Developing a systemic, relationship–based approach to social work education

Sharon Walker

London Metropolitan University, UK

CORRESPONDENCE
Sharon Walker
e-mail: sharondeanwalker@hotmail.com

Abstract

This paper provides a reflexive narrative of my research to develop a systemic, relationship-based approach to teach social work students. I recognised the need for such an approach following a plethora of recommendations in England that social workers should build relationships with their service users and colleagues. There should be coherence between the approach social workers are taught from and the relationship-based approach they need to fulfil these recommendations. I developed the pedagogy by building on principles introduced by Edwards and Richards (2002); mutual engagement, mutual empathy and mutual empowerment. I combined this with the concept of «teaching as conversation» (McNamee, 2007). Three relational-biographical methodologies were used to develop these concepts. The first was relational ethnography where I made audio recordings of my teaching. The second was interpretive phenomenological analysis which I applied to analyse transcripts of the recordings and created themes from the data. The third methodology was self-study conducted through a genealogy of education. I identified the subjugated education policies that shaped my identity and impacted on how I build relationship. My research resulted in the development of a framework providing a pedagogy underpinned by six principles; mutual engagement, mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, conversation, collaboration and culture.

Keywords

Education – Pedagogy – Relationship-based – Social Work – Systemic.

Introduction

I have argued that there is a need for a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy for social workers in England (Walker, 2014; Walker, 2015a). This is in response to the abundance of policy documents that emerged following the death and serious case review of Peter Connelly (Laming, 2009). One theme that was threaded throughout these policy documents was the recommendation that social workers be adept at building relation-

ships with their service users and colleagues (Munro, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Social Work Reform Board, 2010; Social Work Task Force, 2011; The College of Social Work, 2011), an observation I have stated in previous publications (Walker, 2015a; Walker, 2017a). At the time of writing this paper, similar recommendations are being reiterated by the two Chief Social Workers for England (one with responsibility for adults and one for children and families) in their Knowledge and Skills Statements (Department for Education, 2018).

I will commence this paper by looking at the social work context in England that suggests the need for a relationship-based pedagogy and the concepts the pedagogy is built on. I then go on to discuss relational learning and systemic approaches, which underpin the pedagogy. Following this I explore my research paradigm which informed the methods I chose to inquiry into how to develop the pedagogy. I review the key concepts that emerged during the process of developing the pedagogy before discussing the findings of the inquiry and principles of the pedagogy. I note issues that could result in the contesting of the pedagogy and subsequently draw my conclusions.

Context

Ruch, Turney & Ward (2010) noted that a number of authors who have written about relationship-based practice in social work do not provide a definition of the concept of such practice (Howe, 1998; Sudbery, 2002; Trevithick, 2003). Ruch, Turney & Ward (2010) did not attempt to provide a definition themselves, but instead stated:

> [W]e are content to hold the book open on an absolute definition. In fact, this dilemma probably reflects the nature of the terrain, which is rich and diverse and may always be hard to pin down to a simple formula (2010: 10).

My rationale and objective for a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy is that it would provide coherence between the approach social workers are expected to apply in practice and the way in which they are taught. Indeed, Ruch, et al (2010) suggested that for social workers to adopt a relationship-based approach, they «require a distinctive kind of support and development, in terms of training, supervision and leadership» (2010: 9).

I saw it as incumbent on my role to incorporate a relationship-based approach to my teaching in an attempt to introduce relationship building *before* the students were qualified to practise. For an educator to apply a systemic, relationship-based approach to their teaching, they would need to engage in an interdependent relationship with their students. As such, how they use their «self» is crucial to the relationship building process. Ward (2010) explained:

> The term «self» is often used as shorthand for a whole set of aspects of personality and identity, including our beliefs and values, our anxieties and «constructs» — a

combination of our rational and intuitive views on the way the world and other people operate, and therefore how we interact with the world and other people (2010: 52).

The two Chief Social Workers for England (one with responsibility for adults and one for children and families) developed Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) to set out the expectations for qualified social workers in specific roles, and these continued to have a focus on relationships and the practitioners use of self. For example, the KSS for social workers working with adults stated:

> Direct work with individuals and families: Social workers need to be able to work directly with individuals and their families through the professional use of self, using interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence to create relationships based on openness, transparency and empathy. They should know how to build purposeful, effective relationships underpinned by reciprocity (Department of Health, 2015: 4).

While the KSS for child and family practitioners stated:

> Relationships and effective direct work: Build effective relationships with children, young people and families, which form the bedrock of all support and child protection responses (Department for Education, 2018: 3),

The emphasis on relationships was also included in the supervisory role:

> Relationship-based practice supervision...Practice supervisors should...develop a collaborative, supervisory partnership in which the relationships with adults in need of care and support have a central position (Department of Health, 2017: 10).

In addition to these relationship-based developments in England, there has also been a shift towards a relationship-based practice (RBP) in social work in Scotland. Ingram & Smith (2018) stated:

> RBP can be found to resonate with the direction of Scottish public policy...This emphasises the need to move away from a top-down «expert» culture towards one that seeks the views and involvement of individuals and communities, through what might be identified as a process of co-production (2018: 6).

Ingram & Smith noted that this shift is not only evident in children's services in Scotland but is also reflected in social work policy in Scotland related to adults. They asserted:

> RBP thus, potentially, becomes a cornerstone of social policy, percolating, not just individual relationships but the ways in which workers across different professional disciplines and wider communities interact and relate with one another (2018: 7).

The statement from the current Chief Social Workers for England supports the need for relationship-based practice providing currency to the argument for a relationship-based pedagogy in social work. A relationship-based approach to teaching would result

in social work practice, supervision *and* education having consistency, as all these aspects of social work would apply a relationship-based approach. Although the focus of my research was on England, the concept of a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy is relevant to social work internationally. Social work practice is underpinned by an ideology of change. The International Federation of Social workers (2018) stated in the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles «Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people...» (2018:1). Ruch (2005) suggested the relationship is the conduit through which change is initiated and through which help may be offered and accepted. Much of the ethos by the Chief Social Workers in England in relation to social workers being adept at building relationships and my vision to develop a pedagogy to provide coherence between social work education, practice and supervision are likely to be globally beneficial. In exploring how to develop a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy, I drew on Edwards & Richards' (2002) relationship-based ideas in social work teaching and McNamee's (2007) concept of «teaching as conversation», these are American scholars, supporting the notion that these concepts can be embraced globally. Edwards & Richards (2002) developed their approach from relational cultural theory (Miller & Stiver, 1977) which is positioned similarly to systemic approaches with a relational emphasis. They regarded mutual engagement, mutual empathy and mutual empowerment as effective elements of building relationships when teaching social work students. They perceived that the optimal learning experience was one that was relational, «emphasising the importance of the interpersonal connections in social work education» (2002: 34).

This position is reflective of systemic thinking in relation to the importance of connections between the student and the teacher. Campbell (2000) suggested:

> Systemic thinking is a way to make sense of the relatedness of everything around us. In its broadest application, it is a way of thinking that gives practitioners the tools to observe the connectedness of people, things and ideas: everything [is] connected to everything else (2000: 7).

I also looked at how the metaphor «teaching as conversation» presented by McNamee (2007) applied to my teaching. By this, McNamee (2007) meant that conversation «shifts teaching and learning from a focus on a method for conveying knowledge to a process that is attentive to the ways in which participants create meaning together» (2007: 334). By combining Edwards & Richards (2002) with McNamee's (2007) conversation, I would define systemic, relationship-based teaching as

> an exchange of mutual engagement, empowerment and empathy that emerges through conversation and collaboration. There is a purpose to the relationship, an expectation that change or new knowledge will transpire for all within it or connected to it.

Understanding relational teaching and learning — the overarching concept of relationship-based teaching

Sadd (2012) notes three theoretical frameworks: psychoanalytical, attachment and systems theory underpin relationship-based practice. Whereas psychanalytical theory and attachment theory are concerned with the effect the relationship has on the individual, systemic practice recognises an interdependence in relationship, and as such the focus is on how everyone in the relationship is affected. Systemic approaches view people as always being in relation to others — even if those others are absent — and are therefore concerned about how a relationship affects all involved. Edwards & Richards (2002) suggested that the limitation of other models is their focus on the individual: «While relational psychoanalytical theories are attuned to the importance of relationships, in these models the goal of psychological development remains individualistic» (2002: 36). Edwards & Richards further stated that social work teaching should move away from focusing on the individual and instead consider how students would learn and grow in relation to others:

> The ability to recognise and attend to the development of the *self-with-others* are crucial in social work and in teaching. However, the dominant ideology of individualism, as reflected in the educational system, continues to focus on the development of the self (2002: 35-36, my emphasis).

Morrison & Chorba (2015) defined relational learning as

> action that invites both students and teachers/professors to enter into a dialogue about learning. The engagement of multiple parties with multiple perspectives in the activity of learning deconstructs the hierarchy that typically exists in the traditional teaching relationship and opens space for more collaborative experiences (2015: 122).

Gergen (2015) argued that in Western educational systems the emphasis is on developing the individual mind. As a social constructionist, Gergen believes that knowledge is co-created relationally between people as opposed to its emerging from the individual. He suggested that «knowledge is continuously realized in the active process of making, or what I am calling here, relational praxis. Such a view is linked to an emerging and widely shared vision of knowledge as socially constructed» (2015: 59). Even if an individual has a thought or an idea, it will have originated from an earlier interaction with another, from something spoken, read, seen or heard, but ultimately in relation to someone or something else. Gergen suggested that if knowledge is gained relationally, we should teach using relational approaches. He mused:

> If we now understand that what we term knowledge is derived from relational process, pragmatic in its aims, embedded within cultural and historical context… Should we not replace the traditional concern with the «individual minds» of students with investments in relational process? (2015: 53).

Whereas Edwards & Richards (2002) advocated for social workers to be taught in a relational way by virtue of their profession and the need to work effectively with service users, Gergen argued for all teaching to be relational, as the way in which people learn is relational and co-constructed. Kitchen (2005, 2016) presented relational teacher education (RTE), an approach to teaching student teachers. He argued that «RTE helps teacher educators…by prompting them to think deeply about their own practice, draw out the personal practical knowledge of preservice teachers, [and] engage respectfully, and empathically in relationships that lead to professional growth» (2016: 170). Kitchen advised that RTE is «not a formula» but that at its heart «is commitment to respect and empathy for preservice teachers» (2016: 180).

Empathy is also evident in Edwards & Richards' (2002) key principles. Gergen (2015) provided a succinct summary of the difference between a systemic, relational approach and a traditional approach to teaching. He stated:

> It is a shift from knowledge as carried by fixed representations of the world to knowledge as embedded in ongoing, relational practice. Knowledge in this sense is not located in any place — in individual minds, books, or computer files — or in any temporal location (2015: 59).

I interpret the reference Gergen made to «knowledge as carried by fixed representations of the world» (2015: 59) as the traditional approach to teaching, in which knowledge is believed to be contained within the teacher and passed on to a passive recipient — the student (Freire 1970). Taking the positions of Edwards & Richards (2002), Gergen (2015), Morrison & Chorba (2015) and McNamee (2007), I summarised that a systemic, relational approach to teaching would need to encompass mutual engagement, empathy and empowerment, collaboration and conversation in order to enable the co-construction of knowledge, learning and meaning.

My research methodologies for developing the pedagogy

My three research methods are «auto»-biographical, However, I prefer to use the term «relational»-biographical, as I am looking at my-self in relation to others. The purpose of adopting a relationally biographical approach was to understand who I am as an educator *in relation to others* and develop the pedagogy further based on that knowledge. The methodologies were relational ethnography chosen to examine my teaching through audio recordings of the classes I taught. I used interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) to make sense of the transcripts which derived from the audio recordings and self-study conducted through a genealogy of education (Foucault, 1980). The purpose of the genealogy of education was to look back at my secondary education (aged 11-16) in order to explore my educational past, how that impacted on

my relationships with teachers and how my educational experiences impacted on my developing identity. The methodologies all have the underpinning tool of reflexivity running through them. This combination of methodologies supported the emergence of the knowledge I needed to develop the systemic, relationship-based pedagogy.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) enabled me to make multiple interpretations of the data from the transcripts of my audio recordings (Walker, 2018), being more detailed and reflective than thematic analysis. As suggested by Smith, et al (2009), I started by using hard copies of the transcripts and created a margin either side of the text, resulting in the original text being in a middle column. On the right of the original text I included exploratory comments each time I re-read the transcripts. Smith, et al (2009) advised that the exploratory comments include «key words, phrases, or explanations which the respondent used» (2009: 84). In this case, the respondent was me, therefore I was exploring my own words and phrases used while I taught. When I re-read the transcripts, I added my interpretations alongside the exploratory phrases. This led to a third level of commentary — «Conceptual comments» (Smith, et al 2009: 88) — at which I could query what I had noted in the exploratory comments. These queries were underlined and returned to when I next read the transcripts to see whether they were answered somewhere in the original text. I then began to record themes from these exploratory comments. In the column to the left of the text I noted words, statements or incidents that re-occurred. This resulted in each transcript having a list of occurrences. Each occurrence was colour-coded and then counted for frequency. Where an occurrence happened three or more times within half an hour in one teaching session or three or more times across the teaching sessions analysed, I recorded it as a theme. The themes developed provided a lens for me to see how I engaged the students and the different types of conversations that took place between us.

Emergent concepts in the process of developing a relationship-based pedagogy

The ethics of mutuality

In the process of developing a pedagogy with a principle of mutuality, I was challenged by what I considered were ethical issues in relation to how mutuality can be achieved in relationships where there is a power imbalance (Walker, 2015b) I deliberated on the justification of introducing a model based on mutual engagement, empathy and empowerment when a mutual decision had not been taken with the students to introduce the approach. I referred to Jordan (1986) where she argued «in a mutual exchange one is both affecting the other and being affected by the other; one extends oneself out to the other and is also receptive to the impact of the other» (1986: 2). I understood «affect» in terms of «to have an effect on';

which can take place regardless of the power differentiation between those involved, from a systemic perspective, everyone in the relationship affects the other. What was important and ethical was for me to use my power to benefit the students learning experience.

I contended that choosing a model without student negotiation was a legitimate use of my authority and was ethical because the approach should enhance their learning and future practice.

Re thinking empowerment

My experience of teaching on a fast track work based social work programme enabled me to perceive Edwards & Richards (2002) principle of empowerment from a different perspective. On the work-based programme, I taught groups of four students in various Children and Families teams in different Local Authorities. I assumed that working with such small numbers of students would enhance my experience of teaching from a relationship-based approach as it would be easier to engage and collaborate with a small group. However, my assumption was wrong; it was not the cohort size that made the difference, it was how *empowered* I felt to build relationships with the students. My experience of going into the workplace to teach differed between the various Local Authorities. For months I reflected on what this difference was and I realised that there was something about *how I was invited* into the work environment by the managers and the wider colleagues of the students. The more welcoming, collaborative and open I experienced the invitation to be tended reflected in the sense of ownership and empowerment I felt in the space that I taught in. My degree of ease depended on the extent to which I sensed I was accepted in the space, as opposed to feeling I had *invaded* a *space* that belonged to someone else.

Flaskas (2005) noted the «space between» as «the space within the therapeutic relationship between therapist and family, where mutual influence and change is possible» (2005: xxi). I would argue that the teaching space should similarly be one where mutual change and learning are possible — particularly with the mutual engagement, empathy and empowerment that Edwards & Richards (2002) suggested. However, in order for this to happen effectively, I had to feel empowered in the space. My feelings of intrusion resulted in me feeling disempowered; consequently, I taught using less conversation and more instruction, potentially resulting in less learning. I believed that this undermined the quality of the relationships I built with the students. Ferguson (2011) suggested that during child protection home visits some aspects of the work are avoided by the social worker due to «a feeling of being overly intrusive in someone's home» (2011: 73); this was akin to my feeling of intrusion in certain work spaces. Edwards & Richards (2002) discussed how social work students placed value on the environment or climate of the classroom and suggested that «safety, trust and security» characterise the type of environment that students want (2002: 40).

It was important for me to create an atmosphere in which the students also felt ownership of the space in order to lay the foundation on which a relationship-based practice could be built.

Race, culture and identity

My experience of working with culturally and racially diverse groups of students and the separateness between them that I observed on occasions, led me to consider how these differences and sameness impacted on building relationships. I used my self to demonstrate how race, culture and identity are associated with education and the forming of relationships in the learning environment (Walker, 2017b). I referred to the social GGRRAAACCEESS (Burnham, 2011) — Gender, Geography, Race, Religion, Age, Ability, Appearance, Culture, Class, Ethnicity, Education, Spirituality and Sexuality — many of the seen and unseen elements of ourselves. I pulled apart then reconstructed in various formations these characteristics of my self and how they intersected to make *me* the person I am in relation to my students. However, Emirbayer & Desmond (2012) argued that this type of reflexivity is insufficient. They asserted: «for what constitutes reflexive thinking, we argue, entails much more than observing how one's own social position affects scientific analysis or the political imagination» (2012: 577). They went on to state:

> It is not enough to inquire reflexively into «who one is» or where one is positioned in the social space as a whole to understand one's position-takings. One also must inquire into the objective position occupied by subjects of objectification within an academic discipline (2012: 582).

I understood this to mean that it was insufficient to reflexively look at myself and at how I located me in the world and in that particular situation; I also needed to reflexively look at how others *may locate me* and *where I was located by academia*, as these perspectives can impact on how relationships are developed. This thinking fits within a systemic ideology, which would suggest that the wider systems my students are located in, i.e. academia, the university, the higher education institution and so on, will also influence how we engage with each other. As the inquiry developed, the role of culture, race and identity became more central to my understanding of how students and educators build relationships and with whom. I have noted (Walker, 2017b) that in times of increased migration and globalism, highly diverse student cohorts are very likely. It is therefore important to understand how culture plays a role in the relationship-building process as. Factors, such as culture and ethnicity that shape identities can impact on their interpersonal relationships with each other.

Even in cohorts that are not culturally diverse, it is important to consider the intersectionality of characteristics such as gender, religion, ability, age, ethnicity, education,

spirituality, sexuality and sexual orientation (Burnham, 2011). The combination of these characteristics may lead students to view each other as the same, different or having privilege over the other, which can affect both relationship building and willingness to collaborate. Educators should develop an insight into their own cultural identity and how this can present itself when building relationships with students. Also, importantly how our own cultural competence enables us to manage diversity in the class. I was struck by the demands that the role of educator made on my «self» particularly when I was attempting to address the issues of race, migration and difference in the student group Walker, 2017b). This was unexpected emotional toil that led me to realise the *depth* that was needed from my emotional self to manage some of the complexities of using the self.

Findings

Interpreting the audio recordings

Interpretive phenomenological analysis was key in offering a methodology for capturing a range of themes including invitation/engagement, laughter/humour, stories from practice, reflexivity, responsive in the moment and conversation. The conversation category was further analysed to identify different aspects of conversation, which provided an insight into the way in which conversations could build relationships with and between the students and how different *types* of conversation could generate different aspects of relationship building (Walker, 2018). For example, conversations in which opinions were voiced were indicative of getting to know each other's beliefs and values, whereas debates could become contentious and conflictual yet still be important in developing resilience in the relationships by having (safe) opportunities to discuss conflicting views. Interestingly, empathy and empowerment initially appeared to be absent from my analysis. However, I realised that my categories of reflexivity and responsiveness in the moment were examples of empathy. I was able to feel and understand the students' mood or learning needs, reflect on this, and respond accordingly in that moment by changing what I had intended to say or do. «Stories from Practice» was another theme; both the students and I frequently told stories of our experiences from practice. I interpreted the students being able to tell their stories as empowering for them.

Genealogy of education

Although my purpose of conducting the genealogy of education was to look back at my secondary education in order to explore my educational past, I decided to search for «subjugated knowledges». Foucault (1980) explained these as

historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematising theory and which criticism — which obviously draws upon scholarship — has been able to reveal. (Foucault, 1980: 81)

I considered it was possible that I would have been they type of child that a subjugated education policy might have been directed at. In Walker (2017c) I note

When my parents migrated from Jamaica, I became part of the first generation of Caribbean migrant children to be educated in England. I was taught in both mainstream school and the Home and Hospital Tuition Services…This located me in what Ball (2013)… suggests are the educational polices introduced by government which have «three, interrelated vectors — «abnormality», «race» and social class» (2017c: 59).

These «interrelated vectors» were differences that the government appeared to want to control. In the process of conducting the genealogy of education on myself I discovered Section 11 of The Local Government Act 1966. It was known for providing funding to support children with English as a second language. However, there was a subjugated knowledge embedded within the policy that provided a mandate, requiring migrant children to be dispersed to schools in various geographical areas. I contend that my secondary educational experiences as a first-generation black British child are illustrative of the impact of the dispersal system, with the government using education policy to manipulate the identity and culture of migrant children;

It appeared my childhood education was shrouded in socially constructed discourses of me being inferior, object, native, with the need to be assimilated, absorbed and marginalised into the lower ranks of British society (2017c: 60).

Applying the genealogy of education policy as a self-study method helped me to focus on how the *self and identity* impacted on my engagement with education as a student during my secondary education. Consequently, I reflected on how some of my social work students may have experienced the construction and de-construction of their identities, the impact this could have had on them and the way in which my students and I formed relationships with each other.

I developed a greater insight into my culture and identity and an awareness of how these locate themselves when I am building relationships with students and how that might locate me in academia. Furthermore, I have gained an appreciation of how the culture and identity of students can impact on their interpersonal relationships with each other. From a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, the knowledge I gained cannot be generalised; however, it is transferrable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This transferability extends not only to black and minority ethnic (BME) educators in England, but includes white educators internationally, to ensure that they are not taking a «normative position» (Nolte, 2007). Nolte argued that it is the responsibility of those who define themselves as «white» to begin to engage more actively with this process, allowing for difference to

emerge, thus challenging and undermining a normative position and developing rich, complex and multi-dimensional descriptions of our different cultures (2007: 381). Educators of any race, gender or identity should consider how their own cultural identity and that of their students might impact on their relationships and become more responsive as a result. Culture has consequently become one of the principles within the pedagogy, recognising the key role it plays in relationship building.

The principles that underpin the pedagogy developed in this framework include mutual engagement, mutual empathy and mutual empowerment, built on from Edwards & Richards (2002). These were combined with the metaphor of teaching as conversation (McNamee, 2007), resulting in a total of six principles: mutual engagement, mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, conversation, collaboration and culture (see Diagram below). The principles of the pedagogy are all interlinked and relate to one another.

Fig. 1.1 Principles of the systemic, relationship-based pedagogy

The Framework for a pedagogy for systemic, relationship-based teaching of social work students

The framework is intended for social work educators who seek to adopt a systemic, relationship-based approach to their teaching. It is also intended for social work education managers or policy makers who may consider rolling out the approach across their social work teaching team or region. The pedagogy is not a formula or a prescribed method of teaching; rather, it provides an outline for the pedagogical approach. Central to the approach is the commitment from educators to adhere to its principles, which have been built on from Edwards and Richards (2002) and McNamee (2007) further combined with the outcomes from my own inquiry. This has resulted in the principles of mutual engagement, mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, conversation, collaboration and culture.

Engagement

I discuss engagement as showing an authentic interest in the students and using the self when teaching. Engagement should start with the educator having an authentic interest in the students and using the self when teaching. It is important that the educator has this intrinsic interest, as the challenges of teaching in higher education institutions (Cleary, 2018) can mean that it «is usually difficult to enter into, to hold onto, and to work within a *relational perspective*» (Couture and Tomm, 2014: 57, original emphasis). Findings from my own inquiry suggest that the educator has to use their «self» as the teaching tool, and therefore an understanding of their own culture, beliefs and values and how these might impact on the engagement and relationship-building process is key. The educator is responsible for creating a safe environment in which the students feel able to engage. This could include starting the teaching session or module with ground rules agreed by the cohort, starting the teaching session with «best hopes» for the session, and ensuring that the students get to know each other by having rotating pairs or groups completing exercises. The educator should also get to know the students by name and hold individual tutorials if the cohort will be taught over the duration of a module or semester.

Empathy

I present empathy as understanding and responding to the emotional and cognitive needs of the students. Edwards & Richards define mutual empathy as «a universal capacity to understand the thoughts and feelings of others» (2002: 38). Walker (2015a) notes that for the educator to demonstrate empathy, he or she must understand and respond to the emotional and cognitive needs of the students.

The educator will need to be reflexive, and focus on their self — their personal qualities and values — in order to build relationships in which empathy will be more spontaneous, while also maintaining the personal resilience needed to show this empathy and attend to the emotional and cognitive needs of the students. The process of empathy might be recognised by the educator; my inquiry indicates that empathy occurs when educators are moved by something a student says or does reflect on this, and respond accordingly in the moment by changing what they had planned to say or do.

Empowerment

I explain empowerment as first feeling empowered to build relationships before mutual; empowerment between the student and educator can begin. Edwards & Richards (2002) stated «The key to empowerment is mutual growth. We believe the growth in social work education is the result of student and teacher experiencing the dynamics of empowerment that come with mutual empathy» (2000: 43). My experience suggests that the educator needs to feel empowered when entering the teaching space in order to *start* the relationship-based process with confidence and enable student empowerment. The educator will need to be able to take ownership of the teaching space rather than feeling they have invaded a space that belongs to someone else. This can be an issue when social work education occurs in work-based teaching environments rather than in traditional university settings. In my findings (Walker, 2019) I discuss that this sense of empowerment can impact on the engagement process, more so than cohort size — where it might be assumed that smaller cohorts are easier to engage and empower. An important aspect of empowering students is the acknowledgment of their relevant experiences and knowledge, as they can be empowered by contributing to the learning of their cohort. My inquiry also identified the importance of sharing power with the students to enhance mutual empowerment. This may come in the form of negotiating specific aspects of the teaching process, which also supports ongoing engagement. Although collaboration has its own category, collaboration with the students has the potential to increase mutual empowerment.

Conversation

From my inquiry (Walker, 2019) I identify teaching in a conversational style and being aware of different types of conversation. McNamee (2007) used the metaphor «teaching as conversation». As such I suggest teaching in a conversational style and being aware of the types of conversation that occur. A conversational style involves ensuring ongoing dialogue, for example not talking for more than ten minutes before

inviting questions or checking the students' understanding. The educator needs to ensure that comments and questions are coming from a range of students. The use of PowerPoint presentations should be kept to a minimum, and the educator should not read from the slides — unless reading a quote; rather, the subject should be discussed. Debates and opposing views can provide good learning opportunities; however, there is the potential for conflict and the educator should manage this by addressing the issues or challenges as they arise.

My inquiry identified different styles of conversation that the educator should be aware of, as these can be conducive to developing relationships. They can also enable the educator to be responsive to the cohort in that moment. It will be useful for educators to be aware of different styles of conversation when teaching, particularly for when they feel stuck or need to change the direction of the conversation. The educator can reflect on the type of conversation they are having and consider what style might be more helpful in responding to the students or collaborating with them.

Collaboration

I refer to collaboration as all students participating in learning and sharing knowledge in class. McNamee (2007) stated that «refiguring teaching — and consequently learning — in collaborative conversation might open new forms of practice» (2007: 316). Collaboration is one principle of the pedagogy that not only overlaps with conversation but also enhances ongoing engagement and can feel empowering to the students, because through collaboration power is shared. The process of collaboration also provides opportunities for those involved to get an insight into each other's cultures, knowledge and beliefs. Therefore, it is important that the educator encourages all students to collaborate and participate in learning and sharing knowledge in class. The educator must have a commitment to developing a learning community, with the aim that all students participate in it. The educator should have a willingness to share power with the students (and know when to take control).

Culture

I note the importance of understanding how culture and identity play a role in the relationship-building process. In Walker (2017c) I noted that in times of increased migration and globalism highly diverse student cohorts are very likely, and it is therefore important to understand how culture plays a role in the relationship-building process. The multifaceted factors, including culture, that shape identities can lead people to be perceived and positioned in particular ways by society. These perceptions can be reflected in the

classroom and affect the relationships we make as educators and students. Educators should develop an insight into their own culture and identity and an awareness of how these can present themselves when building relationships. Educators should also gain an appreciation of how the culture and identity of students can impact on their inter-personal relationships with each other. Even in cohorts that are not culturally diverse, it is important to consider the intersectionality of characteristics such as gender, religion, ability, age, ethnicity, education, spirituality, sexuality and sexual orientation (Burnham, 2011). The combination of these characteristics may lead students to view each other as the same, different or having privilege over the other, which can affect both relationship building and willingness to collaborate.

Contesting Relationship-based teaching

Educators may choose to use non-relational methods when teaching if they are reluctant to relinquish or share power and control, something that it is necessary to do in relationship-based teaching. I discuss this in Walker (2015b)

> Some educators stay within the parameters of didactic teaching or employ some other method that excludes dialogue to protect their position of power and control…I have no fear of losing control in the classroom or loosening my position of power when attempting to engage students, for me the engagement is more crucial than my need for power» (2015b: 399).

Cleary (2018) considered the impact on social work education of what she suggests is the marketisation of universities in the wake of fee-paying students. Cleary (2018) argued that social work education has become a commodity, with students expecting to finish university with a degree they have paid for. Cleary (2018) found that while universities compete to attract students to ensure profit margins are gained, lecturers are forced to work long hours due to increased student cohorts and decreases in the size of social work teams. Cleary (2018) also identified lecturers who reported having more demands on them in terms of teaching, research and income-generating projects, which resulted in their becoming exhausted. Educators from a black and minority ethnic (BME) background can face discrimination that could leave them feeling like outsiders in their own universities (Bhopal and Jackson, 2013). I can attest to being an «outsider» who invaded the space in some Local Authority teams, an experience that affected my sense of empowerment, my teaching and the process of relationship building. In a climate where social work educa-tors can be exposed to overwork, a lack of resources, discrimination and exclusion they may feel compromised and that they need to use the method of teaching that is the least time-consuming and most cost-effective emotionally. It is unlikely that this would be a relationship-based approach.

It is not only the educators that may be reluctant to apply relational methods; the students may not want to be taught from that approach. ed to have a collaborative and participatory role. In Walker (2014) I note how fee-paying students can see themselves as consumers, in this context knowledge has become the commodity students purchase from the HEI with an expectation that they will be presented with a teacher who will provide knowledge. They may be reluctant to work collaboratively and see it as the educators' role to provide them with knowledge that enables them to receive their degree.

What next

The main limitation of my inquiry is the absence of formal feedback from students. There was no formal opportunity for them to review my teaching approach or to compare it with the teaching style of other educators. If a similar inquiry were to be conducted, I would advise that a student feedback process be incorporated. A further limitation is in relation to the inquiry being centred on my own practice. This has been useful for my practice and hopefully others will benefit from the pedagogical framework that has emerged from it, but it is unlikely that an approach would be rolled out extensively based on the experience of one person. A number of educators could begin to implement a relationship-based approach using the framework I propose. The data they collected from recording their teaching could be used to guide the continuing development of the pedagogical framework and/or provide a critical analysis of the challenges to rolling out the approach more widely.

Conclusion

I aimed to develop a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy. The methodologies chosen were intended to enable me to gain knowledge of what is needed for such a teaching approach. The use of the genealogy of education as a self-study method provided an opportunity for me to reflexively look at my-self in relation to how my identity was shaped by secondary education and education policies. The relational ethnography approach provided an avenue for me to explore my-self as an educator in relation to my students. Using IPA to analyse the transcripts from the audio recordings provided further insight into my teaching. The themes developed from the process of IPA provided a lens for me to see how I engaged the students and the different types of conversation that took place between us. Identifying the types of conversation builds on McNamee's (2007) metaphor of teaching as conversation. In relation to building on Edwards & Richards' (2002) principles of engagement, empathy and empowerment, I identified themes that relate to these principles.

Working as an academic in Higher Education Institutions in England can be a challenge due to current pressures in relation to austerity and marketisation. The potential time, emotional toil and need to relinquish elements of power required when working from a relationship-based approach may deter some educators from utilising this method of teaching. However, those who choose to adopt this pedagogical approach may experience with their students how relationship-based teaching can be the conduit for learning and development.

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