

ABSTRACT

This research adopted a phenomenological approach to gaining a deeper understanding of the emotional experience of teachers in Primary education and the meanings attached to that experience by the research participants. Seven one hour interactive interviews, utilising a number of open-ended questions, were conducted and audio-taped, with participants currently involved in this field. The transcripts of these interviews were then analysed using appropriate phenomenological methodology. The research strongly suggests that participants experience their working environment as largely threatening and significant feelings were frustration, shame, powerlessness and anger. Expression of feelings was generally regarded as unacceptable and unprofessional and participants had developed a variety of cognitive strategies, in and out of awareness, for distancing themselves from feelings. Surprisingly for this researcher, the sense of threat seemed present in all relationships, including in some ways those with children. This despite a heavy emphasis by the participants on the provision of a safe and happy environment for the children. The research outcome is a sense that much greater exploration of the subjective experience of teachers is necessary in the interest of children, teachers and society. These explorations must take significantly greater account of the complex intersubjectivity of relationships on the emotional experience of those involved in the educational drama and of the effect of that emotional realm on the physical well-being of teachers. Statistics which define the cause of stress as 'working hours' and the physical 'working environment' are dangerously simplistic.