the world, a series of questions were being devised for use during these meetings:

This ‘scripted approach,’ as it has become known, is widely used in one form or another, across the globe. At some point both the practice of bringing the victim and offender face to face in dialogue, and the practice of including friends and family members in the dialogue became collectively known as ‘restorative justice.’ (Hopkins, 2016, pp. 8-9)

Restorative practice in schools has its roots in restorative justice and, as Hopkins (2016) notes, “as is often the case, a professional field develops its own creation myths about how ‘it’ all began, and restorative justice is no different” (p. 8).<sup>31</sup> There would, however, appear to be general agreement on the First Nations and indigenous origins of restorative practice, variations of which can found in many traditional aboriginal cultures in Canada and New Zealand (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010; Hopkins, 2004 & 2016; McCluskey et al., 2008), which have successfully employed these methods for generations.

Many of the traditional ways that the Māori people and First Nations people have for dealing with wrongdoing, and the resultant breakdown of relationships, have been incorporated into restorative justice practices in the criminal justice system and, subsequently, into the restorative practice approaches used in schools (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010; Hopkins, 2004 & 2016; Vaandering, 2016). These practices include, for example, affording everyone the opportunity to speak and be listened to, everyone working together in order to repair damaged relationships, and everyone taking responsibility for the success of the process and its outcomes.

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<sup>31</sup> Belinda Hopkins’ (2004) book, *Just Schools*, was the first text to comprehensively look at the use of restorative justice techniques in schools under the term “restorative practice.”

An example of the questions that are asked in the Irish school context, provided by the Childhood Development Initiative (2016), are:

1. What happened?
2. What were you thinking at the time?
3. What have you thought about it since?
4. Who has been affected and in what way?
5. How could things have been done differently?
6. What do you think needs to happen next?

This scripted approach for dealing with conflict is not unproblematic when considered from a Levinasian perspective because, as discussed in Chapter One, questions can be totalizing no matter how open they try to be (Derrida, 1978). However, the practice of giving children opportunities to listen to each other's perspectives can help children move forward in their relationships in ways that are more responsible and ethical. This is an alternative to simply handing down pre-determined punishments from a position of power without affording those involved the opportunity to listen to each other and have all sides of the story heard. Therefore, while the intentionality of such an approach is ethically problematic, it tends to be more ethical than traditional approaches for dealing with destructive conflict in schools.

Despite its scripted nature, adopting a restorative approach for dealing with violent or bullying behaviour allows for improvisation on the part of the teacher and, while it has a loose aim of resolving conflict, each restorative encounter cannot, and does not seek to know or dictate in advance what will happen. Additionally, its focus on creating space and time to build relationships, listening to everyone's stories (not only the most powerful or the loudest), and taking responsibility for building, maintaining, and restoring relationships is broadly in keeping with teaching from a Levinasian perspective.

## What Is Restorative Practice?

As we have already seen, restorative practice is concerned with living as non-violently as possible with the conflict that inevitably arises from existing in pluralities, and with mending relationships when they have been damaged due to destructive conflict.

According to Vaandering (2016), restorative practice is healing, relational, other-focussed, nurturing, and “taps into a profound simplicity—that *all* people are worthy and relational” (p. 63, original emphasis). As we have seen in previous chapters, these themes are central to Levinasian ethics of the Other and, consequently, these aspects of restorative practice can be drawn on by the Levinasian teacher when creating spaces where children can build relationships in class.

When a wrongdoing has been perpetrated, restorative practice moves forward in the belief that people have the capacity to take responsibility for their part in an incident and can be part of constructing non-violent solutions. At its simplest, and taking its lead from restorative justice, restorative practice offers all those who were involved in, or affected by a wrongdoing the opportunity to voluntarily sit down together. Having listened to each other recount the same incident from their (often very different) perspectives, they can then devise an agreed-upon solution with regard to how to move forward together. This does not mean that the aim is to reach a consensus, but to recognise that living with each other’s differences does not have to result in aggression or bullying. Hence, the solution sought is not one that seeks to eradicate dissensus<sup>32</sup> and Otherness, but one that allows the children to learn to exist peaceably with unknowable

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<sup>32</sup> Biesta & Säfström (2011) describe dissensus as “the moment where speech—as different from repetition—might happen. It is not the moment where existing identity positions are picked up through repetition . . . nor is it about the future promise of speech. It rather is about what is spoken here and now, right in front of us” (p. 543).

alterity. In this way, it promotes restoration, healing, and moving forward together rather than a past-focussed blame and shame.<sup>33</sup>

In *Peace and Proximity*, Levinas (1984/1996) suggests that “peace is different from the simple unity of the diverse integrated by synthesis” (p. 166). Therefore, while restorative practice cannot ensure that such peace is achieved as a result of engaging in the restorative process, it could be argued that such an approach is more in line with Levinasian peace than more traditional approaches. The consensus desired by the restorative process is based on working out how to exist together as unique *ipseities* (whose difference can cause conflict and resistance) in ways that do not result in violence or antipathy. To this end, restorative practice, while not purely ethical in its approach to peace, could be considered to be more rather than less Levinasian when compared to more traditional, top-down, punitive responses to dealing with relationship breakdown in school. Furthermore, it could be argued that the consensus sought in the restorative approach is not a synthesis or denial of difference, but an acknowledgement that despite the absence of synthesis, children can exist peaceably together.

By moving away from the idea of a universal solution or punishment that can be handed down by a dispassionate third party from a powerful position who is outside of the relationship that has been damaged, restorative practice is at odds with how most schools have traditionally approached dealing with wrongdoing and aggression. As is the case with restorative justice, restorative practice has a goal “of justice being understood as honouring the inherent worth of all, where people meet with the intent of fulfilling ‘their vocation of becoming more fully human’” (Vaandering, 2016, p. 66), and where the outcome can never be known in advance. While, from a Levinasian perspective, a phrase such as “more fully human” is not unproblematic, what can be

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<sup>33</sup> Brené Brown (2012) has done some very interesting work on the distinction between shame and guilt, which is useful to consider when engaging in restorative practice. She emphasises how the former is always destructive, while the latter can be transformative.

taken by the Levinasian teacher from this aspect of restorative practice is that everyone is worthy of being listened to, not only those who speak or act in ways that lie within the limits of the school's rules or society's norms. What this also means is that no one can know in advance what another person will say or why she has acted in a certain way.

As already highlighted, restorative practice begins with the adoption of a stance that does not seek to blame, shame, or judge people, and approaches teaching with a view to relationship development and reparation rather than control and compliance (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010). As Cameron (2016) observes, "when we are choosing to judge or analyse we are creating or emphasising barriers between people rather than building bridges or connections between people" (p. 93). While the scripted approach to restorative justice has been reinterpreted for the school setting, restorative practice is much more concerned with developing ways of existing peaceably with otherness and conflict, rather than simply being concerned with the implementation of a strategy. Restorative practice is thus primarily concerned with relationships and connecting with others across our differences and, when these relationships are damaged, restorative practice offers "a process that empowers community members to reclaim reciprocal accountability, respect and support" (Wearmouth, Mckinney, & Glynn, 2007, p. 44).

### **Some Benefits of Restorative Practice**

Drewery and Kecskemeti (2010) highlight that many teachers find that a disproportionate amount of their time is spent addressing disruptive behaviour, which makes it difficult (if not impossible) to teach uninterrupted for any sustained period of time: "in short, there is an absence of the kind of atmosphere that is necessary to carry conversations to the end, such as listening, respectful consideration and engagement with the ideas put forward" (p. 108). Consequently, reducing incidences of violent and disrespectful behaviour, and dealing ethically with them when they do occur, is central

not only to the well-being of the children and the teacher, but it is also central to ensuring that learning can happen during the school day. According to Payne and Welch (2013), research conducted into restorative practice in Australian schools has found that “a restorative justice paradigm offers a disciplinary model that can repair harm and create a whole-school communal environment, while reducing the frequency and severity of school violations” (p. 540).

An underpinning belief of restorative practice, when dealing with the aftermath of a serious wrongdoing, is that all of those involved in or affected by the problem can be part of the solution. When everyone affected is involved in the restorative process, perpetrators of the wrongdoing have an opportunity to listen to how their actions have impacted on others, and are part of devising atonement that is acceptable to everyone, including the child who has perpetrated the wrongdoing. Such an approach also allows those who have been negatively affected by the wrongdoing, not only to express how it has impacted on them and hear an account of the event from another perspective; but also, when it is the case, it allows them to take responsibility for any part they might have played in the situation arising in the first place or in how it escalated. Restorative practice, however, can only work if those involved in, and affected by the conflict voluntarily agree to sit down and listen to each other. Nobody should ever be forced to participate in the process against their will.

### **Restorative Practice Methodology**

Restorative practice in schools focuses its attention and energy on “the development of a climate of cooperation and collaboration” (Blood & Thorsborne, 2005, p. 12), and operates out of a benevolent mind-set, unconditional positive regard, and a commitment to “being for everyone.” Being for everyone ultimately means that the facilitator is *for* the success of the process, *for* devising ways of moving forward that can heal the damaged relationship, *for* everyone involved in the process. In other words, the

facilitator operates neither from a detached, dispassionate position, nor from a position that is on the side of one person over another.

Being for everyone does not reduce the facilitator's ethical responsibility to the child as Other. As discussed in Chapter Two, due to the metaphysical Desire that invigorates it, the Levinasian ethical does not become diluted the more alterity it admits. Ethical responsibility expands in the presence of the third party because, as Levinas tells us, Desire "nourishes itself, one might say, with its hunger" (TI, p. 34). In other words, there is no dilution of responsibility when multitudes of others are admitted. Just as my ethical responsibility for the Other is infinite, so is my capacity to meet this responsibility. Therefore, while the co-presence of the third party brings impurity to my ethical responsibility for the Other, my capacity for ethicality stretches beyond the Other and takes on responsibility for the Other of the Other. From the day-to-day perspective of the Levinasian teacher, her ethical responsibility for one child as Other is not diluted by the presence of all the other children in her class.

Wearmouth et al. (2007) highlight that "individual student behaviour that is seen as challenging may be indicative of a range of contextual issues that need to be addressed at the whole-school or school-community level" (p. 44). Therefore, the primary concern of restorative practice is on building relationships between the children, teachers, other school staff, parents, and the wider community. While the primary focus of restorative practice in schools may be on relationship-building, putting the requisite whole-school or classroom initiatives in place will not always lead to conflict being dealt with peaceably. Damage to relationships will still occasionally occur as result of violent, bullying, or disrespectful behaviour. Although it is hoped that such incidents will be greatly reduced if there has been a focus on developing relationships.



When damage has been done to relationships, meetings and conferences are undertaken to work with small groups whose destructive behaviour has caused suffering or harm. While people may approach restorative practice differently, one thing that all restorative approaches tend to have in common is that, as Hopkins (2016) puts it, “‘restorative’ includes encounters where the intention or the outcome is the healing of relationship following a breakdown in these relationships” (p. 10), although it is acknowledged that we can never be sure in advance that this will happen. Such conscious intentionality of the restorative approach is at odds with the Levinasian ethical encounter which takes place prior to intentionality. Despite this, allowing for the restorative encounter to unfold in unforeseen ways, where all of those involved can speak and be listened to is, it could be argued, a less violent approach to dealing with classroom conflict than more traditional punitive approaches, as it can lead to more just outcomes for all of those involved. Recognizing that damage has been done and that it needs to be atoned for means that even in a situation where the relationship is not one of friendship, the relationship can still be repaired to the point of halting any further violence, bullying, or other forms of damage.

### **Restorative Conferences**

As the Restorative Practices Development Team (2003) observe, because conferences take a significant amount of time and energy to organise, they should not be undertaken for relatively minor problems, and they suggest that sometimes a more informal restorative meeting with those involved can suffice. Restorative meetings can be conducted on the spot, and involve a teacher drawing those directly involved aside and asking them an abridged version of the scripted questions. Restorative meetings can be conducted in a short time, and are useful for resolving minor incidents such as arguments that arise when children are playing on yard.

From Drewery's (2016) perspective, the formal use of restorative conferencing is employed when something has gone significantly wrong between people, and has resulted in serious destruction of relationships. The Restorative Practices Development Team (2003) highlights that, having taken the decision to engage in a conference, it is crucial that sufficient preparatory work is undertaken.

Vaandering (2016) emphasises that it is important that the person facilitating the conference has not been directly involved in the conflict. Therefore, the class teacher or school principal may not always be best positioned to facilitate the conference and may, in certain cases, need to be involved in the conference as a participant. All of those directly affected by the wrongdoing are present at the conference, which is conducted in a circle with a speaking object, where only one voice is heard at a time. While adherence to the use of a speaking object and rules about who can speak and when is at odds with a purist understanding of Levinasian ethics, what this approach ensures is that everyone is given the opportunity to speak and be listened to, not only those from positions of strength or power. Therefore, while it is not purely Levinasian, it could be argued that it is more Levinasian than other responses to destructive conflict in terms of how it approaches seeking justice for those involved.

Due to the fact that the starting point for restorative conferences is not focussed on school rules that have been broken, or assigning blame, but on repairing the damage that has been done to relationships, its consequences and outcomes can be very different from more traditional approaches to conflict resolution. However, there is always risk involved when undertaking a restorative conference, because things might not be resolved and relationships might not be repaired. Nonetheless, as Wallis (2016) observes,

the restorative encounter that feels truly transformative is the one that could go either way; hopefully make things better but potentially make them worse,

where the practitioner is on high alert, using all of their craft and experience to keep things safe. Participants are typically anxious and defensive, and some feel aggrieved and even antagonistic towards the other party as they arrive at a restorative meeting. Frequently by the end of the meeting everyone is leaving on the best of terms. Witnessing the ‘movement’ that occurs during a restorative meeting is humbling for the practitioner, who may wonder how such a seismic shift in attitudes can come about in such a short time. (p. 138)

Wearmouth et al. (2007) suggest that “many responses to students whose behaviour is considered unacceptable at school fail because they treat young people as isolated individuals and do not operate in the context of the community of people who know and care about them” (p. 37). Therefore, all of the young people involved should be consulted, and encouraged to bring along someone who will support them during the conference. The Restorative Practices Development Team (2003) stresses the importance of ensuring that the people who are there to support the child are not simply those who constitute the child’s structural support network (i.e. parents, guardians, teachers), but people who can offer genuine support to the young person during the conference process: “the most important task is to identify the appropriate community of care around the young person on whom the conference will focus” (p. 29).

Personal safety from physical or verbal attack is of paramount concern throughout the process and this is where having already developed strong, reliable, and respectful relationships with the children and their parents, in advance of the conference, comes into play. A restorative school, which emphasizes developing relationships across the school community, has already done crucial groundwork that can be drawn on during a conference.

Cameron (2016) states that “the acceptance and kindness needed in a restorative encounter in order for people to feel that they are cared about cannot be understated” (p.

93). From the outset of a restorative conference, it is important to emphasize that the person who has committed the wrongdoing is not considered to *be* a destructive person but of *doing* something destructive. This can be enhanced by outlining the child's strengths and positive traits at the beginning of the process, and is crucial to the success of the restorative conference because, as Drewery (2016) highlights, "the ways they [the perpetrators of the wrongdoing] are dealt with will be determined by the assumptions made beforehand by those who have the authority" (p. 158). Wearmouth et al. (2007) emphasize that during conferences everyone present, including senior school management, if they are involved in the process, must:

listen respectfully, not interrupt others, speak only when 'given the floor' and follow the advice and guidance [of the facilitator]. In this way, solutions can be reached that do not automatically lead to stand downs, suspensions or expulsions of students, but nevertheless acknowledge that harm or hurt has been caused which must be repaired. The school, however, does not own, and so cannot completely control or manage, the process. (p. 45)

This is significant when seeking to approach teaching from a Levinasian perspective because, while there are many pre-established rules for how the conference is run, there is also space for flexibility and improvisation. Therefore, while such an approach is not pure in its ethical approach to the child, it is more ethical and just than other approaches.

Often when conflict is dealt with in schools in more traditional ways, some voices are never heard. Listening to each other is central to both the Levinasian teacher and the restorative process and, consequently, in seeking to create a Levinasian classroom, spaces must be created where everyone's voice can be heard, not just those who have the power to make themselves heard.

Felton (2016) observes that “endings are important” (p. 176). Many of those involved in conferences may be dealing with different levels of trauma and upheaval in their lives, such as bereavement, addiction, homelessness, family breakup, or bullying, to name but a few. Due to experiencing such situations, the endings that children have experienced thus far in their lives may have been unsatisfactory, unresolved, or traumatic. Consequently, as Felton (2016) observes, “taking the time to say goodbye is an essential step” (p. 176).

When a conference is over, the hope is that everyone present, no matter what part they played in the incident, will be able to move forward and participate in repairing the relationships that have been damaged. At times, this reparation may only be to the extent that those involved cease behaving in ways that are violent or destructive to others. It is essential that the facilitator ensures that everyone is satisfied that they can move forward with the decisions that have been made, and that their feelings of hurt, betrayal, or fear have been acknowledged and spoken about. If the facilitator thinks that it may be difficult for some people to move on, despite commitment on the night, she may offer additional support.

Offering someone a review date can help those involved to realise that they are not alone in their commitment to moving things forward, and that previously assigned roles of bully, victim, and so forth will not be revived when everyone is “back in the real world.” This future-focussed, anticipatory aspect of restorative practice is at odds with Levinas. However, as already discussed, the Levinasian teacher will always be working from a position of ethical impurity. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter Two, ethical purity is impossible due to the co-presence of the Other and the third party. Therefore, the Levinasian teacher needs to seek out methodologies that are more rather than less ethical in her efforts to create as just a classroom environment as possible.

In this section, we saw how taking a restorative approach to relationship-building and repair can enhance the possibilities for the Levinasian teacher to foster ethicality in her class. The next section explores another methodology for reducing the instance of damaging, disrespectful, and violent disruption to children's learning. This is important within the restraints of an education system that seeks to educate children because, as Pring (2013) puts it, "central to education (in the descriptive sense) is of course the promotion of nurturing of learning" (p. 158). And while disruption of discourses and secure knowledge is central to learning in a Levinasian class, violent or disrespectful disruption can prevent rather than enhance learning. Therefore, the Levinasian teacher needs to consider what systems she will put in place to ensure that the children can learn in an environment that is, simultaneously, both risky and safe.

### **PAX**

The Levinasian teacher needs to consider how best to create a classroom environment where discourse can be fostered, where children are encouraged to sit with the discomfort that Otherness heralds, and where they learn to negotiate these spaces in ways that destroy neither the *ipseity* of the self nor the alterity of the Other. Levinasian teachers also need to consider how this can be done in ways that minimize the amount of physical and verbal violence and abuse, and allow the child as Other to exist without fear of violent intimidation, bullying, or verbal attacks. In this way, the Levinasian classroom must be simultaneously risky and conflictual, yet safe from physical violence and verbal abuse.

There is always going to be a level of coercion when a teacher enters a classroom with a desire to teach, however loosely she approaches this task. To this end, there is a need for children to attend to the teacher at various times during the day. Depending on the teacher's starting point, this coercion can take the form of demands for uniformity for the purpose of social control, which is the case when the teacher has

decided in advance what the outcome of her teaching will be. If our starting position as teachers is an understanding of ethics and morality as universal, we will create a different classroom environment than if we begin from a position that acknowledges that we can never know in advance what ethical demands the Other will make of us. Starting from such a position of unknowability does not mean that we go into the classroom empty-handed but that, while we have planned curriculum content and thought in advance about how best to create an ethical classroom environment, we are open to the possibility of abandoning our plans and improvising.

Adopting an approach such as PAX may, on the surface, appear to be wholly at odds with a Levinasian approach to teaching, as the aim of its games, it could be argued, is to control the children in the class. However, as we will see in Chapter Five, the tools that PAX offers the Levinasian teacher can be employed in ways that seek to allow children to develop their capacity to exist peaceably with each other, thereby enhancing their possibilities of learning from each other as Other. When the Levinasian teacher endeavours to enhance the peaceful environment in her class, she is acting from a position of seeking justice for the Other rather than simply seeking to control her so that she can teach. Creating risky yet peaceable classroom environments can allow for children to simultaneously sit with the riskiness that encountering the Other occasions, but in a peaceable environment that is free from violence or physical risk.

### **Classroom Management**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the issue of classroom management can produce anxiety in the Levinasian teacher, because the very thought of classroom management would seem to be wholly contrary to teaching as a Levinasian. However, as Embry et al. (2016) outline,

the daily drip of problematic behaviors is a significant cause of emotional problems: ADHD, aggression, bullying, academic problems, school avoidance,

and other ills that make teachers tear out their hair. These are not necessarily 'bad' behaviors, but they do significantly interfere with student learning. (p. 14)

Consequently, if a Levinasian teacher desires to teach, she must consider how she can best respond to the demands of classroom management. To this end, it is not simply how the curriculum is approached that can allow for the alterity of the Other to be encountered in the classroom. Equally important to the development of a Levinasian classroom is how a teacher approaches classroom management, which can be more or less violent, more or less Levinasian, more or less ethical. Therefore, classroom management is something that demands attention when considering how a Levinasian classroom might emerge.

Classroom management represents a practical incarnation of the tensions that the co-presence of the Other and the third party creates for a Levinasian teacher. While the idea of classroom management is anti-Levinasian, it represents a very real tension for the teacher who must betray her ethical responsibility for the child as Other, due to the demand for justice that the presence of the third party represents. As already discussed, this is a fundamental problem that exists at the heart of Levinasian ethics: the fact that the co-presence of the third party and the Other means that we must betray our ethical responsibility for the Other at the moment of its inception. However, as we also saw, for Levinas, this does not negate our primordial responsibility for the Other. To educate as a Levinasian is to accept the inevitable betrayal of the child as Other within the classroom in pursuit of justice for her. Understanding that this inevitable betrayal can be more or less violent is something that must be considered by the Levinasian teacher.

Thinking in advance of how one might deal with harmful conflict while still teaching in a way that recognises the importance of risk and conflict is, to appropriate Levinas's words, "going without knowing where" (TI, p. 305). Similar to Chinnery's (2003) improvising jazz musician, just because the Levinasian teacher already possesses



knowledge, plans, and ideas of how she can deal with classroom management does not mean that she will teach rigidly or draw on these in inflexible ways.

### **A Just Approach to Classroom Management**

Of the three approaches outlined in this chapter, PAX is possibly the one that, on the surface at least, seems too programmatic to be incorporated into the Levinasian classroom. However, while what is outlined below may present PAX as an applied classroom management programme, it is presented in this way so that the reader can become familiar with how this approach works in classroom practice. Chapter Five will then seek to demonstrate how PAX can enhance the practice of Levinasian teachers towards the development of a just and ethical classroom.

As already discussed, if learning and subjectification are to happen, classrooms need to be simultaneously safe and risky spaces. They need to be safe in terms of children not existing in a state of constant fear that their difference or opinions will be used to bully or humiliate them, and risky in the sense that no one, including the teacher, can ever know in advance what each day will offer in terms of learning, and in terms of what demands will be made of her by the Other. Therefore, when planning her teaching, the Levinasian teacher needs to attend not only to the curriculum and how it can be presented in ways that honour this, but also with regard to the methodologies, techniques, and approaches she will employ in terms of facilitating children to attend to their learning.

From a Levinasian perspective, teachers have ethical obligations to all the children in their classes—those who desire to learn, including those who are destructive and violent, and even those who have no desire to learn. Although these are not necessarily different from each other. Therefore, teachers need to develop strategies that allow for both the inclusion of those who constantly disrupt the flow of teaching and learning in the classroom (through overly disruptive, violent, bullying, and

aggressive behaviour), and the creation of a classroom where those who desire to learn can learn. When contemplating how this delicate balance can be achieved, the Levinasian teacher needs to devise techniques that allow her to teach in ways that are simultaneously planned for and allow for improvisation. This involves the development of a classroom where children are encouraged to disagree and dispute the knowledge with which they are presented, yet where the disruptions do not take the form of violent or aggressive personal attacks, but constitute disruptions that foster learning rather than block it.

Consequently, while it may appear that an approach such as PAX is counter to everything a Levinasian teacher wants to achieve in the classroom, when it is adopted into classroom practice in an improvised way—where the focus is on creating a classroom environment that fosters learning while also allowing for the disruptions that facing the Other will invariably occasion—PAX can allow the Levinasian teacher to encourage children to engage with learning, while not forcing them to adopt predefined positions vis-à-vis the knowledge with which she presents them. With this in mind, I would ask the reader to reserve judgement on what may at times seem like a very programmatic toolkit representation of PAX in this chapter because, as will be argued in Chapter Five, this step-by-step approach can be powerfully employed by the Levinasian teacher.

### **Reducing Classroom Violence**

Conflict, violence, and bullying not only disrupt the learning that happens during the school day, but can also lead to classrooms feeling threatening and physically unsafe. PAX is a preventative intervention aimed at reducing the amount of time teachers spend dealing with destructive, bullying, and violent behaviour.

PAX is underpinned by a belief that fear, instilled by external threats and punishments, will not lead to children's ability to engage better with their learning.

This, Embry et al. (2016) suggest, is because fear driven by adults tends to result in “students doing what any human group does when they experience perceived persecution and arbitrary assertion of authority: rebel overtly or covertly or both” (p. 7). Consequently, Embry et al (2016) suggest that a nurturing environment is required if children are to engage with the teacher, each other, and with what is happening in the classroom, and they suggest that such engagement demands a degree of self-regulation on the part of the child.

What makes PAX attractive to the Levinasian teacher is that it offers methods which focus on the importance of relationships, listening to and supporting each other, learning from each other, and having fun while learning. This approach also allows for the development of classrooms as non-violent, nurturing environments that will, according to Embry et al. (2016), increase children’s (and teachers’) sense of flexibility when approaching relationships and problem-solving, their capacity to deal with stressful events when they arise, and will reinforce cooperative behaviour, and reduce violence, aggression, threats, and bullying. All of these elements are conducive to the development of possibilities during the day for children and teachers to face each other as Other without the fear of intimidation.

By incorporating PAX into her practice, a teacher can spend more of her day teaching and engaging with the children in her class, rather than dealing with problematic or overly disruptive behaviour. By empowering and motivating children to regulate their behaviour during PAX games, children can better engage in their relationships with other children and with tasks and activities during the school day (Embry et al., 2016). This can be especially powerful in relation to children who may have acquired the moniker of “troublemaker” or “problematic,” because they are offered numerous opportunities throughout the school day to prove themselves otherwise.

## **PAX Methodology**

In short, PAX “is a group-based token economy, where the groups or ‘teams’ are reinforced for their collective success in inhibiting inappropriate behaviour” (Becker, Bradshaw, Domitrovich, & Ialongo, 2013, p. 485). The following sections outline a step-by-step approach to establishing PAX in the classroom. While it reads very differently in terms of tone and focus than previous chapters, it is hoped that its inclusion here will give the reader an idea of what PAX looks like in practice, so that when it is referred to in the following chapter the reader has a clear idea of what is being spoken about.

At the beginning of the academic year, children are asked to draw up lists of what they would like to see, hear, feel, and do more of in class, and what they would like to see, hear, feel, and do less of. These lists are then prominently displayed in the classroom, are accessible to the children, and can be altered and added to at any stage throughout the year. The first group of lists constitutes PAX behaviour, and the second constitute “spleems.”<sup>34</sup>

The aim of creating a class vision like this is that the children are “no longer talking about adult-made rules and consequences” (Embry et al., 2016, p. 18) that are imposed on them from the outside. They have collaboratively decided on what behaviours *they* want to have more of and less of in their class, leading to a greater sense of ownership of the vision. Such a collaboratively created, fluid vision is specific to the needs of the particular class in question, and can develop and change as the class moves through the academic year. Because it is a class vision, rather than a list of universal school rules, when a child’s behaviour contravenes the vision, they are doing something against their own vision of their class, rather than breaking externally-imposed school rules that they may not agree with and have not necessarily bought into.

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<sup>34</sup> A spleem is a behaviour that is deemed to be destructive or undesirable.

The development of a class vision, which is regularly referenced throughout the day, improves the class climate in terms of atmosphere, cooperation, and non-violence (Embry et al., 2016).

The PAX game is then introduced. The aim of the game is to focus on the work at hand within the allocated time and with as little disruptive behaviour as possible. Children play the game as part of a team. Prior to a PAX game, the teacher asks the children to describe what PAX behaviour will look like during the activity and then elicits what will constitute a spleem. In this way, it is not the teacher who is telling the children what behaviour she wants to see, but the children themselves who are setting the behavioural parameters for an activity prior to its commencement. Consequently, when a spleem occurs, there is no argument between the child and teacher as to whether the behaviour is acceptable or not because it has already been decided and agreed upon by the class, including the child in question. When a child commits a spleem, if another child in her group says something about this, or throws the child a “dirty look,” then the team is considered to have committed another spleem for this behaviour. Similarly, if another team gloats, the second team will be considered to have committed a spleem for such behaviour. Over time, this reduces the amount of blame levelled at team members for committing spleems.

Having established the parameters of the game, the teacher sets a timer and the game begins. The teacher alerts a team when they behave in a way that constitutes a spleem and records it. PAX is underpinned by the acknowledgement that everyone regularly makes mistakes, and this has been incorporated into the very fabric of the PAX programme. Therefore, each team is allowed to commit three spleems per game. If a team commits more than three spleems, they do not qualify for the prize at the end of the game.

Prizes are randomly drawn from a bag once the timer goes off, and the teams who have committed three spleems or less receive the prize immediately. Teams who committed more than three spleems do not participate in the prize. The bank of prizes costs the teacher nothing, because it constitutes activities rather than things. Prizes include activities such as pencil tapping, completing an exercise whilst lying under the desk, sitting backwards on a seat, making animal sounds, running on the spot, dancing to music, air guitar, and other activities that would usually be deemed as unacceptable behaviour during the normal course of a school day. According to Embry et al. (2016), “these silly activities significantly improve academic success, create bonding between students and adults, and help children learn that fun need not require batteries or electronics” (p. 17).

A number of PAX games can be played over the course of a day, with every team going back to zero spleems at the beginning of each game. PAX games can be played during any teaching or activity. Indeed, research (and personal experience) has shown that “students will ask to play PAX Games when they think they need to self-regulate and cooperate more to learn” (Embry et al., 2016, p. 18).

Each time children play PAX games, they are building relationships and a sense of community, while focussing on the task at hand and developing their capacity for paying attention to their work and their responsibility for their team. Additionally, Embry et al. (2016) observe how research has shown that “the more the students play the PAX Game, the better they will do on those measures” (p. 18).

### **Additional PAX Resources**

In addition to the PAX game, this approach offers additional resources to teachers in pursuit of establishing a Levinasian classroom environment. These include PAX stix, tootles, OK/Not OK, and beat the timer.

PAX stix are lollipop sticks with each child's name written on a different stick. These sticks are used throughout the day, for instance, when calling on children to contribute during class, eliciting information on a new topic, pairing children up to walk to the swimming pool, deciding on teams during physical education class, and so forth. Using PAX stix "helps to regulate group behavior by managing student selection for assessment and class interactions or roles" (Embry et al., 2016, p. 74). This approach can also reduce children's anxiety as it ensures that no child is excluded when the teacher asks children to form pairs or groups for activities.

Children are encouraged to write "tootles" for each other whenever they witness a classmate doing something that warrants praise or admiration. Quite simply, a tootle is the opposite of a tattle. Tootles encourage children to look to each other in order to praise each other, rather than looking for something negative that can be communicated to the teacher. Embry et al. (2016) suggest that "the increased sense of community created by thanking and supporting, as opposed to tattling and ridiculing, decreases bullying and other antisocial behavior while increasing students' overall academic and behavioral performance" (p. 82).

OK/Not OK is a non-verbal way of giving individual children instant feedback for their behaviour or work, and can be done in a way that does not disrupt teaching or the activity being engaged in. Teachers can choose to stick an OK/Not OK sticker on each child's desk or they can have a card in their pocket that they can use to show the child what they want to communicate, without breaking the flow of their teaching. In addition to being less disruptive than a verbal cue, this approach also allows the teacher to remind the child of the behaviour they are looking for without drawing the attention of the rest of the class to the child in question. This can increase the child's sense of belonging in the class and trust in the teacher because, as Embry et al. (2016) highlight,

OK/Not OK also allows teachers to manage their responses to student behavior by ensuring they do not accidentally reinforce problematic behavior through highly emotional corrections. This cue also provides a more socially appropriate and economical way of giving feedback to students seeking approval or affirmation. (p. 99)

Asking children to “beat the timer” is a technique that can be used by teachers to reduce or eliminate violent or destructive behaviour during transitions from subjects, tasks, or rooms; for instance, lining up for yard, going for lunch, or reorganizing seating after circle time. In the example of children lining up to leave the classroom, the teacher can challenge the children to try and beat their previous record. If there is a child who finds the pressure of doing something in a timed way too difficult, she can be offered the role of time-keeper. In this way, she is still involved in the activity, but in a way that does not cause her to become anxious. Embry et al. (2016) suggest that asking children to complete these simple, but potentially excessively disruptive tasks as a timed game, can result in fewer instances of bullying and violent behaviour, because children have less time for procrastination as they are focussed on the task at hand.

### **Conclusion**

Teaching as a Levinasian produces constant tensions between the desire to respond ethically to the child as Other and the desire to teach. Consequently, teaching as a Levinasian demands a constant vigilance, flexibility, and capacity for improvisation. As a teacher employed by the Department of Education and Skills, Irish teachers are contractually obliged to produce advance plans outlining what their teaching day will look like and what outcomes their teaching hopes to achieve. Teaching as a Levinasian further demands that teachers must think of how their teaching will allow spaces to emerge where the alterity of the Other is not reduced to the same of the self in the pursuit of delivering a definitive curriculum.



Having considered the inevitability of conflict (Todd, 2011) and the need to encourage children to occupy the middle-ground between ways that are self-destructive or world-destructive (Biesta, 2012) when they encounter otherness, this chapter went on to explore three practical approaches and toolkits that the Levinasian teacher can avail of. All three approaches focus on relationship-building, which is a key concern for the Levinasian teacher. These approaches also facilitate children taking responsibility for themselves and for the other children in their class, and emphasise the importance of listening to each other. While they aim to reduce excessive disruption and destructive behaviour, they can do so in ways that recognise the difference between disruption as dissensus (which is at the heart of learning from the Other) and disruption as destruction and aggression (which denies the alterity of the Other). In this way, all three approaches can be employed in ways that can facilitate children's learning to live with the inevitable conflict that arises from existing as unique *ipseities* in the plurality of the classroom and the world beyond.

While philosophy with children lends itself to the creation of a classroom environment where knowledge is approached as a contested site and where Otherness is welcomed, it leaves the teacher empty-handed when dealing with world-destructive behaviours such as bullying and aggression. Restorative practice and PAX further support the Levinasian teacher as they provide her with tools for dealing with destructive conflict in ways that are less violent than more traditional punitive approaches. As we will see in Chapter Five, when woven into the fabric of the Levinasian teacher's approach to teaching, philosophy with children, restorative practice and PAX can support the self-destructive child in terms of challenging negative self-talk, ensuring she is included in all class activities, and supporting her to feel secure and happy in the class. These approaches can also support the world-destructive child in terms of listening to her in the aftermath of destructive choices, supporting her to

self-regulate so that she can work with others peaceably, and develop the skills to sit with the discomfort that otherness can represent.

Pring (2013) suggests that contemporary educational policies are often premised on a false duality of the theoretical and the practical. Chapter Five seeks to further bridge this gap by juxtaposing the philosophies presented in Chapters Two and Three with the practices explored in this chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Après Toi

In Chapter One, we focussed on some aspects of the Irish education system. Chapter Two explicated Levinas's ethics of the Other, and Chapter Three explored some educationalists' interpretations of Levinas. Chapter Four brought the reader into the classroom in its consideration of philosophy with children, PAX, and restorative practice. This chapter brings together these philosophies and methodologies in order to explore how Irish primary school teachers might approach their teaching from the Levinasian stance of listening and responding to the ethical demands of the child as Other, and creating opportunities for children to face each other as Other throughout the school day.

As we saw in Chapter Four, philosophy with children, restorative practice, and PAX all advocate non-violent communication and foster children's ability to communicate with each other in ways that are cooperative and loving. These approaches also have an impact on the knowledge the child acquires and the methods through which she acquires it. Having looked at these approaches in Chapter Four, in this chapter we will explore how they can enhance "the possibilities of an educational praxis that embraces the other without holding his or her otherness against him or her" (Säfström & Månsson, 2004, p. 355).

#### **Welcoming the Other: The Classroom Possibilities We Create**

Educational concerns cannot be resolved at the level of theory alone. Therefore, educational theories need to be risked in their application. Following a desire to bring this thesis beyond theoretical considerations and into classroom practice, this chapter considers the application of the theories explored in Chapters Two and Three through the approaches explicated in Chapter Four. To this end, this chapter offers concrete examples of their practical application in the context of the Irish primary school

classroom. This chapter will demonstrate how philosophy with children, PAX, and restorative practice can allow teachers to practically apply the philosophies that educationalists such as Biesta, Chinnery, Säfström, and Todd have developed in response to Levinas's ethics of the Other. What is being uniquely explored in this chapter, then, is a consideration of what risking the theories explored in Chapter Three might look like in Irish primary school classrooms when they are considered alongside the approaches explored in Chapter Four.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, research into PAX, philosophy with children, and restorative practice has shown that they can help reduce disruptive and aggressive behaviour at school. While these approaches can be applied by teachers in a programmatic way, to see them as simply representing toolkits for discipline and control is to cauterize their potential. For the Levinasian teacher, the opportunities that these three approaches offer is not to be found in their application as applied educational or ethical programmes. From the perspective of the Levinasian teacher, their strength lies in their potential as discourse-focussed, relational, and Other-centred approaches, which can be adapted to enhance children's development of skills in relation to listening, relationship-building, taking responsibility for the self, and accepting responsibility for each other.

Incorporating these approaches into teaching in an improvised way can provide opportunities for Levinasian teachers to negotiate the boundaries between activity and passivity, between confidence and vulnerability, and between knowledge and ignorance. To this end, these approaches can be adopted into classrooms in ways that are more about approaching teaching as a site of implied ethics rather than thinking that the moment-to-moment act of teaching is something that is separate from the ethical.

In keeping with the structural approach of Chapters Two and Three, this chapter will consider the potential of the three approaches under the themes of knowledge, subjectivity, relationality, communication, and responsibility.

### **Knowledge**

To approach educational encounters from a Levinasian perspective means to leave the security of knowledge behind and embrace the vulnerability inherent in the risk of not knowing in advance what each encounter with each child as Other will demand. As we saw in Chapter Three, a Levinasian approach to teaching advocates learning *from* the Other rather than learning *about* the Other, underpinned by an acknowledgement that I can never truly know the Other. As we will see in this chapter, philosophy with children (and to a lesser degree, PAX and restorative practice) attempts to disrupt stable, rational, normative knowledge by offering children multiple opportunities throughout the day to engage with knowledge in ways that are often at odds with conventional educational wisdom, where the teacher is constantly balancing the delivery of the curriculum and the challenge to this knowledge that the child as Other can represent. When teachers adopt a philosophy with children approach in their teaching, they allow children to challenge the received wisdom that the curriculum represents, and encourage them to construct alternative narratives to those that are being presented to them.

### **Knowing the Children We Teach**

Drewery and Kecskemeti (2010) highlight that:

an important assumption underpinning this [restorative practice] approach is that, even with goodwill, it is possible that there are different, and sometimes conflicting, understandings of how the world should be. This includes, of course, the possibility that teachers cannot know everything about a student. (p. 104)

Todd (2011) suggests that when teachers seek to know the children in their classrooms, they are concerned with establishing “what” the child is as opposed to “who” the child is (p. 104). “What” a child is can be captured within ontological identity categories of gender, race, social class, educational performance, and so forth. The answer to “what” is rooted in the teacher’s understanding and allows her to represent the child back to herself in terms of an identity based on the cultural, social, and educational markers known to the teacher, which she perceives the child to be in possession of. However, “who” the child is cannot be reduced to such thematics. From a Levinasian perspective, to answer the question “who” demands that the self and the Other are present to each other in a pre-ontological way that does not seek to filter the child’s alterity through the pre-existing identities of the self’s consciousness.

In this way, asking the question “who” allows the child to reveal herself from a position of her unique alterity in the face-to-face encounter of the self and the Other and, therefore, “who” a child is, is unique to each encounter and defies generalization. Consequently, answering the question “who” demands that the teacher listen to the child as she presents herself in a language of her own choosing. As teachers, if we are to facilitate the expansion of children’s learning beyond the purely egoist and self-centred, we must allow the child to speak as Other, and we must listen to her because, when a teacher suspends her desire to know the child she faces, she leaves the task of creating the child’s identity to the child.

When a teacher engages with restorative practice, she does not consign a child to pre-established categories gleaned from her own observations or representations of the child passed onto her by previous teachers, school management, or external agencies. Restorative approaches to teaching allow the child to begin each day anew, without the burden of previous behaviour weighing her down. Such an approach can allow the

child to bring something unpredictably new to the teacher and her classmates every day and with every utterance.

### **Knowing the Curriculum We Teach**

Dahlberg et al. (2013) suggest that “the potential of the child is stunted when the endpoint of their learning is formulated in advance” (p. 58, citing Rinaldi). This differs from the exploratory learning of the Irish primary curriculum where truth still underpins what is taught, and modern theorizing “still dominates our rhetoric and practice on all levels of schooling” (Slattery, 1995/2013, p. 284).

Because both pupils and teachers come into their subjectivities in the face of the radical alterity of the Other, when we teach we are not only imparting knowledge, we are also witnessing and experiencing the dissensus that Otherness evokes. From this perspective, the role of the Levinasian teacher is not to tell children what they should think, but to offer them contingent knowledge and opportunities to exist and present themselves as Other, and to be listened to. Consequently, taking such an approach to teaching can often “be more about unlearning the impulse to act ‘on behalf of’ and learning to become witnesses to others in their struggles for becoming historical agents” (Weems, 2007, p. 43).

Such passivity can feel counterintuitive as a teacher. However, as we saw in Chapter Three, the activity of teaching requires the passivity of listening (Chinnery, 2003; Säfström, 2003). In other words, as teachers, we should not be listening to hear something that confirms what is being taught or leads towards a pre-existing truth or knowledge, but to what the Other and her alterity offer so that what she says can inform our own coming into subjectivity and our subsequent teaching.

Drawing on the improvised jazz of Chinnery’s (2003) metaphor, as a teacher I hold my knowledge in a fluid, improvised, open-ended, and relational way. However, approaching teaching in this way does not require that I become a teacher who is

constantly passive, constantly improvising. As we saw in Chapter Three, the teacher does not come to each teaching situation empty-handed, improvising every moment of her teaching day. While teachers must at all times be open to the demands of the Other, we also need to “guard against becoming so committed to a particular conception of responsible and responsive pedagogy that we misread situations which may in fact call for nothing other than a well-rehearsed response” (Chinnery, 2003, p. 14).

When teaching is approached in this way, the teacher listens passively to the child as Other while delivering the curriculum, rather than delivering pre-existing knowledge in a definitive and pre-determined way. As teachers, then, we need to be able to draw on our existing knowledge, while remaining open to receiving teaching from the as yet unknown demands of the Other who is always already yet to come. This represents a delicate balance that demands constant, insomniac vigilance and a capacity for improvisation on the part of the teacher.

Teaching from the perspective of Levinasian ethics is not about searching for the self in the Other in order to make the unfamiliar familiar, or seeking out what is in common between the norm of a society and its “Others.” Neither is it about collapsing the difference between the self and the Other into a “we” that is forged in societies’ norms. From a Levinasian perspective, “curriculum cannot appear as a mirror in which students simply see themselves reflected. This would, in effect, serve to erase otherness, each self looking only for its own reflection, reading texts, and listening to people to see how they are ‘just like me’” (Todd, 2003c, p. 39).

Consequently, when we teach about racial “Otherness,” for example, it is important to consider how “postcolonial discourses remind us that theorizing otherness always already conjures images of The Other as it has been signified in dominant discourses of race and empire” (Weems, 2007, p. 47); and how other dominant discourses conjure similar reductive ideas of the “Other” and “Otherness” in terms of



stereotypes. Within the Irish primary school system, otherness is presented, not from the perspective of Levinas where everyone is an Other to the self, but is constructed along the sociological identity categories of “Otherness” (DES, 2000, 2013, & 2017). From the perspective of sociological approaches to “Otherness,” while a teacher’s aim may be the development of a just and humane classroom, the base from which such justice and humanity emerges is often based on an *a priori* “us” and “them,” even though this base is often neither acknowledged nor overtly stated.

Within such traditional systems, knowledge is generally approached from a Western-centric or Eurocentric perspective, and in the case of religious-run schools, a theocentric, and often (despite the dominance of females in the sector) an androcentric perspective, where there is a right and a wrong way of being in the world.

Within such systems, in addition to the overtly stated religious, educational, and market-place norms, there are also often-unstated, pre-established norms against which everyone must assess themselves and their behaviour. These are generally white, Western, male, heterosexual, cisgender, middle class, able-bodied, normative perspectives. While such traditional approaches to knowledge are often contested by teachers, when we continue to anchor all “different” knowledges to *any* overarching “true knowledge,” we continue to feed into a totalizing idea of “Otherness.” And, as Britzman (1998) has suggested, “more is required than a plea to add marginalized voices to an overpopulated site” (p. 219), which such an approach to alterity as “Otherness” promotes.

Drawing on the work of Todd, Weems (2007) highlights the difference between an ethical approach and a multicultural approach to education thus:

Being mindful of ethical and political dimensions of pedagogical situations includes working with others to problematize our understanding of the particular issues and contradictions we stumble upon in learning from others. Learning

from the other does not relegate pedagogy to an interpersonal approach to multicultural education. A key difference is that most multicultural education works to achieve common understanding and epistemological agreement. (p. 43)

When a teacher starts each day with a plan that has certain and definitive outcomes, she forecloses possibilities that fall outside of what she has predicted. Yet, it is from that which is beyond the predetermined that the Other comes, where possibility, imagination, invention, and the new lie, and whence our subjectivities emerge.

If children are to engage with the Other in an ethical way, they need to be presented with understandings of the world that acknowledge and allow for its uncertainty and its often confusing and contradictory nature to persist. Children need to be taught that it is acceptable not to definitively know, that knowledge and knowing cannot be understood as stable and certain, and that being open to the uncertainty of the world allows for the Other (and for themselves as the Other's Other) to exist more responsibly and ethically.

When teachers approach teaching from non-violent, discursive, restorative perspectives that are implied in philosophy with children, restorative practice, and PAX, they can destabilize traditional knowledge formation and acquisition in their classrooms. Additionally, when such teachers approach every subject from a perspective where they are open to having their own knowledge challenged and altered, they are demonstrating to children that the acquisition of knowledge is always contingent, and that strongly held beliefs, knowledge, and opinions can be altered when we encounter another person's perspective. Such teaching can also encourage children to listen to each other, not simply for the purpose of finding commonalities or points on which to argue, but with passivity and openness to what the Other offers them. This allows children to experientially learn both the risk and the excitement suggested by the

adage “strong beliefs loosely held.” Such an approach to education demands vulnerability, openness, and risk on the part of the teacher as well as the children.

### **Teaching Children to Question Received Wisdom**

Todd (2001), quoting Castoriadis, suggests that “the point of pedagogy is not to teach particular things, but to develop in the subject the capacity to learn” (p. 432). Taking a second generation philosophy with children approach to teaching curricular subjects, where children are encouraged to philosophically as well as cognitively and analytically engage with the curriculum, allows for such fluidity and intersubjective relational engagement with material and with each other to occur.

For example, rather than taking the more traditional approach to teaching place value as a purely mathematical subject, teachers could begin with an exploration of how the concept of number emerged. Children could then be introduced to the barter system and asked to consider why and when such a system became problematic. Rather than proceeding directly to considerations of base 10, children could be introduced to the Babylonian base 60 and asked to consider how and why such a system might have emerged, and how it differs from base 10. They could then be asked to consider where the Babylonian base 60 is still used in maths and contemporary life, and why we have held onto it for time and geometry, why the base 10 might have originally emerged, and why it is used widely today. After these conversations, children could then be introduced to the concept of zero, shown the different ways people had of marking the zero place before its invention, and the discovery of place-value notation by the Indian mathematician Aryabhata of Kusumapura in the fifth century C.E., and the introduction of the symbol for zero by Brahmagupta a century later. Their attention could then be drawn to how the Romans initially refused to adopt it because it had emerged in the Hindu-Muslim world, and, at the time of the Crusades, all things Muslim were shunned by the Rome. In this way, children can be introduced to something as seemingly neutral

as place value in mathematics in a way that demonstrates its cultural, social, historical, political, religious, and ethnocentric contexts. Such an approach to teaching can facilitate children developing an understanding of knowledge as emergent, relational, political, social, and contextual, something that is neither stable nor permanent, but always open to being questioned.

When approached in this way, education can allow for the emergence of “conceptions of subjectivity that allow for the capacity to move beyond the injustices of history that show up in social positionality and encounters with otherness” (Weems, 2007, p. 44), and move towards an acknowledgement of such injustices and a suspicion of “indisputable” knowledge. Such an approach can also allow for children to come into their own subjectivities in ways that do not unproblematically adopt predefined roles based on identity markers but in a way that challenges such totalizing categorization.

### **Knowing the Ethics We Teach**

Levinasian teachers need to operate:

in the sphere of necessary risk, in the sphere of a genuine questioning that doesn't presuppose its own answers. If teachers and educators can do anything at all in this sphere, it is definitely *not* the creation or production of responsible subjects. What education might do is to keep open the possibility for a genuine questioning and, even more importantly, to keep open the possibility for students to really respond. This, I think, suggests a pedagogy that is no longer primarily informed by knowledge, but by something which we may want to refer to as 'justice'. There is definitely a risk to be run here, both for learners and for those who dare to teach. Yet it may be worthwhile—and perhaps even a fine risk to run. (Biesta, 2003, p. 67, original emphasis)

While it can be tempting as a teacher to immediately shut down racist, sexist, or homophobic comments in pursuit of a socially just classroom, what a teacher communicates to children when she does this is that they do not have the right to think differently from her, and that this class is not a space where uncomfortable or controversial issues can be explored, or opinions can be voiced in case these are contrary to the teacher's.

Simply shutting down difficult ethical conversations does not shut down underlying sentiments, however, and if a child offers prejudicial opinions in the classroom, they most likely speak or behave in ways that reflect such thoughts outside of the classroom. When a teacher shuts down children's opportunities to voice their opinions in the classroom, she is denying them the opportunity to examine why they hold certain opinions and, possibly, by refusing to listen to the child, the child may get defensive and more entrenched in her beliefs. When a teacher shuts down a conversation by saying that such beliefs are wrong or unacceptable in our classroom and society, she changes very little, if anything at all. When, on the other hand, a teacher acknowledges the child's opinion, says that while she does not agree with it she acknowledges the child's right to hold it, she is better placed to be heard when she suggests that being open to having our opinions challenged is an inherent part of learning.

These uncomfortably risky classroom conversations present teachers with opportunities to ask children to consider their stance on difficult ethical issues, where our opinions and beliefs come from, and what holding certain opinions might mean for both the child as an individual and as part of the larger classroom and school community. Of course, there is always a risk that the child will not change her mind, will leave such philosophical and ethical conversations with a stronger conviction than ever, or will have influenced others with the power of her arguments. As teachers,

uncomfortable though it may make us feel, we should consider whether the shutting down of such discussions is not simply another form of violence against a child whose opinions we find offensive. While it can be excruciatingly uncomfortable to facilitate these conversations, when a space is created for children to have such conversations, it can be transformative in terms of promoting communication, ethicality, and relationality in the classroom.

When a teacher allows for these uncomfortable and risky conversations to happen in her class, she is not simply allowing racism, homophobia, or disablism to go unquestioned. What she is seeking to do is to create spaces where such prejudicial ideas can be examined and deconstructed, not only by her, but also by the other children in the class. Such moments of extreme dissensus demand a significant capacity for flexibility and improvisation on the part of the teacher. These philosophical discussions offer children the space to deconstruct stereotypes. They allow the teacher to highlight how, while we often believe that we know something about someone in advance of meeting her, consigning “Others” to identities that have been decided in advance and from the outside is always problematic because no one sits absolutely within a preordained identity. To this end, children can be asked to consider the identities they see themselves as belonging to, and then to consider how they do not conform to stereotypes associated with these identities. Through such discussions, children can learn that we should approach each other in ways that allow each other as Other the opportunity to construct her own unique representation of herself through what she says, always allowing for this representation to shift from one utterance to the next.

In the wake of such conversations, teachers have a responsibility to ensure that the “Other” children in the class do not leave feeling victimized or unduly vulnerable. Philosophical, nonviolent, restorative classes teach children that, while they have the right to hold diverse opinions, they also have responsibilities to each other with regard

to ensuring that they do not behave in ways that endanger other children. While a Levinasian teacher may desire that children learn that the development of a peaceable society means acknowledging the alterity of each existent, and that no one can ever satisfactorily be reduced to identity markers, she can never be sure that any child in her class will learn this. Allowing children opportunities to engage in risky discussions on difficult ethical topics, however, affords children experiential opportunities to grapple with the inevitable complexities and conflict which plurality throws up.

It would, however, be naïve to think that simply allowing these risky and uncomfortable conversations to happen during the school day will result in children letting go of strongly held prejudice. Consequently, it is necessary for the Levinasian teacher to create classroom environments where all voices can be heard. This demands that teachers consider the epistemological and ontological implications of the received wisdom of the curriculum they deliver, and think outside and beyond the normative when planning their teaching, constantly presenting children with narratives that challenge stereotypes.

Todd (2003c) highlights how, “from the perspective of the learner, curriculum comes via the Other that is the teacher in the form of new ideas, concepts, and texts; yet the meaning he or she makes out of such material can never be secured beforehand” (p. 39). While Levinasian ethics precedes ontology and, hence, curricular knowledge, the knowledge which the child encounters at school takes an ontological form, and therefore, consideration has to be constantly given to what we teach as well as how we teach. When communicating the curriculum, it is important that teachers do not simply communicate the received wisdom of a system that highlights the role played in society, culture, history, science, geography, maths, and so forth of, primarily, “dead white guys.”

Exploring the poem *Dear White Fella* by Benjamin Zephaniah during English class, for example, can offer a powerful opportunity to deconstruct racist language. Similarly, when considering Christopher Columbus in history class, teachers can encourage children to consider alternative narratives to the traditional colonialist one of discovery and progress, and to consider the injustices suffered by indigenous populations at the hands of the colonists, and the subsequent slave trade on which the development of the continent depended. Stereotypical narratives around what it means to be differently abled can be challenged by introducing children to the art of Jinke Shonibare, the music of Evelyn Glennie, and the dance of Alice Sheppard. However, presenting the works and performances of these artists during Arts Education classes will not in itself challenge prejudice with regard to differently-abled artists and performers, and sometimes ethically risky conversations need to take place.

When teachers challenge received wisdom and the subtle and not so subtle prejudice through the curriculum, they are offering alternative narratives that can occasion a shift in children's understanding of the world and the "Other" within it and, in this way, children can be allowed to risk shifting their opinions in a classroom where it is permissible to do so.

### **Subjectivity**

Education is never neutral, but is always aiming towards something. The aim of all pedagogy is for the child to develop into someone that, at the beginning of the process, she is not. In this way, "subjectivity is instituted" through our education systems, where "the nascent human subject is [considered] eminently pliable and is potentially fitted into any social order into which it happens to be born" (Todd, 2001, p. 432). However, subjects are not only pliable, because they simultaneously resist external forces while being affected by them. Consequently, the issue of subjectivity demands attention by



teachers, who need to consider “who it is that we, as educators and citizens, desire people to become?” (Todd, 2001, p. 436).

Children not only become subjects of learning in the education system, but also come into their subjectivity in a more general way through their educational experiences. These subjectivities develop as much through what is implied by the teacher, the curriculum, and others throughout the day, as by what is overtly taught in a more applied way. Consequently, as discussed in Chapter Three, it is important for teachers to consider how “education contributes to the occurrence of the event of subjectivity” (Biesta, 2013, p. 24).

In Chapter One, we saw how the Irish primary education system is underpinned by myriad influences including, but not confined to, Roman Catholic morality and new managerialism, both of which have predetermining visions of what the educational subject should become ever before she begins her educational journey. From a Levinasian perspective, anticipating what the child should become in this way closes down the potential spaces where ethical events might occur by limiting the legitimate subjectivities presented to the child. Such forced subjectivity demands that children conform to predefined identities and roles, thereby denying children their potential to develop in terms of “subjectivity-as-responsibility” (Biesta, 2013, p. 21), where their particular uniqueness is crucial in the moment when they face each other as Other. Having preordained visions of what the subject will look like at the end of the educational encounter means that as children are fitted into existing identities and roles, they are stripped of that which makes them uniquely irreplaceable.

When teachers consider subjectivity from a Levinasian perspective, we can reimagine how education is thought about and practiced because, as Todd (2003c) reminds us, “subjectivity is not an act created *ex nihilo* but is dependent upon a relationality with the Other, whereby the subject is assigned through the encounter with

the Other” (p. 108). Such an approach to subjectivity can create classrooms where we learn to be responsible for the Other, and not just spaces where we learn how to become economically and socially useful.

### **Teaching Children the Power of Uncertainty**

The new managerialist demand for an ever-increasing amount of planning and a research-proven application of interventions, which ensures that certain inputs will produce certain outcomes, means that there is less and less space for uncertainty on the part of the teacher (and the child) in the classroom (Bailey, 2015). A Levinasian approach to teaching in such a system demands an unlearning on the part of the teacher. Like the improvising jazz musician, the Levinasian teacher needs to first equip herself with knowledge of how to teach before she deconstructs and unlearns it, so that she can simultaneously exist within and beyond the education system in which she finds herself. Furthermore, she needs to acknowledge that if she is to ethically respond to the children who will sit before her, every moment of her teaching day will be full of the co-presence of different and unknowable knowledges and ways of being, due to what Halberstam (2014) calls “the unlearning to come.” When we teach in this way, we are refusing to inhabit the pedagogical and ontological histories we have no choice but to inherit.

Todd (2001) highlights how “the subject *learns* to become a being in relation to others it encounters, learning values, behaviours and modes of thinking within the nexus of culture, language and social relations” (p. 433, original emphasis). Therefore, witnessing a teacher having her knowledge challenged (sometimes welcoming this challenge and sometimes being more uncomfortable with it), and sometimes having her mind changed, for example, can implicitly teach children that approaching their knowledges and opinions in fluid and contextual ways is acceptable, and that it is, in fact, part of what it means to learn how to live peaceably in the world with others. It

also teaches children that their classroom is a place to where taking such risks is permitted and supported. When teachers allow children to witness how they are open to having their own positions challenged and altered, they are demonstrating that it is not only the children who are expected to take such risks during the school day.

### **Offering Children Alternatives to Damaging Self-Image**

Some children come to school with a sense of themselves as troublemakers, and have already developed self-narratives that repeatedly reinforce this throughout the day.

Allowing children to experience success during PAX games can disrupt children's sense of themselves as always being in trouble, and can be framed in ways that highlight how their good behaviour has meant that their team got to participate in the prize. This also provides the teacher with a counter-narrative to a child's negative self-talk, in which many children engage during the day.

Felton (2016) highlights how when children engage restoratively with each other they are less likely "to fill their 'not knowing' with fantasies from their own *script* (p. 170, original emphasis). PAX and restorative practice both allow children who have previously been cast as problematic or troublemakers opportunities to challenge and rewrite this narrative. During PAX games, children who find it difficult to self-regulate can learn to self-regulate and in so doing experience success as children who can complete tasks without causing excessive or violent disruption. This allows both the child herself and the other children in the class to see her in a different light. It also teaches children that subjectivity is not static or pre-ordained, but plastic and in a constant state of flux. Additionally, tootles offer children concrete positive statements about themselves from their peers, which the teacher can refer to when these children engage in negative self-talk.

Some children find it difficult to make friends in school. Using PAX stix to regularly change seating, assign partners, create discussion and project groups, and so

forth can afford these children opportunities to work with other children. Using PAX stix means that children are afforded the opportunity to learn from and work with different children, including those they would not normally work with. Extending this to having PAX groups play together on yard once a week offers children opportunities to learn to negotiate relationships, deal with conflict, and compromise when they end up playing with children with whom they have very little, if anything, in common, but with whom they must collaborate if they are going to have any fun on yard. This not only helps children to develop their ability to form relationships with their classmates but also helps them to re-think who they themselves are, relationally speaking.

Restorative approaches to conflict can also have an impact on children coming into their subjectivity in the sense that it can allow them to understand and represent themselves in different ways than they have done to date. When children are allowed to take responsibility for the breakdown of a relationship and the role they played in this, they can begin to think differently about themselves. It can also cast them in a different light in the eyes of others, which can further feed into the possibility of children revisiting their self-image from something negative to something less so.

Additionally, adopting a restorative approach to dealing with conflict can allow children who cast themselves as victims to take responsibility for any part they may have played in an incident. Or, if this has not been the case, it can allow children who have been victimized to see themselves as having a voice and a perspective to which the perpetrator of the wrongdoing listens and takes account of, and that they are not habitually powerless.

### **Coming Into Subjectivity in the Classroom**

Because, from a Levinasian perspective, it is in the face of the unknowable alterity of the Other that the child learns to “become,” one of the difficulties that children encounter when faced with the prospect of learning, is that such an engagement with the

Other can be uncomfortable (perhaps even traumatic) as the child struggles with alterity that exists beyond the bounds of the self. However, from a Levinasian perspective, without the alterity of the Other, there can be no learning, because without the Other, the self would remain forever enclosed within the realm of the ego, the realm of “the nothing new.”<sup>35</sup> Hence, learning is always potentially more or less violent because it forces the child to give an account of herself, to open herself up to the risk which the unknowableness of the Other represents, and to decentre the ego in favour of her primordial responsibility for the Other.

The benefit of writing tootles is that it encourages children to observe their peers not in a competitive or jealous way but in order to spot something that they can compliment or praise. Tootles encourage children to put the Other at the centre rather than the self, thereby challenging the ego-centricity of child-centred education.

It is not only children who come into their subjectivities in the classroom. The teacher’s sense of self is also constantly being disrupted during the teaching day by the demands of the children, texts, and other adults with whom she engages and, in this way, the teacher’s subjectivity is also constantly emerging and evolving during her encounters with the children whom she faces and the texts that she teaches. Consequently, just as teachers need to consider what their teaching can mean for the children they teach, they also need to consider what kind of subjectivities are emerging for them during the teaching encounter. It is therefore vital that they reflect on what they teach, how they approach the curriculum, and how they deal with dissensus. All of these impact on who they, as teachers and as existents, will become through the teaching process; and whether their teaching is more or less violent for the child as Other in the learning encounter.

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<sup>35</sup> “The sun shone having no alternative on the nothing new” (Beckett, 1938/1973, p. 5).

Adopting approaches such as PAX, restorative practice, and philosophy with children allows teachers to create classrooms that endeavour to be less rather than more violent for the child as Other. What Drewery and Kecskemeti (2010) observe about restorative practice could equally be said of PAX and philosophy with children:

Embracing the values of [these approaches] involves a particular ‘habitual stance’ on the part of teachers, replacing ways of interacting which are based on control and compliance with distinctly different ones, based on appreciative inquiry and respect for difference. We think this is a more satisfying stance than one which must get on top of problems in the classroom at all costs (p. 107).

### **Relationality**

From a Levinasian perspective, each educational encounter occurs in an exceptional and singular moment and, as Todd (2003c) observes “learning from is a profoundly ethical event” (p. 11). Because the alterity of the Other is vital for learning to happen, it is the relationship between the teacher and the child, as each other’s Other, that is central to the educational encounter. As we saw in Chapter Three, teaching from a Levinasian perspective is considered to be unique to each face-to-face relationship between each teacher and each child and is, therefore, neither repeatable nor transferable, even when teaching is taking place in the same classroom and at the same time, but with different children. This stands in contrast to child-centred, constructivist approaches to education, where the knowledge the child acquires in the educational setting is already within the child, waiting to be unearthed, with whoever happens to be in the role of teacher being somewhat insignificant vis-à-vis the knowledge that emerges as a result of the educational encounter.

From a Levinasian perspective, the rational relationship, which underpins neoliberal views of education, where teaching is primarily seen as constituting an instrumental tool for shaping future rational beings, dehumanizes both the teacher and

the child, as it is “non-communicative, non-dialogical, mono-logical” (Säfström, 2003, p. 22). The only way the teacher or student can be in such a relationship is framed by cognition and rationality and, consequently, within this framework, teaching “becomes an act in and of itself, defined through knowledge and rationality rather than through a relation to the other” (Säfström, 2003, p. 22). A Levinasian approach to teaching, which utilizes PAX, philosophy with children, and restorative practice, acknowledges the fact that schools are places where children and teachers come into their subjectivity, and do not simply learn how to be economically useful.

Restorative practice pioneer, Brené Brown (2008), suggests that we “think of connection as the thing that gives purpose and meaning to life” (minute 2:28). Weems (2007) observes that, “in contrast [to epistemological certainty and curricular knowledge], being mindful of the incompleteness of pedagogical situations sparks a kind of relationality that allows us to notice each other: our worries, conflicts, and struggles, however disparate they may be” (p. 43). Through philosophy with children, PAX, and restorative practice, children are encouraged to engage with real-life conflict, which existing with alterity invariably occasions, as it arises. Through discussion, check-in/check-out circles, randomly assigned and regularly changing seating and working groups, and approaching curriculum subjects in discursive ways, children are not only exposed to the otherness of their peers, but they are also encouraged to engage with, and learn from, each other through and in relation to Otherness. As Drewery and Kecskemeti (2010) note, taking such an approach to teaching “centralises quality relationships as a primary objective, a baseline for school communities, and for the staff who make them ‘educational’” (p. 107).

The philosophy underpinning the use of PAX games throughout the school day is that classrooms become more peaceful, productive, happy, and cooperative places when relationships are prioritized. When a teacher endeavours to make her classroom

as safe as possible in terms of reducing bullying and harmful behaviour, she is not creating a risk-free environment in the Levinasian sense, because the risk of learning from the Other can co-exist with children's physical safety.

Using PAX stix to decide who children sit or work with can cause discomfort and problems for some children. However, finding themselves in uncomfortable work and play situations demands that, in addition to completing the task or solving the problem set by the teacher, children experientially learn to live with the conflict that surfaces due to the fact that we exist as unique *ipseities* within pluralities.

Restorative practice recommends that daily check-in and check-out circles frame each school day. These circles promote well-being and constructive ways of dealing with difference and conflict, and represent a very simple way of fostering a sense of community and improved relationality in the classroom. They represent spaces where everyone listens to what is important to each other and what is happening in their lives. They also create opportunities for teachers to find out whether anything is worrying or upsetting a child, which teachers often do not get a chance to do during the normal course of the school-day. Check-out circles at the end of the day can ensure that a child, who might have been disruptive or displayed challenging behaviour throughout the day, is part of the class community before she goes home.

When teachers take a more discursive, vulnerable, and risky approach to teaching, children are offered chances to learn that irreplaceable uniqueness is part of being human and that we need to learn to live with the alterity of the Other if we are going to live more ethically responsible lives. Through employing a philosophy with children approach, children can learn that sometimes, by asking each other questions, their own prejudices can be challenged which can result in a change of mind about something they once held to be unquestionably true. In this way, children can learn that we are better served by listening to the Other as she represents herself as a uniquely



singular existent, rather than simply collapsing her in ways that fit comfortably with what friends, parents, the media, or other information sources tell us about “Others.”

With its primary focus on building relationships, restorative practice can offer schools more ethical ways of dealing with conflict when it arises during the school day, offering children opportunities to take an active role in both building and repairing relationships in order to live peaceably with each other. Blood and Thorsborne (2005) suggest that:

restorative practice, with its emphasis on relationships, demands that schools attend to all aspects of school culture and organisation and that they develop a range of relational practices that help prevent incidents of inappropriate behaviour from arising in the first place. . . . This in turn requires a shift away from punitive practice to a relational approach. (p. 2)

When teachers resort to “the ‘big consequences’ or punishments [they] actually make the children more fearful and/or more aggressive” (Embry et al., 2016, p. 14), leading to unsafe (as distinct from risky) classroom environments. When encounters result in problematic, bullying, or otherwise harmful behaviour, thereby damaging relationships, restorative practice provides a framework within which children are encouraged to participate in restoring the relationship that has broken down. This is done in ways that allow children not only to have their side of the story heard, but also demands that everyone affected by the breakdown in the relationship is listened to (Vaandering, 2016). This can create encounters where all of those involved can hear how their behaviour has impacted on others, and take responsibility for their role in the situation. Approaching this in a way where blame is not assigned from the position of a third party, and where the children involved are not shamed for their behaviour, can empower everyone involved to move beyond the incident without feeling hopeless, or that their identity as victim, bully, or trouble-maker has been reinforced. In this way,

“restorative practice is not about making people behave so that they fit into some predetermined whole, but about maintaining quality of relationships where inclusion, curious inquiry and equity are primary goals” (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010, pp. 111-112).

It is necessary for Levinasian teachers to consider how they can create classrooms that are safe enough for the children to exist as Other, yet risky enough for learning to happen. An anchoring belief of all three approaches is that relationships are valuable, and that things go better when relationships are working well and conflict is dealt with peacefully. These approaches also recognize the reality that relationships do break down sometimes and that when this happens the relationship can be repaired once everyone involved is prepared to listen to what everyone affected has to say. All three approaches also advocate thinking in ways that separate the behaviour from the person. As Restorative Practice Development Team (2003) puts it, teachers need to think in terms of the problem constituting the problem, and not seeing the child as the problem. Through investing in building classroom relationships and dealing with conflict restoratively, children can learn that relationships can be repaired when they have been damaged.

These approaches to relationship-building and problem-solving in the classroom allow children to “begin to think and experience their own lives differently through new ideas, concepts, and relationships to other people” (Todd, 2001, p. 433). They also allow teachers to “participate in conditions for establishing ethical relations” because, despite the fact that “learning occasions an ‘ontological’ violence” (Todd, 2001, p. 431), in their day-to-day relationships with children, teachers can create opportunities for the development of non-violent, ethical relationships.

## **Towards Relationship-Centred Education**

Child-centred education was introduced to Irish primary schools in the 1971 *Primary School Curriculum* (Department of Education, 1971), and commitment to this principle was renewed in the revised curriculum (DES, 1999a). This suggests that child-centred rhetoric continues to dominate official educational discourse in Ireland. From a Levinasian perspective, because subjectivity and knowledge are discursively constructed when the self faces the Other, the modern autonomous child at the centre of a child-centred curriculum becomes problematic. A Levinasian reconceptualization of education advocates moving away from child-centred education and towards a relationship-centred model. Relationship-centred education recognizes that children discursively and dialogically construct their contingent and shifting knowledges and identities through their relationships with their peers, parents, teachers, communities, and the curriculum, as well as society beyond the school and digital culture because, as Dahlberg et al. (2013) point out, “nothing and no one exists outside of context and relationships” (p. 63).

Child-centred perspectives of teaching involve the co-construction of knowledge, anchored to the Socratic notion of bringing forth a knowledge that already exists. However, Levinasian teaching approaches learning and teaching from the perspective that the knowledges we hold will always be incomplete, and that we can never anticipate what the Other will offer us in terms of teaching. From a Levinasian perspective, then, knowledges are always plural and never definitive. Knowledges are always in a state of becoming, never reaching a point of being fully formed, because they are not aimed at a final consensus or solution. The co-construction of knowledges from a Levinasian perspective can facilitate the emergence of temporary, unstable forms of consensus that allow us to exist peaceably in the world with otherness. Such knowledges are not ever truly shared by the teacher and the child who are involved in

co-constructing them and, consequently, they constantly remain open to challenge and alteration.

Relationship-centred classrooms offer children opportunities to juxtapose their individual experiences and knowledges with the received, acceptable, institutional knowledge they encounter through each other, the teacher, the curriculum, texts, and so forth. Therefore, teachers need to broaden the curricular aspirations of the *Irish Primary Curriculum* (DES, 1999) so that the alterity of the Other is not delimited by its philosophies and methodologies.

When a teacher begins by acknowledging that, through her teaching, she will daily encounter the unknowable alterity of the child as Other, she is better positioned to meet her ethical obligations to the children, simultaneously creating spaces where children can learn from both her and each other, and can take up their responsibility to each other as Other.

Different teachers take different approaches to building relationships in their classrooms. Through the use of PAX, restorative practice, and philosophy with children, teachers offer children opportunities to experientially learn the importance of building relationships by listening to and caring for each other, seeing and acknowledging the strengths of each other, and having other children acknowledge their strengths. Embry et al. (2016) cite research sources that show that “PAX GBG reduces human-caused sources of stress: yelling, threats, insults, put-downs, pushing/shoving, bullying, violence, punishments, deliberate social exclusion, etc.” (p. 15). This can lead to the development of safer classrooms where the risk of education can be taken without the risk of physical aggression and emotional and psychological bullying.

Consequently, these three approaches can provide practical ways of:

reaching out . . . to inquire of [a child’s] situation suggesting a capacity for a relationality not premised on control or coercion. There opens up the potential

for a non-violent relationship, a relationship not based on denying or repudiating the student's needs . . . but rooted in a response quite particular to the situation at hand. (Todd, 2001, p. 435)

### **Communication**

To take a Levinasian approach to ethics in classroom settings is to seek to create opportunities for dialogue with the Other, where her unknowable Otherness is brought into a discursive relationship with the self in ways that damages neither the alterity of the Other nor the *ipseity* of the self. As we saw in previous chapters, the relationality at the centre of Levinasian ethics is a communicative one because, from Levinas's perspective, it is through language (which is fluid, shifting, and changes the situation from moment to moment) that the unpredictable alterity of the Other can emerge. For Levinas, it is in discourse, which is devoid of an egocentric, teleological, or eschatological purposefulness, that the alterity of the Other can be ethically encountered by the self, because the ethical conversation between the self and the Other does not seek to reach concordance or a synthetic conclusion (TI, p. 205). For Levinas, the "aim" of communication is not that the self and the Other will understand each other, but that they listen to each other:

It is with subjectivity understood as self, with the exciding and dispossession, the contraction, in which the ego does not appear, but immolates itself, that the relationship with the other can be communication and transcendence, and not always another way of seeking certainty, or the coinciding with oneself. (OtB, p. 118)

For Levinas, then, it is the Other who is speaking that is at the centre of ethical communication with a self, who neither seeks to understand nor to know, but simply to listen. The rest of this section will contemplate how teachers, in the daily life of the

classroom, can create opportunities where ethical communication can potentially take place.

### **Communicative Ambiguity: Engaging Children in the Listening Adventure of Education<sup>36</sup>**

From a Levinasian perspective, communication is essentially ambiguous and unpredictable by its very nature. Contrary to this, more conventional understandings of educational communication consider communication to be successful when it delivers on its aim to unambiguously transfer concepts from one interlocutor to another in a predetermined, predictable manner.

Throughout the day, teachers ask that children listen and respond to them, to each other, and to the texts they encounter and, in turn, teachers listen and respond to the children they teach. However, when this listening is anchored to an understanding of teaching as constituting the transmission of stable knowledge for consumption and comprehension, teachers tend to be on the lookout for (and perhaps even reward) responses that feed into pre-existing truths as defined by the curriculum or the teachers' own knowledge and beliefs.

However, from a Levinasian perspective, children can never have direct access to what they are being taught, because it is always mediated by language, and words can never hold or dictate their own meanings. Consequently, words cannot be relied upon to unproblematically convey a concept between interlocutors because, as Vansieleghem (2011) reminds us, "words are never absolute" (p. 8).

In tandem with the capricious nature of words, relying on a single rationality to ensure that what is said is heard as intended ignores the fact that rationality is equally problematic and non-transferable. Words, their attendant concepts, and even rationality

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<sup>36</sup> Todd (2003c) suggests that we approach teaching as a "listening adventure" (p. 119).

acquire their meaning through the context in which they are offered and received (Murriss, 2012). All communication, then, including educational communication (where there are many different social, cultural, linguistic, and myriad other languages at play) runs the risk of being misinterpreted with each utterance. As Biesta (2009) puts it, “communication relies on interpretation and therefore can always go ‘wrong’” (p. 399).

Wachtel (1999) suggests that accepting ambiguity is crucial in the development of restorative approaches to communication and building relationships in the classroom. How a teacher communicates with children in a class that employs restorative practice, PAX, and philosophy with children can be very different from more traditional teacher-child communication. How knowledge is communicated in the Levinasian classroom is simultaneously confidently communicated, yet remains open to question. Incorporating these three approaches into teaching demands that teachers listen to the children in a different way, not only looking out for what is familiar and makes sense within the context of what is being taught, but also allowing for what the alterity of the child as Other brings to the learning encounter. When considered from this perspective, there are many possibilities throughout the school day for the Levinasian teacher to create opportunities for ethical communication.

Todd (2003c) highlights that, “when narratives are listened to, more than words are at stake” (p. 135), and she encourages us “to consider what it means to listen” (p. 118), urging us to attend to the act of listening (which is embodied and sensory), rather than theoretically listening (which is cognitive and totalizing).

The check-in and check-out circles that bookend a restorative school-day offer all children the right to be listened to without interruption, daily reinforcing the message that every child has the right to contribute to classroom conversations and that each child is worthy of being listened to. This activity, in addition to all the other activities that the three approaches advocate, allow for children to be constantly involved in

creating and developing their own self-narratives within the classroom setting. This is enhanced when children engage in writing tootles, as this demands that they positively communicate something to another child, which requires that they place another child at the centre, if only for the duration of thinking about and writing the tootle.

Critchley (1999) highlights how “ethical dialogue should not result in the annulment of alterity, but in respect for it.” (p. 13). Consequently, teachers must also attend to their own language, tone, and intent throughout the day, always aware that their words are not necessarily being heard as intended, and listening for any dissensus they may cause, because how a teacher communicates with the children in her class is crucial when seeking to create a classroom of ethical opportunities:

How we name behaviour and the meaning we make of it, how we interpret a situation and how we think about our roles (and anything else for that matter), has consequences for how people go on—how they enact their role, how they treat others, what happens in their lives, in ongoing ways. (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010, p. 111)

Blood and Thorsborne (2005) emphasise the importance of schools developing restorative language, where they move “away from using blaming, stigmatising, excusing, rescuing, helpless language and move towards more relational language” (p. 10). They also highlight the need to develop a range of responses rather than relying on traditional narrow punitive responses to wrongdoing. Blood and Thorsborne (2005) employ Morrison’s adaptation of a healthcare model of intervention to illustrate their point, which shows a range of responses moving from universal to targeted to intensive, as illustrated below in Figure 1.



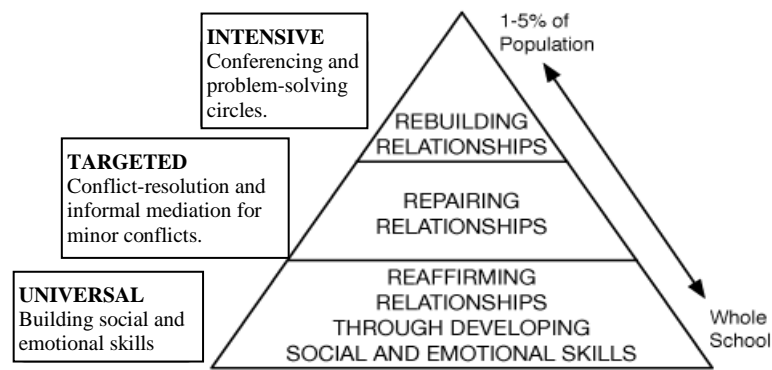


Figure 1: Adapted from Blood and Thorsborne’s hierarchy of restorative responses (2005, p. 11).

According to the Restorative Practices Development Team (2003), restoration requires that “harm done to a relationship is understood and acknowledged and that effort is made to repair that harm. In order for that restoration to happen, the voices of those affected by the offence need to be heard in the process of seeking redress” (p. 11). Taking such an approach acknowledges that it is not just the victims of the wrongdoing who are affected by the event, but also the perpetrators, and often the wider classroom and school communities. Dealing with relationship-breakdown restoratively allows for all children to be heard without pre-emptively consigning them to languish in pre-ascribed roles of bully, victim, and so forth. This approach can also allow children to take responsibility for their behaviour in ways that more traditional, punitive approaches do not allow. When teachers engage with children in restorative ways, they are not simply seeing them as beings constrained by identity categories that have been thrust upon them, but as unique existents whose thoughts, realities, and responses cannot be known by the teacher in advance of the face-to-face encounter, and that they therefore must be listened to.

Drewery (2016) suggests that when teachers are attending to what children say they should not assume that children are ignorant or that they, as teachers, know everything about the children or the situations that arise between them during the day. Drewery (2016) recommends that teachers should always approach their

communication with children from a “stance of respectful inquiry . . . where the speaker does not assume they know all about the student’s position on whatever it is” (p. 158).

### **Centrality of Nonviolent Communication**

Todd (2007) discusses the potential of a Levinasian approach in education in her consideration of an ethics of nonviolence in the classroom. Emphasizing nonviolent communication is also central to the implementation of restorative practice, PAX, and philosophy with children, and children need to be offered as many occasions as possible to encounter and practice this if it is to be incorporated into their way of dealing with alterity.

Cameron (2016) suggests that nonviolent communication “is an ethos and a way of being rather than a process or a model to learn” (p. 90), and that it is more about how the teacher daily engages with the children than the words she uses or the knowledge she conveys. Taking a habitually restorative stance can be difficult as it demands that the teacher constantly attend to her responsibility to promote and model such communication. Because teachers are human, they will inevitably fail from time to time, and such failures can lead to relationship breakdowns. However, such failures also offer teachers opportunities to model how making mistakes is inevitable and that this does not have to represent the end of a relationship, a predetermined outcome, or the reinforcement of an already held identity. When a teacher apologizes for these failures and seeks to communicate with the class regarding how she can atone for them, she is authentically communicating that to be restorative is to be engaged in building and maintaining relationships, and that it also means being involved in the requisite problem-solving to repair damaged relationships. Through the development of such an approach for dealing with their own failures in the classroom, teachers can engage with

children in ways that illustrate how, with every utterance, we are offered a chance to repair harm done and move forward.

Through adopting a philosophy with children approach to teaching, children are offered countless opportunities throughout the school day for learning to deal with difference in ways that do not fall back into a lazy habit of confining each other to predetermined, inescapable identity categories. This approach to teaching can, therefore, encourage children to engage with alterity in ways that do not try to make the unfamiliar into an easy familiar. Taking a philosophy with children approach to all curricular and non-curricular teaching encourages children to learn how to articulate their own viewpoints, even when their viewpoint is not liked by others. This allows children to listen to stances that are very different from their own and, consequently, teaches them that alterity is part of what it means to be human, and that in order to live peaceably and ethically, we need to learn to live with otherness, accept its inevitability, and develop ways of dealing with conflict that arises in ways that damage neither the alterity of the Other nor the *ipseity* of the self. When a teacher approaches teaching in this way, she encourages children to listen to each other passively, in ways that are not constantly seeking out points of consensus or looking out for that with which they do not agree and can argue against.

### **Responsibility**

From a Levinasian perspective, ethical obligation and responsibility for the Other are inescapable and inextricably intertwined; and, as Todd (2003c) highlights, “the subject in communication is *already* a responsible subject. The fineness of risk, then, has to do with the responsibility inherent in the communicative ambiguity between self and other” (Todd, 2003a, p. 34, original emphasis), and that it is out of such a fine risk that “responsibility is born” (p. 37). When viewed through this lens, the teaching day is flooded with potential moments when such fine risks can be taken.

As we have seen in previous chapters, the unknowable demands that the alterity of the Other represents will always overflow any knowledge gained through past experiences or defined by social norms and moral obligations. Hence, children need to learn that the ethical demands that encountering the Other will make of them cannot be predicted and that, consequently, they will have to constantly attend to demands of the Other. Whether or not children decide take up their responsibility for their classmates or teacher as Other is never a given. However, the fact that they will encounter these demands throughout the day is inevitable.

As we saw in earlier chapters, responsibility for the Other is prior to ontology and choice, and cannot be anticipated or planned for in advance because “responsibility for the other can not have begun in my commitment, in my decision” (OtB, p. 10). However, in order to ontologically respond to the pre-ontological responsibility that the alterity of the Other demands of me, Levinasian teachers can offer children opportunities to take up their responsibility not only for themselves or the task at hand, but also for each other. While such responsibility manifests itself in the ontological decision to accept said responsibility or not, its origins are to be found in the pre-ontological ethical responsibility of the self for the Other. Because “otherness is central to responsibility” (Todd, 2003c, p. 76), children need to be afforded multiple opportunities throughout the day during which they can engage with each other in ways that do not seek to mute the alterity of the Other. Approaching teaching through engagement with restorative practice, PAX, and philosophy with children can increase the opportunities for children to face each other as Other and respond to the ethical demands made of them.

When interpreted through a Levinasian lens, the focus of PAX, restorative practice, and philosophy with children can be identified as being one of responsibility for the Other. With relationships at their centre, these approaches put an explicit

emphasis on personal responsibility and accountability by engaging with children in ways that focus their attention outwards towards their responsibility for forming, maintaining, and repairing relationships with each other. While these approaches constitute ontologically conscious practices, they also allow children the space to take up their pre-ontological ethical responsibility for the Other. While for Levinas, the ethical moment when the self faces the Other is prior to such ontology, due to the presence of the third party, the response to the responsibility born of this moment manifests itself ontologically in the human relations between people. While creating situations where opportunities to take up responsibility for the Other is located in the ontological realm of teaching, it echoes its origins in the ethical responsibility born in the moment the self faces the Other.

What planning with this in mind attempts to acknowledge is that if we do not carve out spaces in the fast-paced, over-packed, tightly-controlled school day that allow for children to respond to the ethical demands of the Other, they will be doomed to meet each other in ways that are always filtered through, and confined within ontology, opinion, and predetermined truth. The new managerialist drive in education envisions classrooms where every minute of the school day is planned for in advance and delivered in a way that presumes the primacy and authenticity of knowledge and truth. Children confined within the limits of such an educational vision are doomed to lifelessly reproduce what already exists due to the fact that their engagement with each other is controlled and dictated by what is reproducible and assessable.

As we saw in the previous chapter, approaching disruptive and damaging behaviour management from the perspective of restorative practice, demands that the teacher relinquish the power to decide on and execute punishment after relationships have broken down. Indeed, it demands a fundamental shift away from understanding problematic behaviour in terms of breaking the school rules towards seeing it as being

primarily about the damage that has been done to relationships. Such an approach also changes the power dynamic between the teacher and the child and between the “bully” and the “victim,” by centring resolution on taking responsibility rather than assigning or taking blame. When children are offered the opportunity to take responsibility for their behaviour in this way, they are taking responsibility for their relationship with other children and, over time, this can impact on how they think of both themselves and each other and, consequently, on how they come into their subjectivity as relational, responsible existents.

The primary drive of restorative teaching is not simply concerned with children and teachers taking responsibility for their actions when relationships break down, but more importantly on spending a lot of time and energy on building and maintaining relationships in the first place. When relationships have been damaged, the focus on repairing these relationships is anchored to the belief that all of those involved “are capable and worthy of support, regardless of what has been done” (Vaandering, 2016, p. 72).

When dealing with the aftermath of behaviour that has damaged relationships, the restorative teacher approaches the children who have engaged in the wrongdoing, violence, or damaging behaviour not as bullies or problematic children, but with the belief that in the moment when they made these choices, they “had forgotten that they are capable of doing things to support others, and in this way had forgotten that they themselves are human” (Vaandering, 2016, p. 71). By responding restoratively to an incident, children can be facilitated to take up their responsibility for each other, thereby re-engaging with their humanity.

When teams are constantly shifting and changing according to the randomness of PAX stix, children become responsible for adapting their behaviour and relationality not only for different tasks, but also for the different children with whom they find

themselves working. In this way, they learn that strategies that may have worked when dealing with one child or group of children will not work with others. This brings children face to face with the responsibility that the unknowable alterity of the Other presents them with, and obliges them to take ethical responsibility for each other in a dynamic, lived way. In these situations, children can learn that they cannot know in advance what their responsibility will look like from one encounter to the next, and that it is not the situation itself that crafts their response but the unknowable Otherness of the Other. In this way, children are afforded opportunities to approach each new encounter in ways that allow the dynamics of the relationship to be set not by them, but by the unforeseeable demands that the Other will make of them.

Engaging in PAX games offers children multiple opportunities throughout the school day to learn that they are responsible for more than just themselves, and that their behaviour and reactions always impact on others, even when this is just in the sense that they are in relationships with other children and teachers. The sense of obligation to each other, which can develop during PAX games, harks back to the ethical responsibility that the self has for the Other: “as soon as I acknowledge that it is ‘I’ who am responsible, I accept that my freedom is anteceded by an obligation to the other” (Kearney, 2004, p. 72).

### **Conclusion**

A problem arises when taking a Levinasian approach to ethics and education because Levinas does not offer us any solutions or answers to the question of how to be ethical or teach ethically because, as Chinnery (2003) reminds us, while “philosophy demarcates particular responsibilities for particular situations, Levinas’s ethics offers no such comfort or certainty” (p. 15). Indeed, Levinas suggests that there is no solution to any ethical question, because the minute a solution is reached it is obsolete in the face of

the newly incoming Other, even when that Other is the very same child who stood before me a moment before.

Todd (2003c) highlights that the Levinasian idea of learning from the Other whom I face “implicates the subject in a relation to the Other that is not predictable or calculable; that is, the subject cannot know beforehand how she will respond, or what unconscious bits of affect are going to emerge in the context of any particular encounter” (p. 10). In other words, I cannot know in advance what kind of subjectivity will emerge when I face the Other. Taking Levinas as a starting point, the idea that we must know our students if we are to teach them is highly problematic and unethical, because when we approach education from the perspective of pre-existing knowledge of those we will teach, the pupils we face are reduced to existent themes and are thus dehumanized or, at the very least, perceived as “not yet fully human” (Säfström, 2003, p. 22).

From a Levinasian perspective, then, education can never be fully anticipated or planned for. However, as Chinnery (2003) cautions, this does not mean that teachers should face a class in a purely ignorant way, unaware of the curriculum, how to teach, or the socio-economic and political situations in which the children are living. Chinnery (2003) advises that the teacher should be simultaneously aware of all of these, but should also be prepared to respond to the children in unplanned and improvised ways. Consequently, the Levinasian teacher needs to be constantly and insomniably vigilant, never resting on the assumption that, in the next moment, her planned teaching will be interrupted by the fresh unpredictability that the child as Other always already represents.

Learning is a risky business and, consequently, there is a delicacy and riskiness to teaching from a Levinasian perspective (Todd, 2001, p. 443). Biesta (2013) suggests that when we communicate in education “we should refrain from trying to totalize



communication through our theoretical understandings of it but should always ‘risk’ those theories themselves by bringing them into communication” (p. 139). This can create discomfort and unease not only for children but also for teachers.

Educational communication, therefore, needs to be considered not as something static and unproblematic, but its constant deconstruction should be acknowledged through our witnessing of it. What has been presented in this chapter is a consideration of possible opportunities that teachers have for facilitating ethical communication between children, which will always be problematic and always in a state of deconstructive flux. What are crucial elements in ethical education, then, are the stance of the teacher and her acknowledgement of her inevitable failure to ever teach in a wholly or purely ethical way.

Contemporary approaches to primary school teaching in Ireland would appear to advocate that, prior to entering the classroom or encountering the children they will teach, teachers need to be armed with an arsenal of knowledge about everything that can possibly be known (about the curriculum, the child, the education system and, indeed, ethics). In this way, ethics is often subordinated to pragmatism. A Levinasian approach to education, on the other hand, demands that we “treat the question of what it means to be human as a radically open question, a question that can only be answered by engaging in education rather than as a question that needs to be answered before we engage in education” (Biesta 2006, pp. 4-5). A Levinasian approach to teaching advocates that, if learning is to happen, both the child and the teacher are exposed to the risk of education, where everything the child experiences in the class is not mediated by the teacher or the curriculum; and to embrace the uncomfortable and risky reality that “confusion is not an ignoble condition” (Friel, 1981, p. 67).

## EPILOGUE

Todd (2016) suggests that, “given the extent to which Levinas’s philosophy is no longer a stranger to educational audiences, it is difficult to see, perhaps, what more could be said, said differently, or said with different purposes in mind without rehashing some well-known territory” (p. 405). It is true that in writing this thesis, I have rehashed some well-known territory. However, in its consideration of how Irish primary school teachers can create opportunities for ethical encounters to occur in their classrooms, this thesis contributes something new to Levinasian educational discourse.

Suissa (2019) tells us that, “part of the role of philosophers in education . . . is to explore and articulate different conceptual and practical possibilities from the ones dominating our political and academic discourse” (p. 19). In this thesis, I have sought to articulate differently the relationship between ethics and education in the Irish primary school context. To this end, I engaged with the Irish primary education system as a Levinasian in order to see where this might bring me. Against the backdrop of new managerialism, wherein everything, including ethics and educational research, is viewed in terms of statistics and utility, I believe that space needs to be maintained for philosophical contemplation because, as Suissa (2019) highlights,

at the heart of all serious questions about education are deep philosophical questions . . . . These questions are never abstract intellectual exercises, but involve a rigorous engagement with the realities of educational practice and policy as reflected in the world of schools and other formal and informal educational settings. (p. 3)

Engaging with Levinas teaches us that we should not always be on the lookout for resolutions, fixed conclusions, or transferable recommendations when we teach. Consequently, what is offered in this thesis is just one teacher’s consideration of how Levinasian teachers might approach teaching. Hence, the approaches explored in this

thesis by no means represent the only approaches Levinasian teachers can take in pursuit of developing ethical classrooms.

Ethics for Levinas is prior to ontology and, consequently, before and beyond the theoretical. Yet, writing a thesis is a theoretical endeavour. Derrida (1978) highlights how we “know the meaning of the nontheoretical as such (for, example, ethics or the metaphysical in Levinas’s sense), with a theoretical knowledge (in general)” (pp. 152-153). What Derrida is drawing attention to here is that the very concept “non-theoretical” (due to the fact that it is a concept) resides, at least somewhat, in the realm of the theoretical and, therefore, we can never escape theory.

In the same spirit, Critchley (1999) poses the question: “if ethics is defined in terms of respect for Alterity, how is alterity respected in a discourse upon that alterity? Is not a book on ethics a denial of ethics, and must not ethics be a denial of the book?” (p. 12). As I stated at the outset of this thesis, my engagement with the topic of ethics and Irish primary education and the writings of Emmanuel Levinas cannot be satisfactorily distilled into the said of a thesis, because the moment I put pen to paper, my thoughts move from the saying to the said, from infinity to totality. This concern was my constant companion as I wrote this thesis.

### **The Said of This Thesis**

This thesis began its narrative journey by outlining how the Irish educational system is ontologically underpinned by modernist notions of truth and reason and epistemologically supported by evidence-based practice. This has resulted in the development of a primary school system that is becoming increasingly evidence-led, the belief being that with enough proven interventions, better knowledge can be generated, and certain and better outcomes can be created.

In Chapter One, I outlined the increasing momentum of new managerialism within Irish education, where pupils are recast as consumers of the marketable

commodity, education, which serves the economy like any other commodity (Lynch, 2013). Chapter One also considered how, despite the increasing secularization of Irish society, the Roman Catholic Church continues to maintain its powerful position within Irish primary education due to its dominant position vis-à-vis school patronage and school property ownership. Consequently, Irish education continues to remain constrained by what the Roman Catholic Church dictates as possible due to this dominance. I therefore reflected briefly on the unique history and continued position of the Roman Catholic Church in Irish primary school education, considering how this might limit the ethical scope of primary education.

Chapter Two outlined how, from a Levinasian perspective, the fact that Western ontology, by equating truth with synthesis, leads to encounters with the Other that seek to know her and confine her within the themes of the same. For Levinas, when I seek to know the Other I refract her through the *cogito* and in so doing strip her of her alterity and resign her to the realm of the self, as if her alterity can be contained within the presuppositions and generalizations contained by the categories of my mind. For Levinas, it is not the rational, thinking individual who defines ethics from an ontologically-anchored position; it is, rather, my encounter with the Other who faces me that is the source of my ethical responsibility. From a Levinasian perspective, then, my sense of self is always already disrupted by the presence of the Other. However, as we saw, the Levinasian ethical is betrayed at the moment of its utterance because of the co-presence of the third party, due to whose presence I am compelled to seek justice on behalf of the Other. Consequently, I find myself forced to ontologically frame that which is beyond ontological description. Seeking justice for the Other, in a Levinasian sense is, then, a necessary betrayal of my ethical responsibility for the Other.

In Chapter Three, drawing on the work of educationalists who have been inspired by Levinas, I explored how, when teachers adopt a Levinasian stance, the road

ahead is a risky one as they cannot rest on the certainty from which traditional education is practiced. I outlined how teaching as a Levinasian allows no comfort, stasis, or ease. In this Chapter, I discussed how, when teachers allow themselves to encounter the child as Other beyond the visible horizon of the rational, they are better positioned to create classroom environments in which children are exposed to the risk of education (Biesta 2013, Säfström, 2003; Todd, 2001, 2003a, Winter, 2011). Drawing on the work of these theorists, I further considered how teaching as a Levinasian is underpinned by a belief that, “to make education 100% safe, to make it 100% risk-free thus means that education becomes fundamentally uneducational” (Winter, 2011, p. 540). Chinnery’s (2003) improvised jazz metaphor was drawn upon to demonstrate that, while teachers need to develop a bank of knowledge and skills from which they can draw, how they engage with teaching must remain open to the improvisation that the unknowability of the incoming child as Other brings to the actuality of the classroom situation.

Chapter Four moved towards the practice of education in the Irish primary school classroom by considering three approaches that have been in use in primary school classes in Ireland and beyond for a number of years, namely, philosophy with children, restorative practice, and PAX. According to the research referenced in Chapter Four, philosophy with children, restorative practice, and PAX have all been found not only to improve attention, behaviour, self-regulation, relationships, sense of community, cooperation, and collaboration between children, but have also been found to improve children’s cognitive ability and academic success. While the “proof” of research that tests children in the pursuit of “a perfect evidence-base for educational practice” (Biesta, 2010, p. 494) may be considered specious by some of us, it can be capitalized on when seeking permission from management to include different approaches into one’s practice. In an increasingly evidence-based education system, “proven” research that demonstrates how philosophy with children, restorative practice,

and PAX have undergone empirical research over many years, meets the “proven” success demands that many principals request when considering whether or not to allow a teacher to approach her work in a novel way.

Returning to the Levinasian themes of knowledge, subjectivity, relationality, communication, and responsibility (which framed Chapters Two and Three), Chapter Five considered how this risky, uncertain approach to teaching as a Levinasian could play out in the Irish primary school context. This chapter sought to combine the ethics of Levinas, the learning of the educationalists he inspired, and an improvised approach to the employment of philosophy with children, restorative practice, and PAX in its consideration of what teaching as a Levinasian might look like in Irish primary school classrooms.

### **The Saying**

New managerialism under the guise of progress, devolved responsibility, and autonomy facilitates the advance of the neoliberal agenda where, in my opinion, what is lost is not only a valuing of teachers’ practical wisdom and professionalism, but also the child whose role in education is being increasingly cast as that of an easily transferable product within the business of education. Because she is generalizable, universal, and replaceable, it is almost as if the unique and individual child, who is ostensibly at the centre of our “child-centred” education, has been entirely absented and replaced by a construction and understanding of her as “child-as-human-capital.” By drawing on Levinas, I wanted to replace this economy-facing, automated, universal child with the living, breathing, unique children whom teachers face each day.

This thesis does not propose a different programme of ethics for education, or imagine what it might be like if our system was not denominational or new managerialist. What it does is to look at the system as it is (or at least as it appears to

me) and identify possible sites where ethics of the Other could be better facilitated within what already exists.

I do not believe that it is controversial to suggest that children learn better when they feel safe from violence and bullying, when they feel valued and listened to, and when they feel that their relationship with their teacher is unique and not just a carbon copy of her relationships with all the other children she teaches. Consequently, caring about the children we teach, and allowing their alterity to exist in their relationships with each of us, is a fundamental part of our role as teachers.

No matter how much knowledge, experience, or social justice awareness a teacher brings to her teaching, she can never know what each encounter with each child as Other will demand of her. She cannot know the daily struggles children encounter between the clashing cultures of school, home, subcultures, society, politics, economics, and so forth. The Levinasian teacher understands that the only thing she can know in advance of encountering the children she will teach is that, regardless of the system in which she finds herself working, how she approaches her teaching can be more or less violent, and can create more or fewer opportunities for children to face each other as Other. She also knows that her ethical responsibility to each child as Other is betrayed the moment she begins to teach due to the plurality that is her class. This is the starting point for the Levinasian teacher, who can never know in advance of her teaching day what demands the children will make of her, how she will respond, and what (indeed, if) the children will learn.

In writing this thesis, tensions arose between my philosophies and my practice as a teacher. However, I believe that these tensions are something that should exist. My thinking should impact on my teaching in a practical, embodied way which, in turn, should serve to impact and ground how I think. This relationship between philosophy and praxis should aim towards neither synthesis nor resolution, but toward, as Levinas

would suggest, a constant openness and insomniac vigilance, where the tension is persistently uncomfortable, never allowing for definitive solutions to be reached in my thinking or in my practice.

I genuinely believe that there is no reason why, within the Irish primary school system, teachers cannot create spaces where children can face each other ethically. The system contains in its folds infinite opportunities for teachers to facilitate children to speak and to be listened to. Even if I cannot force a child to listen, to speak, or to learn, I can offer children opportunities to speak and to listen, encourage them to question knowledge, allow official knowledge and my own knowledge to be put into question, and create spaces where opportunities for ethical responses can emerge, spaces where the child can meet the Other at the level of the ethical, and respond responsibly to her (or not).

### **Some Final Words**

In this thesis, I considered how teachers in the predominantly denominational and increasingly new managerialist Irish primary school sector can educate the child as Other in ways that respect her alterity. In the spirit of Levinas, then, I am not proposing a philosophy of education but offering some approaches to teaching that I believe can genuinely represent ways of facilitating children's development of an ethics of Other. Consequently, I have been more concerned with how teachers teach rather than what they teach because, to appropriate the words of Todd (2016), "it is my belief that it is not the curriculum as much as its delivery that impacts on the development of an ethical and non-violent classroom" (p. 405).

My task at the outset of this thesis, then, was not to misappropriate Levinas or reshape his theories to suit my thesis needs. I wanted to enter into a discourse with Levinas and with the Irish primary education system, as both a teacher and a philosopher, without knowing in advance where this dialogue would lead me. In the



course of writing this thesis, I encountered educationalists such as Biesta, Säfström, and Todd, with whom I also engaged in the hope of deepening my understanding of what teaching as a Levinasian might look like. Of course, in the end, I have had to reduce these discourses to the fixed said of a thesis, with all the dangers of being misunderstood or misrepresented that this represents.

The purpose of this thesis was never telic and hence the answers I propose to the questions I posed remain open-ended and, ultimately, the questions remain unanswered and unanswerable. This is not because I did not try hard enough to seek answers to my questions, but because there can never be a fixed answer or definitive conclusion when a question is responded to in the spirit of Levinas. It also reflects my belief that what is philosophically or experientially known as a teacher can never take root but must always remain open to the change that the next moment can herald. Knowing can reside comfortably neither in the philosophies of theories nor in the practice of teaching as each continuously upsets and disrupts the other, which serves to propel the Levinasian teacher further in infinitely unknowable ways in both her thinking and her practice. In writing this thesis, then, I wanted to learn from Levinas (and from those who have learned from him) how I can better engage with what I read, how I live, and how I teach. I want to become more ethical and more respons(e)able as a teacher. I want to embrace the beautiful risk of education.

Having completed this thesis, I have come to the conclusion that the most suitable starting point for the Levinasian teacher in Irish primary schools is through incorporating Levinas's ethics in an implied way. This can only happen "one teacher, one student, and one classroom at a time" (Slattery, 1995/2013, p. 291), because a system-wide adoption of a new ethical approach to teaching handed down by the Department of Education and Skills could only ever represent something applied, something prescriptive, and something measurable. Consequently, if we are going to

develop a more ethical society through the development of ethical schools, consideration must be given to how we teach our teachers to approach ethics in their teaching.

The image of Socrates as a self-proclaimed gadfly, irritating the status quo, continuously asking questions that have ostensibly been satisfactorily answered, is an attractive one when considering the purpose of both philosophy and education. In the spirit of so many wonderful gadflies who have gone before me, I have used the process of writing this thesis to trouble and irritate the question of ethics in Irish primary education in order to reimagine it from an overtly Levinasian perspective. At the end of this process, my thesis feels like the beginning of something yet to come and a point in a long discursive trajectory, rather than a finished product that has reached definitive conclusions, because the unknowability of the Other who is yet to come means there can be no end to the discourse in which we engage. In the words of T.S. Eliot (1945):

Last year's words belong to last year's language

And next year's words await another voice.

And to make an end is to make a beginning.

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