

# Relational Reflection: the sound and feel of reflecting in action, thinking about how to move on

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## *Abstract*

*As a social work educator, I often reflect in action. While listening to audio recordings of my teaching, I noticed pauses and changes to my pace and tone of voice that were taking place while in the process of these reflections. As I recalled these moments, I was stuck by the memory of how I felt and the range of emotions I experienced; sometimes anxious, excited, uncertain. I wondered how my students experienced these times and what (if anything) did they notice about me as I reflected. The aim of this discussion paper is to consider how my reflections in actions were relational; in response to my students and how my cognitive and emotional responses might also be impacting on the students. A further consideration is the emotional toil that can exist for the practitioner when reflecting in action. For social workers, particularly those adopting a relationship-based approach, they may have emotionally charged, reflective experiences that affect their service users and their practice. As this is a discussion paper I do not conclude with any definitive answers, rather I hope to begin a dialogue highlighting the complex emotional and relational elements of reflection in action.*

## *Keywords*

*Emotion, relational practice, relational responsivity, relationship-based practice, reflection, pace, tone.*

## **Introduction**

At the time of writing this paper, the world was being gripped by the pandemic caused by COVID-19. The UK government mandated that people must stay at home and work from their residence where possible. If it was essential to venture outside, social distancing had to be adopted ensuring everyone kept apart from each other. Schools, universities and anywhere that people would normally congregate were shut down; these were unprecedented times. The change to social work education was immediate.

In order to provide continuity to the students' learning, alternative approaches to face to face teaching had to be implemented. Educators turned to social platforms to provide teaching. The words «online», «virtual» and «remote» became quickly embedded in our vocabulary as we scrambled to grasp the technology to enable us to deliver the curriculum and communicate with colleagues in an unrecognisable world. These technologies provided solutions, but there was a relational void between my *self* and the students while being unable to share the same physical space that technology was unable to fulfil. As a social work educator, I had always sought to practice in a way that was relational. Noddings (2003) suggested:

Teaching is thoroughly relational, and many of its goods are relational: the feeling of safety in a thoughtful teacher's classroom, a growing intellectual enthusiasm in both teacher and student, the challenge and satisfaction shared by both in engaging new material, the awakening sense (for both) that teaching and life are never-ending moral quests (p. 249).

Afuape (2011) argued relational responsivity is «responding to the actions and feelings of another» and summarised Lowe (2005) by stating «Rather than a single focus on outcome, relationally responsive approaches focus more on the moment-to-moment experience» (Afuape, 2011, p. 119). Without the face to face contact, the nuances of the «moment to moment experience» were missing during a crucial time of international crisis, when the students may have needed this responsivity more than ever.

From the point of becoming a senior lecturer, I felt a relational approach was key for me to provide a foundation from which to build relationships with my students. During my doctoral research I conducted a relational ethnographic inquiry — relational rather than auto ethnographic as I was observing my practice in relation to my students. The aim was to develop a systemic relationship-based pedagogy. I saw it as my role to incorporate a relationship-based approach to my teaching as there was an expectation noted in social work guidance that social workers should be adept at relationship building (Walker, 2019).

I argued that for an educator to teach from a relationship-based approach, they would need to engage in an interdependent relationship with their students. As such, how they used their *self* was crucial to the relationship building process (Walker, 2019). 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 (p. 52).

Engagement and collaboration were two aspects of the approach to relationship building I identified that were also needed as foundations to develop the relationship from. However, in order to foster a collaborative approach and be responsive to the

students, I found it was often not possible to deliver the pre-prepared teaching material in the way I had designed it. In the process of my teaching, a conversation would start, a question would be asked or a query raised that I had not anticipated. The material I had, the order I had planned it, or the duration of time I allocated to a subject, would need to change to facilitate a relational response to the students. I had to be open to Shotter (2010) when he stated the focus should be «on preparing than on planning activities, activities to do with how to adopt an attitude or orientation rather than with possible sequences of action to take» (Shotter, 2010, p. 17). I could prepare my material but could not plan to deliver it in its exact format, as that would not enable me to respond relationally to my students. At moments when the prepared material needed to change, I would reflect in action on the best way to respond and move forward. I would be thinking on my feet, considering what to say or what alternative resource to produce in response. Feeling both frantic and excited by the challenge of finding new material, I would ask myself if there was something in my pre-prepared material that I could bring forward to this moment or did I need to find something in my metaphorical bag of resources? Would I be able to locate it? Would it prove to be responsive? Rather than material, I might talk through a case from practice. Would I recall the whole story? Would it be a relevant choice? My heart would be racing and I would feel butterflies in my stomach in these few seconds; I wondered how the students experienced these moments of my reflection.

This paper seeks to explore what the sound, feel, emotion and experience of my reflection is like for myself and others, primarily the students I have been in practice with. I make the distinction between relational reflection and relational reflexivity. I draw on some ideas from Shotter's (2010) discussion paper that explores what to do or not to do in a particular moment and what that feels like, looks like and sounds like. I make reference to Ferguson (2018) who noted times when it is appropriate not to reflect in action due to the intensity of emotion. I start by setting the context of reflective practice in social work then move on to discuss reflection in action and the complex processes experienced and elaborate further with Shotter (2010) and Ferguson (2018) to include not only the experience of the mind but also the body and feelings. I will examine the changes in my pace and tone of voice and deliberate on «traverse talk» — when straight talk is interrupted by reflection in action.

## Reflective Practice

Burnham (2005) described relational reflexivity as:

The intention, desire processes, and practices through which therapists and clients explicitly engage one another in co-ordinating their resources so as to create a relationship with therapeutic potential. This would involve initiating, responding to and

developing opportunities to consider, explore, experiment with, and elaborate the ways in which they relate (p. 4).

What I have termed as relational reflection is similar to this definition in that it can be recognised as an occurrence of engagement, co-ordination and responding to within the relationship. However, it is different because the process starts from reflecting in action; there is not a collaborative response in deciding what comes next. I am referring to what might happen to the educator «in the reflective moment» with the students. The notion of reflection as relational is not new, Knights (1985, p. 85) noted that «reflection is a two-way process; without an appropriate “reflector” it cannot occur at all». However, the relational aspects of reflection are rarely, explicitly attended to.

The concept of reflection in education was introduced by Dewey (1933) in order to understand ones' own practice and how to improve it. He posited «Reflective thinking involves doubt, hesitation, mental difficulty and searching, inquiring to find material to resolve the doubt» (Dewey, 1933, p. 12). Schön (1983, 1987) presented an interdisciplinary approach noting that professionals had a gap between their knowledge of theory and delivery in practice. He considered the gap could be reduced by a reflective, self-examination of the theory intended to be applied and what was actually done. The process of reflection became seen as way of improving practice. Schön made the distinction between reflection in action; reflecting in the midst of practice and reflection on action; reflection after the event. Gould and Taylor (1996) were instrumental in introducing reflection into social work as Fook (2015) argued that reflective practice gained impetus in social work as it strove to find ways to develop professionalism and accountability. Fook (2015) noted

the ability to reflect upon practice in an ongoing and systematic way is now regarded as essential to responsible professional practice. the ability to reflect upon practice in an ongoing and systematic way is now regarded as essential to responsible professional practice (p. 440).

However, reflective practice does have its limitations. Boud and Walker (1998) and Quinn (2000) suggested poor or inappropriate use of reflection can devalue the professionalism or effectiveness of practice. Fook, White and Gardner (2006) noted it has been criticised as becoming an uncritical approach as it is used widely across many different professions. Despite this, the importance of reflective practice is mirrored in the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), the overarching framework for social work in England (BASW, 2018). It outlines specific domains that social work students and qualified practitioners should achieve in their role. Critical reflection and Analysis are included in the domains and states social workers should «Apply critical reflection and analysis to inform and provide a rationale for professional decision-making» (BASW, 2018). Fook (2015) posits the terms «reflective practice» and «critical reflection» are often used interchangeably and suggested «both involve an ongoing scrutiny of practice based on identifying the assumptions underlying it» (Fook, 2015, p. 440). As social work students need to be as-

sessed and meet the requirements of the PCF domains, it is incumbent upon social work education in England to teach reflective practice. To this end, reflective models such as Kolb (1984) and Gibbs (1988) have been introduced to social work, whereas others have developed models specifically for reflection in social work practice (Boud & Walker, 1990; Davys & Beddoe, 2009; Maclean, 2016). Blackwell (2019) noted regardless of the type of model, they are important to ensure a structured approach to reflection. Horwath and Thurlowe (2004), argued:

the reflective approach requires the practitioner to use theory, research, practice wisdom and the unique variables of individual cases in the application of theory to practice. As such, the task for educators of evidence-based social workers is to create a learning climate that encourages reflection-in-action (pp. 9-10).

The next section focuses on reflection in action and the embodied experience this can create which has had little attention in the discourse in relation to reflective practice.

## Reflection in Action: body, mind and spirit

Schön (1983) developed the notion of reflecting in action whereby the practitioner reflects as the situation unfolds:

The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behaviour. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation (p. 68).

I was aware that I regularly changed what I intended to teach in response to the students. Shotter (2010) argued «New ways of acting cannot be planned; they have to emerge» (Shotter, 2010, p. 12). One of the ways in which new ways might emerge is through reflection, Lehrer (cited in Shotter, 2010) suggests, this is relational «coming to act in a way that seems to be for the best in a particular situation is not something we can decide upon simply within ourselves» (Shotter, 2010, p. 16). In other words, the responses from others, the emotional charge within the room or something we recall from a similar situation with leads us to reflect. During the process of my relational ethnographic inquiry I listened to the audio recordings of my teaching and was struck by what *sounded* like me reflecting in action. The discourse that surrounds reflective practice tends to focus on *why* and *how* we do it and what is needed to be critically reflective. What reflection in action might *feel* like to the reflector and the emotions they experience and what it might *sound* like to the listener is a topic for further exploration.

I had audio recordings and transcripts of my teaching which I analysed by applying Interpretive Phenomenal Analysis (IPA, Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This enabled me to write about what I recalled thinking and feeling while in the process of teaching as well as my thoughts when re-reading the transcripts. This excerpt from a transcript provides some insight into how I experienced a reflection.

ME: Have you all got copies of the material? The title is Child Safeguarding and Protection Systems: Frameworks and Multiagency Working. But essentially, it's a gallop through (PAUSE)

Reflection: I was about to say a gallop through legislation and policy. I pause to ask myself how the students will remain engaged as I espouse one piece of legislation after another. In my mind I answer «They won't». «They will get bored of hearing my voice» I say aloud.

ME: So, I think (PAUSE)

Reflection: My mind is racing as well as my heart, it feels as though the blood is rushing up through my chest and neck... I feel hot. I am anxious in the realisation my planned material probably will not work. I chastise myself for not previously considering that a monologue would be disengaging. Simultaneously, I am attending to how I am feeling and what I need to do; I have to consider an alternative way to present the material. After a moment; I develop a plan. My thoughts are now unhurried, my body temperature drops; my voice is slow and deliberate as I begin to speak.

ME: maybe if we look at some cases that you have worked with (PAUSE)

Reflection: I am hoping they think this is a better idea. The tone of my voice lowers. I breathe and continue with more confidence.

ME: we can talk through the relevant legislation, how and when it would be applied and I'll discuss the additional legislation or policies that are new to you.

In those few reflective moments, I experience a range of emotions, thoughts and feelings. My facial expressions, pauses, pace and tone of voice are likely to have mirrored this range of emotions and may have been witnessed by my students. Yet, as these are moments rather than minutes, I am unsure how much is likely to have been observed by the students or what difference might it make to them if they had noticed my momentary changes. Eraut (1994) questioned how much could go on in the moments of reflecting in action and argued «when time is extremely short, decisions have to be rapid and the scope for reflection is extremely limited» (Eraut, 1994, p. 145). Stern (2004) suggests reflections in action varies between one and ten seconds, lasting on average three seconds. Listening to my recordings I can hear with clarity the times when I pause to do or say something different in response to something related to the

students. I hear the pause, the slight stuttering, the changes in the tone and pace of my voice, reflecting what I am thinking and feeling in response to the students. I then hear myself say or do something different to what I originally planned. During the experience, it feels as though an endless amount of time has elapsed, yet it is only moments. I am unsure if the students are having similar bodily responses while waiting in these moments, for example apprehension, anticipating hearing my new suggestion. Conversely, they may not have realised I am thinking of something new, different or better. Shotter (2010) posits:

For we respond to each other's utterances bodily, in a «living» way without our having first «to work out» how to respond to each other. This means that when someone acts, their activity cannot be accounted as wholly their own activity — for in being spontaneously responsive to each other, everyone's acts are partly «shaped» by those of the others around them (p. 24).

Shotter noted the relational way in which we respond to each other. The emotional temperature within the room may further impact on everyone present, affecting how we respond. The learning environment is not generally one of heightened emotion, however the process of reflecting aroused feelings of anxiety within me, suggesting reflection in action can be an emotive experience in itself. The description Schön (1983) gives of the practitioner who «allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique» is important for two reasons. Firstly, where Schön states «allows himself» indicates that the practitioner has a degree of control over whether or not to have the reflection in action. Ferguson (2018) identified how reflection in action during situations of high anxiety can create such an emotional demand on the self, that consequently, some social workers do not reflect in these circumstances. Ferguson (2018) argued:

the worker gains momentary awareness and makes a decision that this is so difficult it is not safe, productive or bearable to dwell on how emotionally and viscerally demanding it is. Yet at a deeper level not reflecting in action is not so much a choice practitioners' make as a product of how in the moment the defended self leads them to enact the impulse not to dwell on painful feelings but to split them off (p. 242).

Rather than choosing not to reflect in action, Ferguson (2018) believes the social worker has utilised a defence mechanism to prevent themselves from reflecting in action to save their *self* from further distress. This excerpt from Ferguson's research provides a rationale given by a social worker for being unable to reflect in action.

SW: that's kind of when, you know, my anxiety levels started to go up again... you can feel the kind of emotions arrive and you've got to be monitoring them constantly... You can just feel it physically, you know, the kind of stress and attention that you've had in your body (Ferguson, 2018, p. 422).

Here, the social workers' highest concern was his emotional management and containing his feelings rather than reflecting in action and changing the direction of the visit. He may have become too overwhelmed in the process of reflection to have managed the situation and his emotions simultaneously. Therefore, he focussed only on managing his emotions and containing his anxiety. Ferguson (2018) argued that to reflect in practice requires a complex use of the self that has not been fully understood or taught social work education. He continued:

This leads to the expectation that students and experienced practitioners, even at moments of high intensity, can, even should, be able to reflect in action on their feelings and thinking to ensure a skilled and ethical use of self (p. 242).

Indeed Moffatt (1996, p. 53) stated that «Moments of confusion and emotion are not thought to limit the social work student's effectiveness». However, this view is beginning to change. Urdang (2010) argued that social work education relies too much on cognitive theories to understand and teach reflective practice, thereby omitting the focus on the complex relationship between emotions and the self, which Ferguson (2018) presents. Ferguson warned «the *self* has been conceptualised as a coherent unproblematic entity, as something distinct and unified that the worker accesses and goes into in order to connect to themselves and their service users» (Ferguson, 2018, p. 417). This complex self will be required to engage and navigate through reflection in action, which is already a multifaceted, perplexing process. As mentioned, the description Schön gives is of a practitioner who «allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique» is significant. The second reason why this description is key is because the reference to moments of «mental difficulty and searching» and «surprise, puzzlement, or confusion» (Ferguson, 1983, p. 68) suggests a deeper level of complexity than appears to be currently understood in social work, as Ferguson (2018) alluded to. Shotter (2010) might argue that this puzzlement or confusion may be because we have not yet had the opportunity to fully comprehend the issue that has made us reflect in the moment:

Attention to such issues is not all that easy to sustain, for it entails trying to capture things «in motion», which means trying to capture them while they are on the way to being other than they already are — in other words, we cannot easily name the things of our concern (p. 18).

Shotter (2010) noted that it not easy name what is giving us cause for concern as the situation is unfolding, rather it is a *feeling* within us that causes us to act or not. From his argument reflections in action can be seen as «transitional phenomena which have their being only in the unfolding dynamics, in the "time-contours", of the feelings they arouse in us» (Shotter, 2010, p. 18). According to Schön (1987) I am simultaneously experimenting with my inventory of examples, ideas and actions from practice and bringing them into



this new, unfamiliar or unproductive situation. Schön identified three different types of experiments practitioners apply in their moment of reflection. Firstly, there is exploratory experimenting, where the practitioner tries something without any inclination what the outcome might be. Secondly, Schön suggests «move-testing experiments» where the practitioner has a hoped outcome in mind. Thirdly, there are hypothesis testing experiments where the practitioner has an idea of what has happened in the situation and what needs to happen next to change it for the better (Schön, 1987, p. 71). Schön presents these three levels of experimenting as happening concurrently and notes «experimenting is at once exploratory, move testing, and hypothesis testing. The three functions are fulfilled by the very same actions» (Schön, 1987, p. 72). Whereas Schön has a clear cognitive thinking process in relation to reflecting in action, Shotter makes further reference to feelings

while we can decide very precisely what not to do, {...} resolving on a new line of action, gathering together all the relevant features of the now new situation one faces, takes judgement — for, to repeat, we have to consider, not facts, but possibilities. And a moment of judgement — the 3 to 5 second «present» moment of a judgment (Stern 2004) — entails, I want to suggest, some judgemental work, work in which we go out, imaginatively and feelingfully (Shotter, 2010, p. 23).

The judgemental work that Shotter (2010) refers to can include the judgement made by social workers not to reflect in action. However, this judgement itself is a form of reflection — making a decision in the moment not to change their behaviour but to continue on while managing their emotions. Ferguson (2018) suggested social work education should help practitioners to «develop their capacities to contain themselves through good “internal supervision” so as to be able to tolerate anxiety in difficult situations» (Ferguson, 2018, p. 425).

The importance of what reflection in action feels like should become more central to the teaching of reflective practice as it can assist in developing an internal supervision for social workers to know when and how it may be safe to go on. The pace and tone of voice may be an indication of how the reflector is feeling, I will discuss this next.

## Pace

Schön suggested (1987, p. 75) «the pace of action can be varied at will. The designer can slow down to think about what he is doing». I have spoken about my thoughts being hurried as I think of alternatives and then slowing down when I feel satisfied I have a new plan. Still, this variation in pace is not limited to my thoughts, it also translates to the pace of my spoken words. Listening to the audio recordings, I noticed the pace of my voice varied in *parallel with* my reflections in action and possibly with the mood of the students. Perhaps if I notice my students looking impatient or fidgeting in these moments of reflection, my thoughts and pace of voice speed up accordingly, thus the emergence of an interdependence in the relational reflection. The following excerpt is from a class

where child protection procedures was being taught. One of the students made reference to a case where a child had died of neglect and starvation and his body had been left in the house. His mother and adult brother were prosecuted.

Me: I guess they felt he {the sibling who was prosecuted} was old enough to know what was going on and was expected to have intervened (PAUSE)...I abandon the rest of the sentence as I start to reflect.

Reflection: I recall seeing footage of the house on the news. If I find it, I can show it to the students so they get a sense of the lived conditions of the child who died and the surviving siblings.

Me: Let me have a look (PAUSE) for the news coverage (PAUSE) so you can see (PAUSE) what the house looked like.

My voice is slow, low and deliberate as I am thinking to myself, speaking to the students and beginning to search for the footage. I am anxious having to be quick while using technology. It is taking longer than I hoped. I am beginning to feel hot. The students are starting to have conversations between themselves. Getting bored. I try to speed up.

Me: Just a second (I say quickly, the tone and volume of my voice are high).

Me: OK (I say slowly, with relief, PAUSE). Here it is. The students are quiet.

ME: This is the picture of the kitchen (PAUSE) and that's the bedroom where he was... (PAUSE), I stop talking. I sense the students are no longer listening. They seem totally moved by the images. My voice would interrupt their thoughts.

Throughout this reflection I hear my speech slowing down and speeding up, possibly influenced by my perceptions of the students getting bored. Once the reflection is over, and I find the footage, my speech speeds up again. I stop talking in response to *their* response to the news footage.

Starting...      Stopping.      ← ← ← Changing direction → → →      S-l-o-w-i-n-g d-o-w-n

The tone and pace of my voice in those moments mirror the pace of my reflection as I move forward. Shotter & Katz (1999) surmised:

*Indeed, in our use of language, in our speaking of our words, we embody a way of proceeding, of «going on», of orchestrating the flow of our energies, a rhythm of acting, shaping, stopping, reflecting, switching positions, revising, looking back, looking forward and sideways and so on, we embody ways or styles of responsively relating to our circumstances, shifting between different activities at different times (p. 83, original emphasis).*

In the moment I listen to my inner dialogues suggesting what might be best to move on, what to consider, what to ask, what direction to take. Shotter & Katz (1999) noted when this happens

[...] has become to incorporate within himself a variation of the kind of dialogue involved in the reflecting process. And so doing, he can move [...] to a similar dialogue within himself, and from being within it to reflecting on it, and so on (p. 87).

After hearing myself, I wonder what my *style* of starting, stopping slowing down and changing direction *sounds and feels like* for the students. Are *they* trying to follow my words as I slow down, speed up or stop? Are they compelled to pay more attention? Does this help them to engage? Or does it feel like a distraction?

## Listening to reflection in action

Linnell, Bansel, Ellwood & Gannon (2008, p. 300) suggested «“straight talk” — direct and carefully framed, composed, rehearsed with attention to the nuances and subtleties of language — is heard crookedly, differently, subversively». If straight talk is heard obliquely, how is my traversed, multi directional, improvised, in-the-midst-of-reflection talk heard? Moffatt (1996, p. 52) suggested «the social work interview can be understood to involve a multitude of change of direction; at times there appears to be little order». Although it is accepted that the reflector will experience and understand this confusion, it is less clear what the listener is thinking or feeling in this situation. Linnell et al. (2008, p. 300) argued, «Listening cannot be part of a binary or an opposition: listening/speaking; it must be a living dialogue, speaking — and — listening. When we speak, we may intend a double meaning, but when we listen, we hear in a myriad of different ways». My intention is not to give a double meaning however, if speaking while reflecting in the moment mirrors my thoughts and emotions, it may sound to the listener as disjointed and incomprehensible, interpreted with more than one meaning. Yet, as the reflective process takes only moments, perhaps the idiosyncrasies of my speech are barely noticed. Linnell et al. (2008, p. 304) proposed when we speak, our history of relating to others emerges as if present «Our present is an accumulation of moments and places and people, events and narratives, which are always in excess of the moment in which we speak». I interpret what Linnell et al. (2008) suggest on two ways. Firstly, the students might fill in the gaps of my pauses with what they deem as logical replacements based on similar conversations they have had in the past. Secondly, in the moments that I am reflecting and the pace of my thinking and speech fluctuates, I am not only listening to my inner dialogue or «internal supervision» (Ferguson, 2018) but also historical conversations from different times with different people. This supports the argument posed by Lehrer (cited in Shotter, 2010) that we do not decide simply within ourselves when we reflect.

The process is relational not only with those we are in the situation, reflecting in action with, but also with those from our past that help inform our ideas. When social workers who manage their emotions, rather than fully reflect in action, they may be influenced from a past experience when reflecting in action had unhelpful consequences. There may have been a similar situation where they reflected in action, changed their method but the consequences were more upsetting than if they had continued on. Rather than reflect in action and change tact or continue in the same way, their reflection could lead them to be silent. This excerpt from Fergusons (2018) research provides insight from a social worker for her silence after reflecting in action

Well, I didn't, I just didn't know what to say, I didn't know what to say, what to do, and as I was, and as I was sat there I was, I was analysing my own practice, I guess, and I'm thinking: I can't even talk to, I can't talk to the child, (p. 421).

Linnell et al. (2008, p. 305) suggested «silence is not an empty space — it is filled with which remains unsaid {...} Speaking, listening and silence are performances, and performances of knowing (or not knowing)». Sometimes we know to stay silent to allow for others to have their moment of reflection. For example, I had started a narrative of the footage of the squalid conditions where the baby died then reflected in action and decided to stay silent as the students watched. Linnell et al. (2008, p. 304) ask: «and what of that which is held passionately in silence, not expressed in speech but contained in a body that may or may not betray signs of that which it holds: a tense back, a tapping foot, a drumming finger». Contained in my body was the shallowness of my breath, not wanting the sound of my breathing to interrupt the thoughts and reflections of the students or my own sadness. Moffatt (1996, p. 53) noted the risk of imposing one's own knowledge «as a master narrative which subjugates the story of the client and undervalues the knowledge from which the client draws to understand his/her circumstances». In such situations, silence may be the best way to move on.

## Conclusion

The aim of this discussion paper was to consider how my reflections in actions were relational; in response to my students. I hoped to emphasise not only the cognitive element to reflection in action but also the emotions and feelings that can be experienced by the reflector. With a combination of Schön (1987) focussing on the complexities of the mind when reflecting in action and Shotter (2010) having a focus on the embodiment of feelings, we may expect our experiences during these moments of reflection to impact on those we are in this relational reflection with. Ferguson (2018) further noted social workers may exercise inner supervision to «decide» if they should protect their heightened emotions rather than reflect in action and change their behaviour or method at all. He recommends:

The theory of reflective practice is not sufficient to make sense of how, or if, practitioners think in action and I have argued that it needs to be supplemented with insights from psychoanalysis and theories of embodiment and lived experience, taking into account movement, the senses and complexity, as well as the sedentary nature of practice (Ferguson, 2018, p. 424).

My recommendations are similar, the complex way in which reflection in action can be felt, heard and experienced needs further exploration to be understood beyond the cognitive processes which are often focussed on. Although as social work educators we have had to delve into the world of technologies during an unprecedented time of crises, this cannot effectively replace face to face teaching, *relational* teaching. It is within these personal student/educator, student/student contacts that we are able to fully experience the embodied phenomena of relational reflection in action. We can then begin to comprehend the complexities and teach these in a way that is relevant to the highly emotive landscape of social work practice.

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