

# *Phenomenology of the Parent-Child Goodbye on the First Day of School*

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## Abstract

As a milestone in a child's life, the first day of school is a much-anticipated event. Preparations usually begin well in advance as families shop for school supplies, visit the school, and talk about what school will be like. Regardless of the many preparations, the moment of saying goodbye on the first day of school is sometimes a lot more difficult than either the child or the parent was prepared for; it can also slip unnoticed in the busyness of arriving and leaving; it could provoke a memory of a child's birth; it may precipitate a parent's sudden realization that their arms are empty. This paper explores the often-overlooked phenomenon of the parent-child goodbye on the first day of school. It reflects on singular parental experiences of preparation, expectation, and relationality. Lippitz's (2007) inquiry into foreignness of school invites wonder about the child's transformation to student and what that might mean for a parent. Drawing from van Manen's (2015) phenomenology of pedagogical tactfulness, it offers insights into the relationality between a parent-child goodbye and the teacher-student hello. Exploring what makes the parent-child goodbye on the first day of school, as a unique experience, opens new possibilities for understanding the meaning of a child's transition to school for the parent.

*Keywords:* phenomenology, parent goodbye, transition to kindergarten, first day of school

## Introduction

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

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ceremonies that range in significance, as do a lingering hug, tearful separation, high-five, knuckle-to-knuckle ritual that signals leave from one's child.

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

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

## **A Parent-Child Goodbye: Preparing, and Yet, Not Prepared**

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

*At the door, coats on—we are ready to leave—him for his first day in early learning, and me for my first day teaching a new school year. He stands ready with the backpack we packed and repacked with items carefully selected: a favoured stuffed animal, new shoes, a familiar blanket, a change of clothes. I smile. It seems only yesterday that he screamed his arrival into the world. Look at him now. An unexpected heaviness builds in my chest as I*

*feel my eyes water. I take a moment to assure him, "You're going to have a great day!" In response, he replies, "I love you dad." Our hug lingers. I kiss his cheek. Then off he goes. I walk away feeling the weight of my empty arms.*

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

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

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

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

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## A Parent-Child Goodbye: Being Present to the Other

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

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

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

It is common and expected for the parent to care for one's child, but when the child cares for the parent it may be easily dismissed as trivial. The term 'parent' arises from the Latin, *parens*, meaning to "bring forth, give birth to, produce" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 541). Bringing forth a child may begin with giving birth, yet for many, what it means to parent involves so much more. Parenting is not a one-sided relationship in which a parent cares for a child and the child remains a passive recipient. In a phenomenology of mothering, Bergum (1997) reflects on moments of relational responsibility as "the experience of being *for* the other" (p. 22, italics in original). In a phenomenology of being a father in a child's transition to school, Madjar (2016) reflects on a father-child relationship as being with the child. Adoptive parents would agree that parenting is more about a life lived *with* and *for* the child than the moment of birth. The terms *with* and *for* denotes the "entangledness" of the parent-child relationship. When a parent first holds a baby, the moment of wonder is soon replaced with the sense of immense responsibility for feeding, cleaning, and keeping the infant safe. The very young child is fully dependent on the parent or guardian. In the early years, caring for the child is constant: feeding, bathing, clothing, applying first aid, wiping tears, wiping noses, playing, laughing, cuddling, taking the child to the doctor and the dentist. Caring for the child goes on and on, always unique and fundamentally singular, at times overwhelmingly so. In so many ways we learn to parent from being parented when we were young; and yet, becoming a parent happens in the very act of parenting this child. As interdependent beings, we are transformed by how we care for our children, and how they respond to our caring. And although it is said that a parent produces a child, the child makes a parent.

Profoundly reciprocal, a parent-child relationship is also pedagogical. The pedagogical relationship articulated by van Manen (2015) is not limited to the physical care of a child; more specifically, it is essentially being present to the experience of the child within the particular situation that matters. The complexity of these moments cannot be pre-planned like the teaching and practicing of a skill; rather, it is seeing the child. More than looking at the child, pedagogical *seeing* is attentiveness to the experience of the observed being seen; the possibility of *seeing* that which is significant though not visible; and consequently this *seeing* is always action towards the

other (Saevi & Foran, 2012, *italics added*). Primarily oriented to the caring education of this child, when a parent is pedagogically present, the child may experience being *seen* by the parent in moments that are often unplanned but responsive, usually spontaneous and yet sensitive, ordinarily unpremeditated though intentional (van Manen, 1991; 2015). Different than simply showing a child how to care for their belongings when cleaning their bedroom, and different from teaching a child how to feed and clean a pet for example, the pedagogy of caring for the child is essentially relational, always ethical, and yet without predictable consequences (van Manen, 2015). We cannot know how a moment will shape the child.

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

### A Parent-Child Non-Goodbye

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

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

Standing in the classroom, a parent watches amidst the commotion of the first day of school. Listening to the teacher directing children to sit, the parent tries to recall if hellos were exchanged. The rows of desks and colouring sheets in kindergarten evoke memories of absent art and building materials enjoyed by children now older. The classroom appears so different from what was expected that the parent experiences a visceral reaction. Beginning in the stomach, the

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effect reaches upward, awakening a voice in one's head. "Do something!" the inside voice demands, forcing the parent to take the child by the hand. The anticipated moment of the goodbye dissolves as the parent leads the child towards the door.

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

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

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

decision, though shrouded in family hopes and dreams and past school experiences, there is resolve for the transformative nature of this school.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The shift between time experienced in one's home and school-time can be onerous with parents and children trying to get ready, arrive on time, and be prepared for the school day.

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School-time is marked by bells that affirm punctuality and judge tardiness, and clock-time is ever present as time not yet filled, waiting for the next class or watching minutes tick by until recess or home time. Time-waiting moves slowly, at times a laborious effort toward a final moment of crescendo—the moment most anticipated. The slow rising and falling of school time is felt in the flow of school activities and noted in daily agendas for recording impending due dates and forthcoming school events. Calendars track the months of school, and yet it is the arrival of summer break that is so often awaited. When they can, families set work schedules to match school breaks. Then, all too soon, the long summer days quickly languish with the approaching school year.

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

A parent-child goodbye may be unhurried when a teacher’s smile invites the parent to join the first story. Still for others, the goodbye may extend over days and weeks amid classroom activities, a stolen moment at drop-off in the hallway, in a parking lot, or waving goodbye as the bus pulls away. The space and time for a goodbye may be intimately connected to the space in which it takes place—at home, on the side of the road, in a doorway, amid classroom activities; still, the goodbye tone is not solely for bringing closure. This goodbye opens opportunities for a new relationship.

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

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

*I feel the load of the pack shift from my arm to the hook. “Keep your toys in your bag until I pick you up, okay?” He nods. It is the first day of school. We locate his name*



*tag, and as I pin it to his shirt, our eyes meet. "It's going to be fun, you'll see. Remember, Michael will be here, too." I give him a reassuring squeeze, "I love you, you're going to have so much fun." His eyes scan the room. His smile brightens when Michael arrives. The teacher begins a song. I usher him to the carpet, feeling a rush in my movements. As I step back toward the wall, he looks up and our eyes meet. "I'll see you soon. Remember to..." My words trail off as his attention shifts to Michael settling beside him. Next, he turns to the teacher, holding a storybook.*

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

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

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

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

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the parent, in a pedagogical relationship that has the potential to see to the caring education of the child (van Manen, 2015). Taking pause, the parent sees the child turn toward the teacher, and the teacher begins with the children. Still, the pedagogy of the child is only shared, after all, the parent leaves a child with a teacher only briefly.

## **The Parent-Child Goodbye**

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

The parent-child goodbye on a first day of school is an embodied experience. When the time for school arrives the old sentiment “*god be with you*” may linger in the packed school bags, hugs and kisses. Anticipating what the child might need, preparations for the first day of school may be the parent’s way of continuing to watch over the child. Still for the parent, becoming a parent of a child in school leaves preparations incomplete.

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

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

The parent-child goodbye on the first day of school is a relational experience. The child learns many things from a parent—first words, family rituals, a sense of self, and perhaps a caring disposition. Parenting is the first relationship with the child that holds the potential for pedagogical tactfulness (van Manen, 1991, 2015). The parent, who knows the child like no other, may wonder if the teacher could possibly recognize what this child needs. Like the parent, pedagogy calls a teacher to act with care and sensitivity (Saevi & Foran, 2012); and yet with so many students to watch over, a parent may wonder: Will the teacher recognize when this child is sad? Will a teacher know what he needs? The teacher, too, has the potential to take up the caring education of the child in the social world outside of home. Understood as more than simply teaching a child, pedagogy is also knowing and acting with care, always recognizing this child and what this child needs from a given learning situation (Foran et al., 2020; van Manen, 1991;

2015). The teacher has an important role in helping the child recognize the importance of their different kinds of relationship with others, both in and outside the home.

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

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