

PhD Opportunity

Exploring the pupil-teacher relationship in policy, popular discourse and teacher conceptualisations

Supervisory team

Director of Studies: Professor Alison Kington

Supervisors: Dr Daniel Whittaker & Dr Ben Looker

Research Group: [Social Psychology of Education](#)

The PhD Opportunity

The pupil-teacher relationship is known to be an influential force in the school experience (Looker & Kington, 2020; Looker et al, 2023; Whittaker, 2024). From the Department for Education (DfE, 2024a; 2024b) to the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2021), key policymakers and policy actors encourage teachers to exploit the potential within these relationships to improve pupil behaviour and pupil outcomes (Bennett, 2020; EEF, 2021; DfE, 2024a; 2024b; Ofsted, 2024).

While this crucial relationship (or pedagogical relation) has a long history of research consideration (Nohl, 1933; Tiedeman, 1942), and while particular types of teacher-pupil relationships *are* associated with positive pupil outcomes (Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Lee & Loeb, 2000; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Blum, 2005; Cornelius-White, 2007; Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013), little research has been conducted that explores how the nature of the pupil-teacher relationship has changed over time and how the discourses of policymakers' and policy actors' influence, and have influenced, our conception of these relationships.

This project would seek to address how the pupil-teacher relationship is constructed in popular discourse. Further, it would explore how the popular discourse interacts with teachers' constructions of their pupil-teacher relationships. In order to achieve this, it is anticipated that the study might include a desk-based examination of secondary data sources, such as policymakers' and policy actors' white papers, speeches and other texts (Spicksley & Kington, 2023), combined with primary data gathered from teachers using a range of qualitative methods.

The study will contribute to our understanding of this vital classroom relationship and how policy discourses shape them, leading to the identification of implications for policy and practice.

References

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Application Process

To begin the application process please go to:

<https://www.worc.ac.uk/research/research-degrees/applying-for-a-phd/>.

The Interview

All successful applicants will be offered an interview with the proposed Supervisory Team. You will be contacted by a member of the Doctoral School Team to find a suitable date. Interviews can be conducted in person or over Microsoft Teams.

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For further information or an informal discussion on this project, please contact Prof Alison Kington: a.kington@Worc.ac.uk