Developing a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy in social work education

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This Covering Document is submitted to London Metropolitan University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD by Prior Output).

March 2019

Acknowledgement and thanks to:

The students:

Without your dynamics and great personalities, I would have nothing to say

My supervisors:

Dr Rossana Perez-del-Aguila – for showing me the importance of the research trio

Dr Allister Butler – for giving me a first, and a second opportunity

Critical friend: Professor Uvanney Maylor – for your time, compassion and for leaving the drawbridge down

Friends who were with me along the journey:

Pauline Donaldson – thank you for listening

Marva Furlongue-Laver – separated by the Atlantic, bonded by our PhD journey

Matthew Ganda – for being my unofficial mentor

Julia Jude – your advice, guidance and laughter have been invaluable

Rena Kydd-Williams – always calm and with thoughtful advice

Novelette Lynn – your support was crucial through my transition

Vicky Rodrigues – for starting me on this journey, thank you

Family:

Shereen my daughter – for listening to a lifetime of concepts and theories

Gabriel my grandson – for motivating me to leave behind a legacy

My parents, Frankie and Lynneth Walker – for passing on your resilience, determination and hard work ethic; I hope I made you proud.

God – without you none of this would be possible

Abstract

This covering document provides a narrative account detailing the context and rationale for my body of work in the public domain at the time of writing. The body of work contains ten peer-reviewed papers published between 2014 and 2018. The central argument underpinning the papers asserts the need for a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy in the teaching of social work students in England. This contention arose following a plethora of recommendations stating that social workers should build relationships with their service users and colleagues. I argue that there should be coherence between the approach social workers are taught from and the relationship-based approach they would need to practise from to fulfil these recommendations. Despite the proposals relating to social work practice, currently there is no requirement in social work education to teach from a relationship-based approach.

My body of work sets out the principles upon which a relationship-based teaching of social workers should be built, my ethical ponderings and the methodologies I have used in undertaking relational inquiries. I focus the inquiry lens on myself in order to identify how I could effectively adopt a systemic, relationship-based approach to my teaching. This covering document outlines the meaning of systemic practice. It also examines the research trio of ontology, epistemology and methodology that underpins the body of work. I discuss how the epistemology is situated from the perspective of my-self as a black female (I use the term 'my-self' as it relates to the use of self). From my argument for the need for a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy for social workers, two key issues emerged: firstly, research that inquires into relationships should utilise qualitative research tools that have a systemic, relational aspect to them; and secondly, there is a need to understand how the culture and identity of both the educator and the students could impact on this relationship-based teaching approach. Furthermore, the covering document demonstrates the unique contribution to knowledge made by my body of work, namely the development of a framework for a social work pedagogy, combining three biographical methodologies underpinned by reflexivity and demonstrating the role of culture and identity in relationship-based teaching. The framework is attached as an appendix (appendix 2) to this covering document. It is aimed to be a working tool to provide social work educators with the six principles identified to teach from a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy. The six principles, mutual engagement, empathy, empowerment, conversation, collaboration and culture have been developed to inform social work teaching and provide congruence between the social work relationship-based practice and supervision currently championed in social work policy and guidance.

Contents

1. Introduction

<u>Content of the covering document</u>

This covering document affords me the opportunity to reflexively appraise the body of work currently published in the public domain (see appendix 1 for a bibliography of this work). It provides a narrative account detailing the central argument, the context and the rationale for this body of work. Throughout the document there are references to the publications, which provide the reader with an insight into their content and purpose. My argument is that there is a need for a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy for social workers in England. This is in response to the abundance of policy documents that emerged following the 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 relationships 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, 2015c, 2017d). At the time of writing this document, the same kind of recommendation is 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, 2018a).

Ruch, Turney and 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 and 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. This is akin to Ward's matching principle (1998; see Walker, 2015c), which argues that training in professional education should match or reflect the model of practice the students are being trained for. 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).

I believed I possessed the type of personality that would be useful in an education setting and would enable me to interact easily with students; this included my interest in generating and sharing knowledge, and my ability to be patient, curious and show compassion. With this in mind, in 2013 I left my job as a social work team manager to become a senior lecturer in social work. I also began a Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice to explore how to develop a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy for social work students. During this transition, my own observations of social work practice and social work students helped to shape my belief in the need for a systemic, relationship-based pedagogical approach and my conviction that I needed to imbed this in my teaching. After joining academia, I was employed in three different social work education institutions that had students from ethnically diverse backgrounds in cohorts ranging from four to fifty. In the process of my inquiry into systemic, relationship-based teaching, coupled with my early experience as an educator, two key issues emerged: firstly, the need for coherence between a systemic/relational inquiry and the methods chosen to conduct the research and secondly, the need to understand the culture and identities of both myself as an educator and the students, as this is likely to have an impact on the relationship-building process. I build on this discussion in this document.

Section 1 of this document comprises of

the introduction, which offers a context to the body of work. Section 2 is entitled 'The Theoretical Framework: from systems theory to systemic practice' and here I examine the theory underpinning relationship-based practice. I go on to consider what I envisage a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy to be, compared with 'traditional' teaching methods. I discuss how I build on Edwards and Richards' (2002) relationship-based ideas in social work teaching and McNamee's (2007) concept of 'teaching as conversation'. Section 3, 'The Research Paradigm: my ontological and epistemological position' considers how my world view has been shaped through the lens of my-self as a black woman. This also relates to my emergent argument for the need to understand one's own culture and identity. In Section 4, 'Methodology', I focus on the range of methods I use to explore aspects of my-self that fall under the umbrella of autobiographical methodologies.

Section 5 identifies my contributions to new knowledge, including the development of a framework for a relationship-based pedagogy for teaching social work students, which fulfils my aim of developing this teaching approach. In Section 6 I look forward to the next steps in relation to this inquiry, and I end in Section 7 with some final reflections. Appendix 1 is a bibliography of the publications which form the body of work. Appendix 2 contains the framework for the relationship-based pedagogy.

The framework includes the context for the need for a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy and provides a short narrative for each of the principles designed to be embedded in the teaching of social work educators. The principles are mutual engagement, empathy, empowerment, conversation, collaboration and culture.

<u>The context of the papers</u>

I qualified as a social worker in 1992 and practised for ten years before joining HM Prison Service in 2002. After a further ten years, in 2012 I re-joined social work as a team manager in a local authority children's service. I was asked to support a group of social workers while they attended university part time to gain an MSc in Social Work. I subsequently became curious about social work education. I decided to become a senior lecturer in social work and secured my first such role in a university in the east of England that had an ethnically diverse cohort. This was in 2013, a time when there was much rhetoric regarding social work education reforms that advocated the need for social work students to develop effective relationships with service users and professionals. Yet, there was no recommendation as to how students should be taught to do this. Ruch, Turney and Ward (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). This was borne out on my very first day of teaching. When I taught my first class, I was struck by the racial divisions I observed between the students and I was troubled, as students appeared not to have developed positive relationships with students from races other than their own, despite having been taught together for a year. It concerned me that they might struggle to develop the relationships that social work reforms (mentioned above) espoused as being essential in practice. As a senior lecturer, 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. I decided to draw on Edwards and Richards' (2002) systemic, relationship-based approach to teaching social work students. Edwards and Richards (2002) regarded mutual engagement, mutual empathy and mutual empowerment as effective elements of building relationships when teaching social work students.

Edwards and Richards (2002) 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). In response to my argument regarding the need for a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy for social workers, I aimed to develop this by combining Edwards and Richards (2002) with McNamee's (2007) conversation. Consequently, 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.

The objective was to utilise the approach as I defined it (above) in my teaching, to provide coherence with the way in which social workers should practise when building relationships.

At the time of becoming a senior lecturer, I had also commenced a Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice (PDSP). As the purpose of a professional doctorate is to inform practice, there were two issues I believed were essential for me to attend to: firstly, to use *my-self in practice* as the primary research method and secondly, to produce articles from the inquiry that were accessible to other practitioners. It was important for me to have publications that could be useful to practitioners and researchers, rather than to write a doctoral thesis that might be seen by only a few people. I was influenced by Shotter (2012) when I read that 'the outcomes of our inquiries as practitioners are not to be measured in terms of their end points – in terms of their objective outcomes – but in terms of what we learn along the way' (2012: 1).

I understood this to mean that the end product of the thesis was not the only thing of significance and that I needed to share what I was learning on the journey *while engaged in the journey*. I was also encouraged during my attendance at the inaugural 'Knowledge Transfer' summer residential workshop at the London School of Economics in July 2014 to write and publish from the moment I had a research concept, as this could crystallise my ideas and/or attract collaboration from other interested parties. I realised that I enjoyed punctuating my learning with the writing of papers and I wanted to continue to write for publication more so than to focus on the thesis. Consequently, I decided to withdraw from the PDSP in 2016 and concentrate on producing papers. Prior to this, I had also made the decision to move to a different teaching environment.

In 2015 I left the traditional university setting in the east of England to teach on a fast-track graduate trainee scheme, where social work trainees were located in 'units' of four students within different local authority children's social work teams.

The theoretical approach of the scheme was that of systemic, relationship-based practice and I assumed that working with students in groups of four would enhance my experience of teaching from a relationship-based approach. However, my assumption was wrong; it was not the cohort size that made the difference, it was how *empowered* I was to build relationships with the students. My experience of going into the workplace to teach differed between the various units. 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 colleagues of the students. The more welcoming, collaborative and open I experienced the invitation to be tended to be reflected in the sense of ownership and empowerment I felt in the space provided for me to teach in. My degree of ease depended on the extent to which I sensed I was accepted in the space, as opposed to coming in and 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 – the mutual engagement, empathy and empowerment that Edwards and Richards (2002) suggested. However, in order for this to happen effectively, I had to feel empowered in the space. I wondered whether some managers were uncertain about my presence and their uncertainty translated into my feelings of disempowerment and intrusion. I realised that when I taught in these units there was less conversation, 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 units. Edwards and 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. I realised that this was a key factor for engagement, rather than the cohort size. I eventually left the post with the fast-track graduate scheme and gained employment in a London university with cohorts of fifty students.

In the London university, 90% of the students on the social work course were African or Black British of African descent. I was reminded of the experience of my secondary education where I was taught in classes with a majority of black students. This prompted me to write two papers relating to culture and identity, in which the importance of culture and identity in relationship-based teaching was reiterated.

The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) is the overarching framework for social work in England, from pre-qualifying to senior positions. It has specific domains that social work students and social workers should achieve in their role (British Association of Social Workers, 2018). Domain 3 (diversity), states that by the time of qualifying, a student social worker should 'understand that diversity characterises and shapes human experience and is critical to the formation of identity' (2018: 21). However, I assert that the understanding of culture and identity often needs to be appreciated on a more complex level. This is necessary in order to comprehend how the history of the country of origin and the cultural heritage of both the social work educator and the students have influenced their identities and can affect relationship-based teaching. This is the last of the three themes by which I have grouped my publications. The first theme encompasses systemic practice and relationship-based teaching, emphasising the need for a relationship-based pedagogy. The second theme incorporates systemic/relational methods that are needed for a relational inquiry, and the third addresses cultural and identity issues that can impact on the relationship-building process.

Themes of the papers

Theme 1: Systemic, relationship-based papers

The aim of this set of papers is to present my argument regarding the need for a relationship-based pedagogy in social work education, one underpinned by systemic ideology. I suggest that this should be built on the relationship-based teaching approach introduced by Edwards and Richards (2002) and combined with the application of conversation (McNamee, 2007). Within this theme are four papers.

Table 1: The papers in theme 1

Date	Title and Journal
2014	Insider inquiry: developing a relationship based practice when teaching social work students. *Journal of International Scientific Publications, Educational Alternatives*, 12, 985-992 http://www.scientific-publications.net/en/article/1000579/
2015(b)	Relationship-based teaching: a relational ethics led approach to teaching social work. *Journal of Ethics and Social Welfare*, 9(4), 394-402 http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17496535.2015.1088703
2015(c)	Teaching as conversation: the methods adopted by an inside inquirer of social work relationship based teaching. *Educational Alternatives*, 13, 38-48 http://www.scientific-publications.net/en/article/1000914/
2015(d)	The pendulum swings (back); relationship based social work in England, then and now. *Educational Alternatives*, 13, 49-56 http://www.scientific-publications.net/en/article/1000915/

These publications represent my early stages of exploring relationship-based teaching. Walker (2014) was written immediately after I attended the inaugural 'Knowledge Transfer' summer residential workshop. As the facilitators had suggested, it was an opportunity for me to crystallise my ideas on how to move the inquiry forward.

The paper incorporated discussions about the methods I might employ and also considered why I was proposing a relationship-based pedagogy, what it might look like and in what ways it was different to didactic teaching approaches. In the abstract of Walker (2015c) I note that the paper was written as 'an attempt to answer my question [posed in Walker, 2014] of how I develop a relationship-based practice as a social work educator'. Walker (2015c) built on the relational aspects of mutual engagement, empathy and empowerment, based on the concepts presented by Edwards and Richards (2002) that I aimed to develop in my teaching. As these were key principles of their relationship-based approach, I sought to evaluate them to gain my own interpretation of what they could look like in practice.

Walker (2015b) also built on Walker (2014) in relation to the ethical issues raised, including how 'the concept of mutual empathy, engagement and empowerment posed by Edwards and Richards needs to be considered in the context of how mutuality can be achieved in relationships where there is a power in-balance' (2014: 990). 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 considered 'affect' in terms of 'to have an effect on'; this can take place regardless of the power differentiation between those involved: systemically everyone affects the other. The Walker (2015b) paper was dedicated to fully exploring ethical issues in relation to the principles of a relationship-based pedagogy. I deliberated for a long time 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. This is clear from the abstract of the paper, where I state, 'I aim to explore the ethics of my decision to create mutuality with students who have not formally agreed to be taught from a model which requires them to give of themselves' (2015b: 394).

The final paper in this theme, Walker (2015d), was inspired by the sudden closure of The College of Social Work, social work's then guiding body and one of the institutions that had endorsed the need for social workers to build effective relationships. I was concerned that my argument for a relationship-based pedagogy might not remain credible if this social work body was no longer in existence. Beresford (2015) reported to *The Guardian* that the closure of The College of Social Work was 'symbolic of a much deeper ideological struggle with the government and a weakening and restructuring of the profession' (2015: 1). The Conservative government was in power when the decision was made to close the college. Thoburn, Featherstone and Morris (2017) suggested that there was a political view that university social work education was substandard in comparison to the fast-track social work training programmes (such as the one I had worked in).

They argued that this view started with 'New Labour but [was] latched onto by the coalition and now the Conservative government' (2017: 1). Indeed, in a memorandum submitted by the Department for Education to Parliament's Education Committee (2015), paragraph 19 stated:

> We have supported the new fast-track Frontline qualification programme for child and family social workers and continued the Step Up to Social Work programme, investing £35m in both over the 2010-15 period (original emphasis).

The closure of The College of Social Work, along with the financial support provided to the fast-track work-based social work programmes, brought into my focus the potential fragility and the precarious nature of social work education, social work as a profession and support for relationship-based practice. This prompted me to write a paper that looked back at the history of relationship-based practice to understand the socio-political contexts that were present when it fell in and out of favour (Walker 2015d). In Walker (2015d) I reiterated my argument for the need to introduce a relationship-based pedagogy. In the abstract I noted the following:

> I end by presenting current relationship-based models underpinned by systemic practice and suggest this should be both the theoretical approach to teaching social work and the delivery of social work practice to provide a relational, pedagogical teaching approach (2015d: 49).

In the process of exploring the history of relationship-based practice (Walker, 2015d) I was able to understand why relationship-based approaches in social work practice had not always been the politically favoured theoretical model. Nevertheless, by this stage of my understanding of the principles of relationship-based teaching (based on Edwards and Richards, 2002 and McNamee, 2007), I remained confident in my argument for the need for a relationship-based pedagogy. Even if the relationship-based approach to social work practice did not survive the *political* turbulence in social work, relationships would still be of importance. As Ruch (2005) suggested, the relationship is the conduit through which change is initiated and through which help may be offered and accepted. However, it appeared that the demise of The College of Social Work did not signal the end of the importance placed by governing bodies on the need for social workers to have the skills to build relationships.

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. For example, 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, 2018a: 3),

while the KSS for 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).

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 a statement issued jointly by the Chief Executive of the British Association of Social Workers and the two Chief Social Workers for England (2018b), it was noted that as there had already been a government consultation and these KSS could be used as post-qualification standards for social workers and practice supervisors.

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 and 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 and 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).

This provides further reassurance that the focus on relationships in social work practice could continue for some time in England and also develop in Scotland. Consequently, my argument for developing a relationship-based pedagogy is relevant to social work education.

The papers in theme 1 address both the need for and the development of a relationship-based pedagogy in social work education, one underpinned by systemic ideology. The papers within the theme introduce relationship-based teaching, the ethics related to such teaching and the historical context of relationship-based social work practice. I conclude that although one of the governing bodies that endorsed relationship-based practice has since ceased to function, the current Chief Social Workers for England continue to support the need for the practice. This provides currency to the argument for a relationship-based pedagogy in social work. This would result in social work practice, supervision *and* education having consistency, by applying a relationship-based approach to all these aspects of social work. Relational methods also provide consistency with relationship-based research; the next theme discusses how I identify relational and systemic methods in my inquiry.

Theme 2: Systemic methodology

This theme emerged as the inquiry highlighted a need to have relational/systemic methods when making relational inquiries. This stemmed from my need to find appropriate methods with which to inquire into my teaching of a systemic, relationship-based approach. The papers in this theme (see Table 2) discuss qualitative methods that are relational and, as such, provide a coherent use within systemic inquiry. The methods themselves are not new; however, I have identified their *relational* aspects in order to emphasise how they can be applied effectively in systemic research. At the same time, I note the limitations of some frequently used methods, such as transcripts, when they are employed in systemic inquiries.

Table 2: The papers in theme 2

Date	Title and Journal
2015(a)	Literature reviews: generative and transformative textual conversations. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research.* 16(3). ISSN 1438-5627 http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/2291
2017(b)	*From participant observation to relational ethnography: a reflexive look through a systemic lens. *SAGE Research Methods Cases Part 2.* 10.4135/9781526404282 http://methods.sagepub.com/case/participant-observation-relational-ethnography-reflexive-look-systemic-lens *A video accompanying this paper is also in the public domain.
2017(d)	Transcripts: a useful tool in systemic inquiry? *SAGE Research Methods Cases Part 2.* 10.4135/9781473989702 http://methods.sagepub.com/case/transcripts-a-useful-tool-in-systemic-inquiry
2018(a)	Interpretive phenomenological analysis: Identifying the 'relational' in systemic inquiry. *SAGE Research Methods Cases Part 2.* 10.4135/9781526440709 http://methods.sagepub.com/case/interpretive-phenomenological-analysis-relational-in-systemic-inquiry?fromsearch=true

(Note: there are no page numbers in the Sage Research Methods publications in which a number of these papers appear).

Knudsen (2010) urged: 'If we want systems theory to be more than a world scheme then we need methods which can help us generate further analyses' (2010: 1-2). There is a lack of research methods that offer a coherent fit between systemic practice, thinking, theory and research, as systemic practice is a relatively new concept. This is an issue for practitioners/researchers who have a belief that embraces systemic/relational ideas where the inquiry has a systemic theoretical framework yet there is an absence of systemic methods to apply to it. In order to maximise the potential for a trustworthy outcome, the method chosen for the inquiry should be able to adequately identify, assess and explore the relational aspects of the research, looking at the connections, patterns and/or relatedness.

The four papers within this theme address how a qualitative method can be used in systemic inquiries. Walker (2015a) was intended to be a literature review chapter for the PDSP thesis, yet I experienced a dilemma when I came to write it. The process of conducting a literature review often requires that the author provide a detailed synopsis of how the papers in the review were sourced. I understand that this procedure gives transparency to the method the researcher undertook, which is relevant in any research paradigm. However, there is also a part of me that associates having to detail the process of the literature search with a positivist ideology, enabling other researchers to repeat the review in the same way. As my inquiry and my ideology (which I will discuss in more detail in the ontology section) do not sit within a positivist paradigm, my PDSP literature review chapter was a challenge to write.

At the same time as attempting to write my literature review chapter, I was supervising final year students who were writing their literature review dissertations. I noted that many of the students were struggling to understand the concept of writing a literature review as research in its own right, as opposed to conducting empirical research. However, as I stated in the abstract of Walker (2015a): 'After reading a paper by Montuori (2005), I considered how literature reviews could be situated systemically whereby connections and relatedness between people and ideas are identified' (Walker, 2015a). I saw literature reviews through a systemic lens whereby each text was in conversation with another, contesting or supporting the other's ideas and contributing to a shared discourse. I was thus able to present literature reviews in this way, which resonated with me and the students. Writing the paper supported all three principles of Edwards and Richards' (2002) relationship-based approach. I *empathised* with the students' lack of drive to start their literature reviews (albeit for different reasons). However, once I had written the literature review paper, I was able to *engage* the students with the ideas that emerged from it. Where they had struggled with the concept of a literature review as a piece of research, the paper enabled them to grasp that concept.

I got a sense of *mutual empowerment*: I felt empowered knowing that a paper I had written had directly benefited my students. As a result of seeing literature reviews systemically, the students appeared to be empowered and inspired to start their literature review dissertations.

The three other papers in this theme are connected to each other by the inquiry process. Walker (2017b) discusses my ethnographic approach. Ethnographic methods tend to generate notes, recordings and so on that require transcribing; transcripts are the focus of another paper in this theme (Walker, 2017d). Once the material is transcribed, it requires analysis. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was the method of analysis I chose and it is the subject of Walker (2018a). These three papers are further connected as they are all published for *SAGE Research Methods Cases*, a collection of specially commissioned case studies that address research design and methods application.

Walker (2017b) is a reflexive discussion of the ethnographic research I had conducted a decade earlier. I explain in the abstract that 'I provide a reflexive account of my experience through a systemic lens, exploring my immersion into the observed group and [seeing] ethnography as a relational, embodied research method' (2017b). This connects to my relationship-based inquiry, as I used an auto-ethnographic method.

With university ethical approval, I made audio recordings of my teaching over two semesters when I was in post at the university in the east of England. Although my preference had been to make video recordings to capture the unspoken dynamics in the class, some students asked not to be videoed. My decision to audio record rather than video record was made with consideration to the principles of Edwards and Richards' (2002) approach, including mutual engagement. I was concerned that there might be a lack of engagement from the students if I disregarded their request to not be video recorded, which could reduce the amount of participation and leave them feeling disempowered. Consequently, their learning experience might have been negatively impacted on by my prioritising my research needs above their learning, which would have been unethical. This exemplifies the relational aspect of ethnography; everyone is affected by the thoughts or actions of the others. Through the systemic lens I refer to in the paper (Walker, 2017b), I was able to identify the relational aspect of ethnography and discuss how the term 'relational ethnography' might be more appropriate than the term 'auto-ethnography', keeping in mind the interdependence that exists between everyone in the research environment.

Walker (2017d) was written as a result of the issues I experienced with the process of transcribing in a systemic inquiry. I had the audio recordings of my teaching professionally transcribed. This was a difficult decision to make, as I had envisaged transcribing all the material myself and becoming immersed in the data.

I had discussed being 'immersed' in inquiry early on in the research (Walker, 2014: 988) and hoped to immerse myself further to understand all aspects of what was emerging as a systemic, relationship-based method of teaching. Yet, the number of recordings meant that I had to concede to having the recordings professionally transcribed. However, I found aspects of using the transcripts frustrating and contrary to systemic thinking. The deductive process of the transcribing, particularly that done by others, lost elements of the whole, principally some of the nuances I had wanted to capture, such as ums and ahs that can indicate acknowledgement, empathy, curiosity, and so on. Still, by applying IPA (Walker, 2018a), I had 'permission' to include my own interpretations in place of some of the gaps left by the process of transcribing, something I discuss in the methodology section of this document. Furthermore, IPA positions the researcher *to be in relation to the data or research material* in terms of transparency, including in the interpretations in the analysis and the importance for the researcher to be reflexive. I discuss this in more detail under the heading 'Reflexive inquiry and practice'.

This theme regarding relational methods emerged as the need to have relational/systemic methods when making relational inquiries became evident during the research process. The papers in the theme discuss qualitative methods, of which I have identified the *relational* aspects in order to highlight how they can be applied effectively in systemic research. This theme developed as the inquiry progressed, as did that relating to culture and identity, which I will discuss next.

Theme 3: Culture and identity

I recall my first day of teaching social work students in 2013, in the university in the east of England. I arrived early to organise myself and was surprised by a student who appeared at the door:

'Are you Sharon, our new lecturer?'

'Yes, and you are…?' I queried with a smile

'Natalie' (a pseudonym)

'Welcome, Natalie, come in and take a seat'

'No, you're alright, I just wanted to see who was teaching us'.

With that she was gone. What was Natalie expecting and did I meet that expectation? I looked down at myself and wondered *what do I look like? A lecturer? Knowledgeable? Approachable? Distant?* My Eurocentric name possibly reveals more about my age than my ethnicity. Was my colour a surprise to her? Or even an issue?

As far as I know, it was not (Natalie and I went on to form what I perceived as a positive relationship and we had some contact with each other after she had qualified). Yet, I never forgot my first encounter with her: what did I look like to my students? Did my ethnicity have an impact when I was trying to develop a relationship-based practice, and if so, how?

For both publications in this theme (see Table 3) I used my-self to demonstrate how race, culture and identity are associated with education and the forming of relationships in the learning environment. The two papers are connected, as I argue that the history of our country of origin, our cultural heritage and the emergence of our identities are all intertwined. Furthermore, policies that shaped our childhood education also impact on this bundle of factors that contribute to who we are. This results in our locating ourselves not just geographically but socially, politically and ideologically in positions that are based on our lived experience and histories. For example, I may locate myself as educated and with spiritual and social justice beliefs, and as someone who generally seeks to form relationships with people who position themselves similarly, despite being able to grow and learn from those who locate themselves differently.

Table 3: The papers in theme 3

Date	Title and Journal
2017(a)	Foucault's genealogy of education policy: understanding ourselves as educators. *Educational Alternatives*, 15, 56-65 https://www.scientific-publications.net/en/article/1001562/
2017(c)	Relationship based teaching with (social work) students affected by globalism and the politics of location. *Educational Alternatives*, 15, 48-55 https://www.scientific-publications.net/en/article/1001561/

Walker (2017a) was written when I began working in the London university where 90% of the students on the course were African or Black British of African descent. The prospect of teaching in a university setting with a majority of black students took me back to my secondary education where a similarly high percentage of the students I was taught with were black. This led me to go far beyond reflection; I delved into levels of reflexivity I had never before entered.

Walker (2017a) starts with an exploration of a genealogy of education (Foucault, 1980), identifying the subjugated knowledges within the education policies that were responsible for shaping my education and impacting on my identity. I was curious about subjugated knowledges, which Foucault (1980) suggested were oppressive policies that are either hidden or have their true intent disguised. With reference to myself and my students, my abstract states, 'I intended to understand how the origins of where we were from and how I had been taught, affected our interactions with each other' (Walker, 2017a: 56). As I wanted to teach using a relationship-based approach that involved using 'the self' as a teaching tool, it was important to understand what had shaped who I was.

Conducting my own genealogy enabled me to discover a policy aimed at managing the number of migrant children in schools (Department of Education and Science, 1965), which undoubtedly influenced my identity and my-self. I believe it was the absence of a relationship with the teachers rather than the reality of being taught with a majority of black students, that made my secondary education an unpleasant experience. Nevertheless, knowing that I was going to teach and attempt to build relationships in a similar context to the one in which I had experienced a turbulent time, led me into a deeply reflexive space.

I found myself almost cross-examining each layer of my multiple identities in order to try to take a look at my-self from the outside. I considered the social GGRRAAACCEESS (Burnham, 2011) – Gender, Geography, Race, Religion, Age, Ability, Appearance, Culture, Class, Ethnicity, Education, Spirituality and Sexuality – 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 and 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.

I began to research into the experiences of black women in academia to get a sense of how I might be located within the classroom and in the wider higher education system. I discovered numerous challenges black women faced, not only when attempting to enter the 'Ivory Tower' of academia but also once inside it. For example, I became aware of the under-representation of black and minority ethnic (BME) staff in further education colleges (Commission for Black Staff in Further Education, 2002) and the disparity in pay between BME and white staff (Deem and Morley, 2006). BME staff were also being overlooked for promotions or not encouraged to apply to posts for progression (Equality Challenge Unit, 2011). These inequalities have resulted in significantly low numbers of black people in academic positions and, when they are in such positions, they are usually those of a lower ranking, or sessional or part-time work.

The Equality Challenge Unit (2015) found that BME staff comprised 3.9% of senior managers in UK academia and that, of these, only 0.5% were black (2015: 180). The Equality Challenge Unit (2015) looked at both race and gender and found that 7.1% of professors in the UK were BME men and only 1.8% BME women (2015: 278).

With such low representations of black staff, it may not be surprising to learn that Bhopal and Jackson (2013) found that many BME academics felt like '"outsiders" in their own university...this feeling of being an "outsider" resulted in part from experiences of subtle exclusion' (2013: ii). I had learned from my experience of teaching on the fast-track graduate trainee scheme how feeling like an 'outsider' and as uninvited impacted on my sense of empowerment and consequently on my confidence in the relationship-building approach. Within the racialised and gendered context of higher education institutions, it was impossible to *not* consider how my race and gender might impact on the relationships I intended to develop with and between the students. With a low representation of black women in academia, students might experience being taught by me (a black woman) as a challenge/unfamiliar/uncomfortable. Might some students assume I had limited skills if they were familiar with seeing BME staff in lower-ranking positions? Such concerns could impact on how they located me and formed relationships with me – hence my argument regarding culture and identity.

Walker (2017c) was a paper I had wanted to write from my very first day of teaching. I have alluded to the disconnect between the students I observed in the east of England university. This disconnect was personified by a physical colour divide, with the black students seated on one side of the room and the white students on the other. It has taken me several years to find the courage to explore this seating arrangement without assuming that race was the only issue. I felt that there was a multiplex of matters I was yet to understand and I could not write about them until I had further clarity. This clarity emerged through the process of reflexivity and of considering the role of identity in conjunction with race. I refer to the fact that I needed 'courage' to write the paper, as I felt I could easily appear to be accusing the students of racist behaviours. Therefore, I needed the courage and confidence to be able to discuss my observations with more understanding of what the racial divide might mean. Reflexivity enabled me to step back and take an unencumbered look at how the students had located themselves in the room. In my abstract in Walker (2017c) I noted the factors that seemed to have contributed to the divide: 'students from countries connected by historical colonisation yet separated by language, culture and identity'. At the time of writing the paper I felt able to provide an appraisal of what might have led to the dynamics between the students.

Theme 3 emerged as the inquiry developed and the role of culture, race and identity became more central to my understanding of how we build relationships and with whom. The multi-faceted historical factors that shape our identity and how we position ourselves and others in society can be reflected in the classroom and affect the relationships we make as educators and students. The concept of occurrences in the classroom mirroring occurrences in wider society fits with systemic ideology, in that what happens in the macro systems in society is connected to and reflects the micro systems in which we live. In the next section I intend to present my understanding of what systemic practice is and how it has evolved, including a range of concepts that have grown from it.

2. The Theoretical Framework: from systems theory to systemic practice

I have presented my argument for the need for a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy in response to the social work reforms that called for social workers to have the ability to build relationships with their service users and colleagues. As such, it is important for me to engage in a brief discourse exploring didactic and individualistic approaches to teaching as opposed to a systemic, relationship-based approach. This section will explain my understanding of what systemic practice is before discussing what I envisage a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy to be.

I was introduced to systemic practice during my training as a social worker in the early 1990s. My first student placement was in what was then known as Child Guidance – the equivalent of the current Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). My second placement in a couple and family counselling organisation also used systemic approaches, which helped me to build on my learning of systemic practice in a new context. My placement experience was unique in that both placements had the therapeutic underpinning that is the Milan systemic approach. The Milan approach (Boscolo et al, 1987; Cecchin, 1987), a systemic form of family therapy, suggests that there is no normative way in which families should function; each family have their own norms, rules and cultures that enable them to perform as a family system. If the family has become dysfunctional, this means that the rules of the family need to be changed (Walker and Akister, 2004). In statutory social work, Pincus and Minahan (1973) introduced their approach to systemic social work practice. They emphasised the importance of the client–worker relationship whereby 'the worker's position and purpose influence the type of relationships he forms with the various systems he encounters in his change efforts. These relationships are the medium through which he carries out his activities' (1973: 69). Pincus and Minahan further suggested: 'A relationship can be thought of as an effective bond between the worker and other systems operating within a major posture or atmosphere of collaboration, bargaining or conflict' (1973: 73).

What connected the Milan approach and the Pincus and Minahan model (1973) was the emphasis on the importance of relationships, stemming from general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Von Bertalanffy proposed that systems comprised a range of entities that interacted with each other to make the whole. There is no focus on an individual part; all parts are interdependent. This relates to my argument regarding the need for a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy. Social work practice can be seen as one system, within which social workers intervene in the lives of children and vulnerable adults. Social work education is another system, in which student social workers are taught how to intervene.
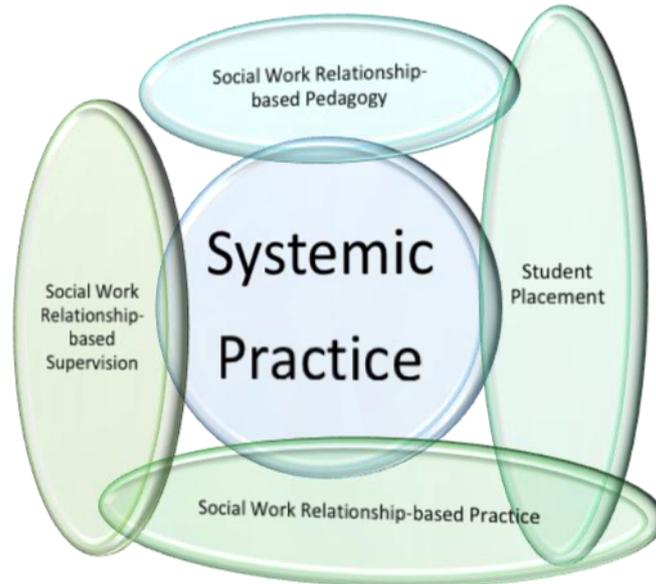
Diagram 1: Systemic social work practice systems

The systems are interdependent and connect with each other, particularly during practice placements (see Diagram 1). As such, a pedagogy that is reflective of the approach taken in practice is needed in order for these systems to operate in an effective equilibrium. The connections between systems have been recognised in the decision by the Chief Social Workers in England to have relationship-based supervision, thereby providing a coherence with relationship-based social work practice. This is the connection I am arguing needs to be extended to social work education.

While von Bertalanffy presented the concept of human systems, Bateson (1972) made two major contributions, firstly by introducing the idea of feedback loops within systems, and secondly, with his realisation that a practitioner cannot remain in a neutral position outside of a family system (Bateson, 1979). Post Bateson, systemic thinkers understood that each person in the family affected the others through the way in which they communicated via this feedback loop, thus there was no individual blame. By applying the concept of feedback loops to human systems, social workers were able to reconsider the linear process of the prevailing psychodynamic theory, which had proposed that issues were caused by an individual and that the family were affected by that person. Hedges (2005) noted that '[s]ystemic thinking created a profound shift from an individual to an interpersonal perspective' (2005: 8). Bateson (1979) made his second contribution by stating that the practitioner becomes part of the family system.

This suggested that the contribution made by a practitioner to the feedback loop in the family system could potentially be 'the difference that makes the difference' (Bateson, 1979: 459) in terms of bringing about the change the family required. This raised another crucial element regarding what the practitioner *said* while part of this feedback loop, and language and dialogue subsequently became a hugely important aspect of systemic practice. In my paper on literature reviews (2015a) I stress the transformative possibilities of dialogues:

> [T]he dialogical nature in the way the texts speak to each other in a literature review has the potential to be transformative, just as spoken dialogues are when they generate new knowledge (2015a: para 3).

What transpired after this emphasis on language was that a plethora of concepts emerged from systemic thinking, including dialogues (Anderson, 1997; Anderson and Goolishian, 1988; Shotter and Katz, 1998), communication processes (Pearce, 1994), social construction (Shotter and Gergen, 1989; McNamee and Gergen, 1992), relational responsibility (McNamee and Gergen, 1999), an ethical stance (Cecchin, Lane and Ray, 1992), power (Hoffman, 1985) and reflexivity (Burnham, 1992, 2005; Etherington, 2004), and the importance of the cultural and historical context (Burnham, 2005).

Different aspects of these systemic ideas filtered into social work practice in various organisations, hence the divergence between Pincus and Minahan (1973) and the Milan approach. However, by the time I had qualified and had entered statutory social work in 1992, the Pincus and Minahan (1973) approach was on the decline. The practice I observed then epitomised a period of eclecticism, utilising a range of social work models (Walker, 2015d).

Currently, the Milan approach has been adopted as a theoretical model of a relationship-based practice that social workers apply in the fast-track graduate programme for which I worked. It has also been adopted by a number of local authorities not involved in the fast-track programme (Forrester et al, 2013). However, some fundamental aspects of the Milan approach are not well aligned to a statutory context. For example, Cecchin, Lane and Ray (1992) argued for therapists to be irreverent, as this allows them to give themselves permission to be led by the family, which is considered to be an 'ethical stance'. Yet, it is not always possible to be led by the service user, due to the boundaries set by statutory procedures and safeguarding concerns. Cecchin, Lane and Ray (1992) were concerned that systemic family therapy could be used as a conduit for the change required by the authoritative body. In statutory social work, denying this authoritative position could undermine the protection of the child or vulnerable adult. Hence, I was reluctant to utilise the Milan approach in my pedagogical method and instead opted to build on Edwards and Richards' (2002) approach, which specifically related to social work education.

Systems theory has thus shifted away from a technical science and has developed into a systemic practice that is still evident in therapeutic and statutory social work practice in England. While systemic ideas permeated into social work, they also influenced teaching and education (albeit not specifically in social work). The relational concepts emanated from a social constructionist route, with the impact more apparent in the USA and Canada than in England, under the influence of Anderson and Swim (1993), Gergen (1982) and McNamee and Gergen (1999). Anderson and Swim (1993) argued: 'The creation of new narrative or knowledge is not standardised; it is realised in the process of conversation and relationship' (1993: 151). McNamee and Moscheta (2015) further explained:

> As we can see, to the social constructionist, we create and maintain meaning in relation to other people. Since meaning and knowledge are by-products of relations, neither can be merely conveyed from one mind to another (2015: 26).

Fundamentally, they are arguing that knowledge is constructed while relating to others through conversation, and this needs to be considered when teaching. The next sub-section discusses the role of systemic, relationship-based practice in education.

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

In the introduction to the paper 'The pendulum swings back' (Walker, 2015d) I assert:

> Relationship based practice is more than just using relationship skills in social work; I suggest the nature of the relationship is central to the potential for learning and change between the service user and social worker, similarly, for the educator and social work student (2015d: 49).

In the same paper I explain:

> Sadd (2012) notes three theoretical frameworks: psychoanalytical, attachment and systems theory underpin relationship-based practice (2015d: 49).

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. US scholars, Edwards and Richards (2002), positioned themselves within the systemic approach to the relationship-based teaching of social work students.

Edwards and 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 and 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).

Gergen (2015) also 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 and 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. Morrison and 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).

This approach to teaching and learning is what I believe was missing from my secondary education (Walker, 2017a), during which the majority of students were black and the majority of teachers white. A single perspective from the teacher was dictated to us as students with what appeared to be no collaboration or no desire to build a relationship. Morrison and Chorba (2015) argued that 'traditional' teaching involves a hierarchy in the teacher–student relationship and they suggested that collaborative approaches that include multiple views via conversation will contribute to a relational style of learning. 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 and 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.

Taking the positions of Edwards and Richards (2002), Gergen (2015), Morrison and Chorba (2015) and McNamee (2007), I would summarise 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. McNamee and Moscheta (2015) noted:

> This perspective is aligned with Paulo Freire's (1970) ideas and the distinction he makes between 'banking' and problem-solving education, where 'banking' presumes that educators/teachers 'deposit' information into the minds of students (who are the depositories). Problem-solving education, on the other hand, refers to a view of where students and teachers engage in dialogue, becoming collaborators in the construction of knowledge (2015: 26).

Next, I will discuss 'traditional' approaches to teaching in the context of Freire (1970) (also see Walker, 2014) in order to explore the differences between what Freire presents as traditional teaching and the systemic, relationship-based pedagogy I argue is needed in social work education.

Systemic, relationship-based teaching and traditional approaches to teaching social work students

Walker (2014) discusses Freire and his 'traditional' concept of teaching. The paper also refers to the views of Tight (1996), who argued that the facilitation of self-directed learning had become a popular approach to teaching during the mid-1990s. A few years later Walkin (2000) suggested that there was a return to didactic teaching – the 'banking style' Freire referred to. Despite Freire's concepts being subject to criticism, particularly in relation to his ideology of power and lack of hierarchy in the student–teacher relationship (Facundo, 1984; Weiler, 1991), I see the relevance of Freire's work for a number of reasons. Firstly, he raised an awareness of the significance of a pedagogical approach (although my approach differs from what Freire was proposing), and I am arguing that there is a need for a specific pedagogy when teaching social work students. Secondly, Freire recognised the importance of the teacher–student relationship, which he suggested should be one of respect and democracy, in which the educator seeks to replace the traditional teacher–student hierarchy with egalitarian interactions (1970: 77). Thirdly, Freire introduced the concept of dialogue in teaching. McNamee (2007) later incorporated a similar focus on conversation, which I include in the process of engaging students and relationship building.

Freire suggested that dialogues need to happen to create the potential for engagement and mutuality whereby the student's contribution could lead to the emergence of new knowledge. He argued that what happens in traditional teaching is a narrative approach – not to be confused with the type of narrative associated with storytelling (White and Epston, 1990) but rather a single narrative or monologue during which talk is directed to students. Gergen, McNamee and Barrett (2001) proposed a relationality to monologues, suggesting: 'For even monologue is addressed to someone – either present or implied' (2001: 698). These authors might argue that what is relational is the reaction or unspoken response the person will have on hearing the monologue, for example laughter, sadness or reflection. However, in the teaching environment, Freire noted that the student's response to the teacher's monologue is often to 'memorize mechanically the narrated content' (1970: 53). Without the expectation or invitation of a verbal response, no new knowledge or learning is generated. Freire believed that the monological, narrative style maintained the status quo by closing down any opportunity for the students to enter into a dialogue or to challenge the teacher, which might lead to a different perspective or point of view.

Freire suggested that the narrative style oppresses any thinking that might generate new knowledge. He continued: 'Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués...[t]his is the 'banking' concept of education' (1970: 53).

I felt it was important to explore the relevance of Freire's view of traditional teaching in the context of current higher education institutions (HEIs) in England. Furthermore, I wanted to discover whether there was a possibility that some students might prefer the 'traditional' banking style of teaching to one in which they would be expected to have a collaborative and participatory role. In Walker (2014) I note that Morley (2003) argued: 'Whereas in the 1960s students were seen as change agents, radicals and transgressives, their identity at the beginning of the twenty-first century is described in the language of the market' (2003: 83). The students are seen – and often see themselves – as consumers, with education being a means of gaining employment once they have graduated. In Walker (2014) I also discuss Williams (2010), who explored student identity in the wake of students becoming fee payers. Williams (2010) suggested that 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. Williams noted that students see their role as requiring them to attend class and receive knowledge, which seems analogous to the narrative education Freire speaks of. Williams (2010) seems to suggest that the students, rather than their being oppressed, *want* to have knowledge they have purchased deposited into them. This position would not apply to trainees on fast-track graduate schemes, as they receive a bursary for being employed as trainee social workers and do not pay fees. Nevertheless, social work students in general might take a different position from the stance Morley (2003) and Williams (2010) presented.

The underpinning value base in social work is social justice, which implies that students might want to become active collaborators in their learning in order to develop empowerment with which to challenge the status quo and generate new knowledge. The British Association of Social Workers code of ethics makes it clear that 'social workers are change agents in society and in the lives of the individuals, families and communities they serve' (2012: 6). However, there will be differences in the extent to which these students perceive themselves as change agents compared with those who expect to have 'purchased' their knowledge by virtue of paying fees. Furthermore, although the fast-track trainees are not fee payers and may not prefer the 'banking' approach for that reason, the social work qualification is condensed into one year, resulting in frequent assignments. This could be a motivating factor for some students in their wanting to memorise material for reasons of speed rather than wanting to learn to gain knowledge.

Since Freire's publications (1970, 1972, 1976), there has been evidence to support the notion that narrative education, or what has more latterly become known as didactic teaching, has limitations for student learning (Biggs, 1999). I discuss the arguments proposed by Banning (2005) and Walkin (2000) in Walker (2014: 987). Banning (2005) suggested that students learn by rote, become bored and engage less in participation and reflection when being taught by didactic methods. Banning recommended that an alternative approach to teaching should be offered, such as a conversational approach that is engaging, participative and lends itself to reflection. The pedagogical approach I am arguing for encompasses all these aspects. Walkin (2000) argued that didactic methods continue to be used in lectures as 'an economical means of transmitting factual information to a large audience, although there is no guarantee that effective learning will result' (2000: 55). Although Walkin's statement was made some years ago, it maintains currency.

Similar to Morley (2003), 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. As discussed earlier, 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 units, an experience that affected my sense of empowerment, my teaching and the process of relationship building. In a climate where social work educators 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: the narrative/didactic approach. Similarly, in social work practice Hingley-Jones and Ruch (2016) suggested that in times of financial austerity and reduced resources, social workers can emotionally distance themselves from the service user's experience rather than work from a relationship-based approach.

Educators may also choose to use didactic methods when 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. As a black woman, I am aware of the transient nature of the power I hold…depending on the context and the relationship I am in, I can be an oppressor (my role as educator), a member of an oppressed group (my identity as both black and female) or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed (2015b: 399).

Despite these challenges, I continue to be moved to teach from a systemic, relationship-based approach and argue that this is what is needed to bring coherence between social work teaching and practice. McNamee (2007) suggested that we can approach teaching as 'a form of practice – an activity and a conversation – rather than a technique for conveying knowledge' (2007: 317) by reconfiguring teaching as a collaborative practice. In this sense, learning is not the sole responsibility of the teacher; the students take some responsibility. Anderson and Swim (1993) first noted:

The teacher, like the student is always in the process of learning. We view the learning process as a collaborative and egalitarian effort in which new meaning and change evolve though dialogue (1993: 145).

Anderson and Swim stated that critical to their view of learning are the notions of language, knowledge, narrative and conversation. They suggested: 'Narrative and narrative knowing emerge from, are the social construction of, persons in conversation with one another and with themselves' (1993: 146). Anderson and Swim's interpretation of narrative is one that is synonymous with 'storytelling'. Like Freire, they embrace a move away from the concept of knowledge as being separate from the knower 'as a one-way street' (1993: 146) towards 'knowledge and the knower [being] interactionally dependent. Everything (knowledge, meanings, beliefs, feelings) is co-authored in, is a product of, a community of persons and relationships' (1993: 146).

The dialogical style advocated by Freire (1970) contributes to mutual engagement as suggested by Edwards and Richards (2002) and mutual engagement increases the potential for dialogue. There is an interdependence between the two. The more conversation and engagement, the more opportunity there is for the relationship to develop, creating further increases in dialogue, which can result in transformative and relational learning. This recursive nature is important to build on as Couture and Tomm (2014) noted that 'it is usually difficult to enter into, to hold onto, and to work within a *relational perspective'* (2014: 57, original emphasis).

It may be far too easy to fall into a pattern of Freire's banking concept of education, particularly with the demands of the job in times of austerity, when students are reluctant to participate and there is inequality that challenges the ability to teach from a systemic, relational approach. What enables me to maintain the desire to work from this approach is that it is coherent with my ideology, which encompasses beliefs I hold about how knowledge is generated and shared. My views are also reflected in how I believe research should be approached, the types of method that ought to be used and the rationale behind those choices. I will clarify my research beliefs in the next section, where I discuss ontology and epistemology and my position on these aspects of research.

3. The Research Paradigm: my ontological and epistemological position

Hollway (2008) referred to ontology, epistemology and methodology as 'the trio of principles informing research' (2008: 137). These three aspects of research are important in providing a conceptual framework or paradigm, which Guba (1990) defined as 'a basic set of beliefs that guides action' (Guba, 1990: 17). Guba further noted:

1) *Ontological*: What is the nature of the 'knowable'? Or, what is the nature of 'reality'?

2) *Epistemological*: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?

3) *Methodological*: How should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge? (1990: 18, original emphasis)

Twenty years since Guba provided these definitions, there has been a greater understanding of the connection between the researcher and the research trio. For example, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) noted that researcher's beliefs, values and experiences will influence their ontological and epistemological beliefs and subsequently their methodological choices. They suggested:

> The gendered, multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology), which are then examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 11).

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) referred to elements of the self and identity that influence how this research process will be approached. Since the definition provided by Guba (1990), there has been a recognition that *who* the researcher is will influence their world view and ultimately their research interest, the research methods they choose and how they interpret the research data. Dillard (2006) also recognises that there has been a

> reframing of the research endeavor as an *ideological* undertaking, one deeply embedded within the traditions, perspectives, viewpoints, cultural understandings, and discourse style of the researcher (2006: 3, original emphasis).

Over time, four major interpretive paradigms have developed in relation to research: 'positivist and post-positivist, constructivist-interpretive, critical (Marxist, emancipatory) and feminist post-structural' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 13). I locate myself as most closely belonging to a constructivist-interpretive paradigm which assumes:

a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities),

a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and

a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures

(Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 13).

Palmer (1983) asserted 'Truth – whenever it may be found and in whatever form – is personal, to be known in personal relationship' (1983: 49). Here, Palmer's 'truth' is synonymous with Denzin and Lincoln's 'realities'. My belief is that there are multiple realities or truths that are relative to the people involved. This belief transpires from my conviction that truths derive from lived experiences and are emergent – as Palmer suggests – in relationships. I consider that truths/realities and knowledge are what people construct together. I support Gergen's (2015) proposal that knowledge is generated in a relational way, between people who are making sense of something, similar to Anderson and Swim, who argue that knowing emerges from persons in conversation with one another and with themselves (1993: 146). The concept of knowledge emerging through dialogue is evident in my body of work, particularly from the influence of McNamee (2007). The importance I afford to dialogue and conversation extends beyond a 'people discourse' to include texts, for example in 'Literature reviews' (Walker 2015a), where I discuss how texts are in dialogue with each other. It is from my ontological position that my belief in a subjective epistemology where 'knower and respondent co-create understandings' emerges (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 13). This is key to my argument for a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy and the need to have conversations in which knowledge can be co-constructed. I reiterate this in Walker (2017d):

[By] providing them [the students] with the opportunity to become learning participants, actively engaging in dialogue to develop their knowledge, I wanted *us* to create meaning *together*, rather than them be bystanders in a classroom where I might be expected to espouse knowledge that they would digest and regurgitate at some later stage (2017d, original emphasis).

I, as the educator, and the students bring existing knowledge and experience, our race/cultural identity and our gendered perspectives to the classroom. These personal characteristics of our selves make a subjective contribution to how knowledges are generated and interpreted. Rather than deny the subjectivity in the research process, an ethical approach is for me to be transparent about my beliefs and where they have emerged from. I consider there to be benefits to subjectivity, as it provides an opportunity for the researcher to declare who they are, their interest in the inquiry and how their experiences, gender and cultural perspective, ethics and values might influence the research process and outcome.

There are opportunities for openness and engagement through writing in the first person, a subjective style in which the researcher addresses the reader directly. All my publications are written in the first person for this reason. My writing is reflective of a subjective epistemology in which knower and respondent co-create understandings; I hope the knowledge the reader gains from my papers will feel accessible because of the first-person style. As I am writing, I have the reader in mind. I am continuously thinking about what sense they will make of my words and how they might interpret them. On occasions, by thinking about how my writing might be interpreted, new ideas emerge for me. As such, even with the reader absent, the potential is there for them to influence my writing, in the same way as I intend my writing to generate new knowledge and to influence the reader.

I discuss writing in the first person in more detail in the next sub-section as my own contribution to a subjective epistemology.

Epistemological writing: writing in relation to the reader

I decided early on to write in a way that felt relational, conversational and inviting to the reader. In Walker (2015a) I argue that writing in the first person allows voices to be heard – my voice as the writer – as 'it opens up a number of possibilities, which writing in the third person purposefully seeks to shut down: subjectivity verses objectivity, dialogical verses monological, and transparency verses concealment' (Walker, 2015a: para 6). In Walker (2015a) I refer to Kirsch (1994), who took a position that power and politics underpin the discouragement of the use of the first person:

> Omitting the authorial I is a rhetorical strategy that can be (and has been) used to turn opinion into truth, to silence women and other marginalized groups, and to trivialize their concerns ... [T]he uses of an authorial I (or lack thereof) have social, moral, and political consequences for which authors bear responsibility (Kirsch, 1994: 382).

This statement made by Kirsch resonates with me as a woman from a marginalised ethnic group. I feel a sense of empowerment in taking ownership of my voice, which can often be denied in society and by the privileged research gate-keepers. I seek to have transparency with the reader, to build a relationship by inviting them to see and hear how I position myself in the world through my thoughts and writing. A subjectivity, which is honest and self-contested through reflexivity, is offered to the reader as an ethical way of writing; they know who I am and I take responsibility for my writing. Gergen (2007), similar to Kirsch (1994), appears to have taken a political position when he suggests that we should contest the traditional, dominant forms of writing in academia that are often perpetuated in the natural sciences, as they lead to isolating subcultures in the academic domain. Gergen (2007) takes a different position for his writing in the first person, he states:

My attempt here is…to explore the relational implications of various genres of scholarly inscription. As I shall propose, writing is fundamentally an action within a relationship; it is within relationship that writing gains its meaning and significance, and our manner of writing simultaneously invites certain forms of relationship while discouraging or suppressing others (Gergen, 2007: 113).

From my epistemological and systemic perspective, writing should be subjective and relational. For me, the language of the third person is closed, protecting the identity of the writer from the reader, often under the guise of 'objectivity'. Within this context, there is little invitation and less relationality. Gergen (2007) quoted Shotter when he asked 'Is there something in our current circumstances that makes us (or at least some of us) anxious about owning certain of our own words, or taking a stand?' (Shotter, 1997: 17-18, cited in Gergen 2007: 114). Shotter (2010) talked from a personal position when he stated 'I want to try to write "participatively" i.e., from within an ongoing involvement within the activities in question, not as a detached outsider to them' (2010: 202). Simon (2012) presented an alternative viewpoint by reframing reading as a dialogical activity. As a reader, Simon (2012) hoped the writer would

invite me into a conversation with them or spark some reflexive movement in my inner dialogue. I have come to expect a coherence between that which the writer is describing and how they are involving me in the presentation of those ideas (2012: para 1).

Another aspect of my writing that can be contested by the positivist paradigm is my use of direct quotes from other scholars. An academic etiquette related to this suggests that a direct quote should be made only when it is a definition or something of such complexity that the meaning might be lost in a summarised form. However, I *want* the actual words of the other scholar to be seen and heard and I *want* there to be dialogue on the page – an exchange between my text and theirs. I want to show reverence to what they have said without summarising and changing their words. This lends itself to a constructivist-interpretivist way of thinking about knowledge and the *exchange* that occurs when knowledge is emergent. There are journals to which I have submitted papers that have requested that I re-write in the third person. I have declined to do this, not wanting to compromise my beliefs and values or my 'ethic of personal accountability' (Hill-Collins, 2000: 284). I also maintain my position on the direct use of quotes and employ them in a way I believe is respectful to the scholar. Having debated ontological and epistemological positions and having connected them to my body of work, I now move on to discuss the final element of the 'trio of principles informing research' (Hollway, 2008: 137), that of methodology.

4. Methodology: how my ontological and epistemological positions connect with my methodology

While Hill-Collins (2000) suggested that positivist methodologies require researchers to distance themselves from the object, to maintain an emotion-free position and keep separate their own ethics and values, the opposite is true for the constructivist-interpretive paradigm and associated methodologies. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) referred to a naturalistic set of methodological procedures as the third element of a constructivist-interpretive paradigm. My research methods are 'auto'-biographical, an approach that sits within the methodological aspect of the paradigm. However, I prefer to use the term 'relational'-biographical, as I am looking at my-self in relation to others. For me it is important to distinguish between 'auto' and 'relational', as auto implies the individual whereas the purpose of my relational-biographical approach is to understand who I am *in relation to others.* This is similar to when Simon (2013) referred to 'relational ethnography' rather than 'auto-ethnography'. Simon stated: 'I use the term *relational ethnography* for speaking reflexively and dialogically about *and from within* relationships' (2013: para 8, original emphasis).

I have chosen three methodologies that are relationally biographical: relational ethnography to examine my teaching; interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to make sense of the data gathered from my teaching; and self-study conducted through a genealogy of education to look back at my education, in order to explore my educational past. Although I have grouped these under the umbrella of relational-biographical methodologies, they are seen as methodologies in their own right. Ellis (2004) used the term auto-ethnography, which can be deemed a methodology, as the options for data collection include a range of methods such as 'research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political' (2004: xix). The connections that Ellis (2004) referred to acknowledge the relational aspects of auto-ethnography. My second methodology, IPA, is argued by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) to be a methodology rather than a method, as they consider it to be more than a technique for analysing data. They suggested:

> IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of human lived experience. And it aims to conduct this examination in a way which as far as possible enables that experience to be expressed in its own terms, rather than according to predefined category systems (2009: 32).

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) noted that the lived experience can be an activity or a response to that activity, 'remembering, regretting, desiring and so forth' (2009: 33). IPA provided a framework for the activity of my teaching and the emotional responses to be interpreted and analysed in relation to the students. Self-study, the third methodology I selected, is a methodological approach that seeks to enable the educator to understand and transform their practice (Anderson-Patton and Bass, 2002).

Reflexivity is an aspect of each of these methodologies and the tool that enabled me to look critically at the research process, explore the methodologies chosen, understand how they fit within a systemic framework and identify what new knowledge they lead to. These methodologies provide a coherence with my ontology and epistemology, as they identify what has been co-constructed when building the relationships between me and the students. The methodologies aim to create a deeper understanding of all aspects of my-self in relation to others.

Dillard (2006) suggested that as a teacher or researcher these are not jobs you do but 'something you are engaged *with*, a way of being in the world in relationship with others' (2006: 42, original emphasis), and this is true of my research, which was to understand how to develop a relationship-based teaching pedagogy. Dillard argued that 'such service [to humanity] begins with *engaging oneself*, as the researcher or teacher, in continuous reflection, examination, and exploration of one's heart and mind for the true purposes of one's work' (2006: 42, my emphasis). The methodologies I chose to 'engage my-self' enabled me to know who it was I hoped the students would be in relationship with. Indeed, Gouldner argued: 'There is no knowledge of the world that is not knowledge of our own experience of it and in relationship to it' (1970: 28).

In Walker (2017a) I quote Brookfield (1995), who argued that 'the most significant and most deeply embedded influences that operate on us are the images, models, and conception of teaching derived from our own experience of learning' (1995: 49). As such, the self-study provided an opportunity to journey back through my education. Brookfield went on to say: 'Our autobiographies as learners in childhood, adolescence and young adulthood frame our approach to teaching at the start of our careers' (1995: 50). The purpose of looking back with the self-study is also to review how my education may have influenced the shaping of my identity. In the process of understanding how to develop a relationship-based pedagogy, a factor that transpired for me was a reminder of my 'self' and my identity as a black woman, which influenced my growing argument for the need to understand the role of culture and identity in relationship-based teaching. Jude (2013) appears to have had a similar re-discovery of self when she stated:

> As a black therapist I became aware that there were points in my training and practice where I had become unconsciously blind and, on some occasions, experienced amnesia with regard to the importance of my ancestry, cultural roots and identity (2013: 85).

It is not that I had forgotten that I was black or female, but in the course of looking at how to build relationships with others I had to hold a mirror up to my-self in order to know *who* I presented – what I looked like to others, thinking back to my encounter with Natalie. The process of looking back is a central component of reflexivity, and I discuss this next.

Reflexive inquiry and practice

The importance of reflexivity in social work has been well documented (D'Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez, 2007; Parton and O'Byrne, 2000; Schon, 1983) and the notion of reflexivity has been of equal importance in education (Brookfield, 1995; Dewey, 1933; Fook, 2010; Mezirow, 1990), with varying definitions provided. Cunliffe (2003) noted the difficulty in defining reflexivity due to its emergence from divergent fields. Etherington (2004) stated that 'I understand researcher reflexivity as the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of the inquiry' (2004: 31-32) The common theme threaded through these definitions is a belief that reflexivity is crucial in relational, professional practice to prevent the practitioner from being 'trapped in unexamined judgments, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations' (Larrivee, 2000: 293). With the growth in recognition of reflexivity as a tool to enhance relational practice, reflexivity has also come to be perceived as a legitimate research methodology (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000: Etherington, 2004; Oliver, 2005). The purpose of my inquiry was to be an educator who taught from a systemic, relationship-based approach, therefore I needed to understand the development of my-self and how this gave me agency to become the educator I hoped to be. Etherington suggested that 'the use of "self" has become more and more legitimate in research' (2004: 19). Etherington (2004) discussed the range of applications of reflexivity in research. She suggested that reflexivity can be used to check for subjective bias during the inquiry as well as its being used as a method for the inquiry.

Alvesson and Sköldberg used the terms reflection and reflexivity interchangeably and noted that 'reflective research has two basic characteristics: careful interpretation and reflection. The first implies that all references – trivial and non-trivial – to empirical data are the *results of interpretation*' (2000: 5, original emphasis). A process of subjective interpretation is ongoing throughout the many and varied stages of my inquiry. Alvesson and Sköldberg advised: 'This calls for the utmost awareness of the theoretical assumptions, the importance of language and pre-understanding' (2000: 5). A number of the papers that form my body of work emerged from my reflexivity throughout the research process. For example, Walker (2015b) reflected on the ethics of expecting mutuality from the students, Walker (2015d) reflected on the historical popularity of relationship-based approaches, while Walker (2017d) reflected on the use of transcripts in systemic inquiries. The second basic characteristic that Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) referred to is reflection, which 'turns attention "inwards" towards the person of the researcher, the relevant research community, society as a whole…' (2000: 5). They further proposed that '[s]ystematic reflection on several different levels can endow the interpretation with a quality that makes empirical research of value' (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000: 6).

This appears to be a reflexive challenge that contests the skill of the researcher, yet one that adds 'rigour' to the inquiry process. Koch and Harrington (1998) argued that reflexivity provides rigour, believability and plausibility.

The papers in theme 3 address these points made by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000). For example, in Walker (2017a) the process of conducting my genealogy of education policies enabled me to 'turn attention "inwards"', as did Walker (2017c), in which I explored the politics of location of myself and the students. Cunliffe (2003) pointed out that 'reflexivity also raises fundamental questions about our ability as researchers to capture the complex, interactional and emergent nature of our social experience' (2003: 984). Etherington (2004) included auto-ethnography, autobiography and heuristic methodologies as primary reflexive methodologies. Walker (2017b) reflexively looks back at the relational ethnographic study I had conducted years before, exploring the knowledge I had gained about the need to be reflexive. I wanted to remind myself and share with the readers how crucial reflexivity is throughout the research process. Alvesson and Sköldberg proposed that important aspects of primary reflexive methods include '[i]nterpreting one's own interpretations from other perspectives, looking at one's own perspectives and turning a self-critical eye onto one's own authority as interpreter and author' (2000: vii). This process of interpretation was key to the original research and after some challenges in analysing the audio recordings of my teaching (as noted in Walker, 2015c and 2017d) I chose to use IPA, which enabled me to make multiple interpretations of my data (discussed in Walker, 2018a).

As suggested by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (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, Flowers and Larkin (2009) advised that the exploratory comments include 'key words, phrases, or explanations which the respondent used' (2009: 84). 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, Flowers and Larkin, 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.

I applied both of these processes of reflexivity and interpretation each time the transcripts were re-read in order to generate the exploratory phrases, conceptual comments, occurrences and queries needed to develop themes. These themes were key to my interpreting the findings from the inquiry (see Section 5). Furthermore, this process within IPA highlighted my argument for the need to have systemic, relational methods in order to identify the relational aspect of the research question, which I discuss later. Before I go on to IPA in greater detail, I will review my use of relational ethnography, the first relational-biographical methodology I employed.

Moving from auto-ethnography to relational ethnography

Ellingson and Ellis (2008) noted that 'the meanings and applications of *auto-ethnography* have evolved in a manner that makes precise definition difficult' (2008: 449, original emphasis). Relational ethnography requires the researcher to be intrinsically connected to the research. The researcher conducting relational-ethnographic research becomes the focus of their own research, observing their own practice in relation to others. This is different from traditional ethnography, in which the researcher is observing the practice or behaviour of an individual, group or community. In Walker (2017b) I discuss McIlveen (2008), who suggested that auto-ethnography entails the 'practitioner performing narrative analysis pertaining to himself or herself as intimately related to a particular phenomenon' (2008: 3). This is the process I undertook when making the audio recordings of my teaching; I was observing myself in practice while relating to the students. McIlveen noted that auto-ethnography has been used in a number of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology and education. Examples of relational-ethnographic inquiry in higher education include Doloriert and Sambrook (2009) and Sambrook, Stewart and Roberts (2008). As relational ethnography has emerged, it has also attracted criticism. In Walker (2017b) I note that Maréchal (2010) suggested that criticism has been made regarding 'validity on grounds of being unrepresentative and lacking objectivity' (2010: 45). Conversely, Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) argued that there is a transparency in auto-ethnography that acknowledges subjectivity and invites this to be both reflexively examined and visible in the research. My use of IPA, which I will discuss next, was crucial in fulfilling this role. When Simon (2012) introduced the term relational ethnography, it was to reflect how 'auto' ethnography, despite being deemed a study of self, is always in relation to others. Simon (2012) stated:

> I am not telling 'my' tale in isolation from others. Even when I am researching 'my own' practice relationships from within living moments, the shaping of my research endeavor and its telling will be influenced by many others, directly and indirectly involved with it (2013: para 8).

An important aspect of relational ethnography is relational ethics, which Ellis (2007) suggested is intertwined in ethnography as it acknowledges the researchers' interpersonal bond with participants and takes responsibility for actions and their consequences. This aspect of responsibility and relational ethics connects to my decision to make audio recordings of my teaching as requested by the students, rather than video recordings, which had been my preference. As already stated, I believed it would have been unethical to make video recordings knowing that some students felt uncomfortable with this idea; I would have knowingly made them feel ill at ease in the learning space we shared. Lincoln (1995) had previously noted the importance of relational ethics whereby the consequences and impact to the researcher and those who are related to the research should be considered.

Relational ethnography was crucial in looking at how I developed a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy. I was able to scrutinise my practice and review the principles of Edwards and Richards (2002) and McNamee (2007), discussed in Section 5. It also confirmed the need to have a systemic/relational method to be able to review my teaching in relation to the students. However, the data gathered from the recordings of my teaching required interpretation in order to review the experience of my practice, and IPA was the methodology selected for this purpose.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis

The use of IPA offered me a framework for the process of identifying key themes from my teaching (outlined earlier) without focusing on pre-determined categories such as mutual engagement, empathy and empowerment, which I had done in my first analysis. I needed to be reflexive while interpreting the transcripts of my teaching, as Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008) argued that reflexivity is central to IPA, with the researcher needing to consider the 'intersubjective dynamics between researcher and data' (2008: 231). They went on to say:

> Rather than attempt the impossible task of seeking to diminish the researcher's role, IPA makes the positive step of acknowledging and exploring her role. The interviewer's thoughts and feelings are admitted as explicit and thus legitimate components of the inquiry (2008: 231).

This underpinning reflexive approach in IPA sat well with my chosen methods and my epistemological position, which connects to the assertions of Denzin and Lincoln (2011) regarding the subjectivity of the researcher. However, other aspects of IPA may not seem to sit so coherently with my theoretical approach of systemic practice.

McNamee (2004) stated that we can take a 'promiscuous stance' when 'we have evolved to a point where, instead of deciding which is better, we can focus on how we use theories, models and techniques as fluid and flexible resources' (2004: 224). I had taken a promiscuous stance by deciding to employ IPA, although it was potentially more faithful to systemic thinking than it might appear to be. Walker (2018a) discusses the connections between IPA and systemic approaches, drawing out the similarities and compatibilities. For example, I note that Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) explained IPA as idiographic, as it seeks to understand 'what the experience for *this* person is like, what sense *this* particular person is making of what is happening to them' (2009: 3, original emphasis).

Referring to a 'particular person' might appear to be a non-relational approach. However, in Walker (2018a) I note:

> As Smith et al. (2009) explain, although the analytical process in IPA starts with each individual experience, it then moves to look at similarities and differences across the individuals interviewed. They suggest, 'through connecting the findings to the extant psychological literature…we see echoes of part and whole relationships' (Smith et al., 2009, p. 38). This is likened to [the] systemic conceptualization of [being] relational and [having] connectedness (2018a).

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) also suggested that IPA enables the lived experience of humans to be expressed in its own terms, 'rather than according to predefined category systems' (2009: 32). What is important here, and which I perceive to be connected with systemic thinking, is that predefined categories are viewed as closing down the possibilities of what could otherwise emerge. I have already mentioned the importance of the role of the researcher accepting their subjectivity and consequently the need to be reflexive. This perspective of the researcher sits comfortably alongside relational ethics, an aspect of systemic practice and relational ethnography that recognises the connectedness between researcher and researched and how consequences can impact on them both. (Lincoln, 1995). The way in which my thoughts and feelings as the researcher are admitted as explicit and legitimate when interpreting the data was particularly helpful for my inquiry. I could explore what I felt while teaching as well as my feelings as the researcher when re-reading the transcripts. In relation to the use of transcripts, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggested that the transcripts should capture the nuances such as ums and ahs, pauses, and so on, so that these might be interpreted. The 'utterances' (the ums and ahs) are important to systemic practice as they can be reflective of a response that has been made in place of a spoken word, while conveying the same meaning as if the word had been said (Shotter, 2009).

Despite my identifying these similarities to systemic practice and relational inquiry, aspects of my inquiry differed from the 'usual' process of IPA. Interviews tend to be the method used to collect data within IPA. Brocki and Wearden (2006) conducted a literature review of published research in which IPA was the chosen methodology and found that 46 of the 55 articles stated that interviews were conducted; in contrast, my data had been created from the audio recordings of my teaching – a relational-ethnographic approach. However, Larkin and Griffiths (2002) utilised an ethnographic approach in their research and still applied IPA, therefore I believed it was possible to apply IPA to my inquiry. Indeed, IPA was key in offering a methodology for capturing a range of themes, particularly 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 (see Walker 2018a). 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 were still very much absent, even with my use of IPA. 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.

IPA is a relatively new methodology, which has arisen from the field of psychology. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) noted how IPA has been moving into applied psychologies, including counselling, and clinical, occupational and educational psychology. Consequently, as I note in Walker (2018a), many of the limitations of IPA have arisen from within the discipline of psychology. Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) suggested that student researchers and supervisors from a traditional psychological approach appear to misunderstand IPA as primarily an interpretive approach, which results in a descriptive discussion. Where traditional psychological approaches seek to generalise, IPA's theoretical commitment to an ideographical approach is often misunderstood, leading researchers to use large numbers of participants in the research whereas Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggested that four to six is sufficient. Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) noted that attempts have been made to compare groups using IPA.

These limitations or misunderstandings by students and supervisors appear to come from an expectation of IPA being within a positivist paradigm, yet it digresses from this paradigm in the areas of sample size, generalisation, interpretive analysis and the need for reflexivity. Ironically, these digressions align IPA to systemic ways of thinking. Also aligned to systemic thinking is the third methodology I chose to use: a self-study that applied a genealogy of education as the method. Although the term 'self-study' indicates an individual focus, the purpose of self-study is for the educator to improve their practice in relation to the students.

Genealogy of education as a method of self-study

Samaras and Freese (2009) suggested that teachers conducting research into their own practice is a relatively new phenomenon; prior to the 1980s it was not a recognised area of research. The emphasis on reflective practice from the 1980s onwards began to influence the potential for studying one's own work. However, it was action research that was initially used and this subsequently influenced the emergence of self-study. Feldman, Paugh and Mills (2004) noted that action research is intended to change the practice of the individual, the community or the institution of educators and that, therefore, 'the collection and analysis of data are used to guide the development of a plan of action or to articulate a critical analysis of the individual and institutional barriers' (2004: 953). Samaras and Freese (2009) argued that the focus of self-study is about how the *self and identity* impact on and are impacted by one's own practice and how practice might be improved. This improvement is in relation to the benefit for the students. This was an important connection with how I saw my-self in relation to the students when teaching. It also provided the potential to identify or explore issues related to the theme of culture and identity. Mitchell and Weber (2005) noted that methods in self-study have included the use of performance, photography, video documentary and dress stories. However, the self-study method that I adopted is somewhat different to these. I was curious to learn more about the genealogy of education (Foucault, 1980) and sought to explore this further. To understand a genealogy of education, I first had to understand what Foucault meant by subjugated knowledges. He stated:

> By subjugated knowledges I mean two things: on the one hand, I am referring to the historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemisation…Subjugated knowledges are thus those blocs of 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. On the other hand…subjugated knowledges… have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity (1980: 81-82).

I was aware of the second type of subjugated knowledge that Foucault refers to, knowledges that are deemed inadequate or at the bottom of the hierarchy. For example, Hill-Collins (2000) discussed knowledges presented by 'others', i.e. groups considered to be subordinate, such as black women, that would be left at the bottom of the knowledge hierarchy (2000: 270). However, the first type of subjugated knowledge was new to me. Foucault stated that the process of unearthing subjugated knowledges

> is something one might call a genealogy, or rather a multiplicity of genealogical researches, a painstaking rediscovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts (1980: 83).

Therefore, I understood the genealogy of education to be a search within education policy to find subjugated knowledges that had been hidden because their true purpose would be deemed unethical or of concern to the general public. A genealogy of education is generally used to explore the effect of an education policy on a country, for example Leung (2016) looked at polices related to 'English as an Additional Language' in England, Venkatanarayanan (2013) inquired into policies in India under colonial rule and Yeneayhu (2011) explored polices in Ethiopia after a government regime change. I suspected that I might have been the type of student that a subjugated education policy would be aimed at. I clarify this in Walker (2017a):

> 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' (2017a: 59).

On this basis, I decided to conduct the genealogy on myself. In Walker (2017a) I explain that

> Foucault's genealogy of education policy offered a method of self-study in understanding myself as an educator. Being part of the first generation of migrant children from the Caribbean to be educated in England, I was aware education policies at that time had espoused assimilation into British society. The genealogy was intended to help me identify the complexity of these policies and how they affected my 'self', identity and teaching (2017a: 56).

As far as I was aware, this was the first time a genealogy of education had been used as a technique for self-study.

While trawling through policies implemented during my education, I discovered Section 11 of The Local Government Act 1966, which was known for providing funding to support children with English as a second language. The subjugated knowledge embedded within the policy provided a mandate, requiring migrant children to be dispersed to schools in various geographical areas. In Walker (2017a) I note that

> it was felt a smaller concentration of numbers could be more easily assimilated into British society. As a result, migrant children were 'bussed' to schools in different areas to ensure there were no more than one third of migrant children in a school (2017a: 59).

I contend that my educational experiences are illustrative of the impact of the dispersal system, with the government using education to manipulate the identity and culture of migrant children. In Walker (2017a) I reflect:

> 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 (2017a: 60).

Lunenberg, Zwart and Korthagen (2010) found that self-study enabled educators to support theoretical growth, ongoing development, the production of knowledge and increased self-confidence. I found that the process of self-study helped me to understand more of my identity as Black British. In addition to this, 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. Consequently, I reflected on how some of my 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. My argument regarding the importance of understanding the role of race, culture and identity in relation to building relationships was reiterated through this process.

The aim of this inquiry was 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 a framework for me to reflexively look at my-self in relation to others, as a former student and as an educator, and at the role identity plays within that. 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 and Richards' (2002) principles of engagement, empathy and empowerment, I identified themes that relate to these principles. I suggest that these findings contribute to new knowledge.

In the next section I discuss the contribution to new knowledge that my body of work has made.

5. Contribution to New Knowledge

The body of work was driven by my argument regarding the need for a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy for social work students in England. The aim of the inquiry from which my publications were written was to develop an approach to teaching that I could imbed in my practice. The objective was to provide a coherence between systemic, relationship-based social work practice and social work education. Having a body of work in the public domain already contributes to the discourse each publication belongs to. Petre and Rugg (2010) suggested that 'making a significant contribution means adding to knowledge or contributing to the discourse – that is, providing evidence to substantiate a conclusion that's worth making' (2010: 14). My first contribution is the development of a framework for the systemic, relationship-based pedagogy (details of the framework is in Appendix 2). The contribution is representative of the publications in theme 1, which focused on the need for the pedagogy. The contribution is a useful working tool to provide social work educators with the principles they need to teach from a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy. The pedagogy was developed by combining Edwards and Richards (2002) with McNamee's (2007) metaphor of teaching as conversation and conducting my own inquiry. This combination of Edwards and Richards (2002) with McNamee (2007) is itself new. The second theme in my body of work was related to methods whereby I had identified the relational aspects of a number of qualitative tools that could be used in systemic inquiry. The relational-biographical methodologies I combined in my inquiry – relational ethnography, interpretative phenomenological analysis and a self-study using a genealogy of education – were a unique combination representing a subjective epistemology appropriate for a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm. This subjective epistemology (discussed in section 3: 'The Research Paradigm') suggests that the knower and respondent co-create understandings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). I applied the methodologies in order to understand what was taking place between me and my current students by using relational ethnography and interpretative phenological analysis to analyse the data. I explored my secondary education and the policies that shaped my identity during that time by using a genealogy of education. The final contribution relating to culture and identity in relationship-based teaching linked to the third theme within the body of work. This proved to be an important element of the relationship-building process, whereby sameness and difference, culture and identity, made an impact on how I as the educator could be positioned in academia and the impact this could have on how relationships between myself and the students were formed. The three contributions to new knowledge can be summarised as:

1) The development of a framework for a social work pedagogy

2) A contribution to research methodologies in the study of relationship-based pedagogy

3) Identifying how culture and identity are crucial in relationship-based teaching.

1. <u>The development of a framework for a social work pedagogy</u>

I have developed a framework for a pedagogy by combining the work of Edwards and Richards (2002) with that of McNamee (2007) – a combination not made before. My aim was to develop a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy to teach social workers and this has been achieved. In doing this, I have provided a pedagogy that is coherent with relationship-based practice and the relationship-based supervision recommended by the British Association of Social Workers and the Chief Social Workers for England (2018). The pedagogy responds to the gap that I identified and the suggestion from Ruch, Turney and Ward (2010) when they stated 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 have provided the education (training) element, while the Chief Social Workers recommended the supervision element. The pedagogy I provide completes the systems needed to create coherence between relationship-based social work education, relationship-based social work practice and relationship-based social work supervision.

The principles that underpin the pedagogy developed in this framework include mutual engagement, mutual empathy and mutual empowerment, built on from Edwards and 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 2). The principles of the pedagogy are all interlinked and relate to one another.
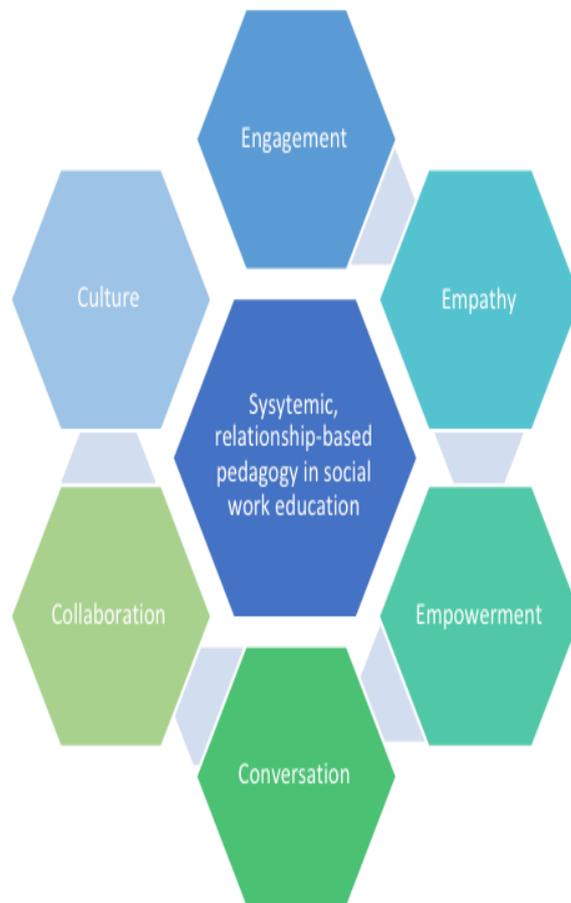
Diagram 2: Principles of the systemic, relationship-based pedagogy

2. <u>A contribution to research methodologies in the study of relationship-based pedagogy</u>

The three methodologies I chose to inform my inquiry were relationally biographical. The purpose of adopting a relationally biographical approach was to understand who I am as an educator *in relation to others* and the combination of the methodologies I chose enabled me to achieve this insight. The methodologies all have the underpinning tool of reflexivity running through them. This is a unique combination. Petre and Rugg (2010) suggested that combining two or more ideas and showing the arrangement reveals something new and useful to knowledge. This combination of methodologies supported the emergence of the knowledge I needed to develop the systemic, relationship-based pedagogy. Relational ethnography enabled me to examine my teaching through audio recordings, IPA facilitated my making sense of the data gathered from the recordings and the self-study genealogy of education allowed me to explore my educational past, how that impacted on my relationships with teachers and how it impacted on my identity. The genealogy of education is generally used to explore the impact of education policies on a country or community; however, other researchers or educators may consider conducting a genealogy of education as a self-study method to identify how they may have been affected by hidden education policies.

I have identified the systemic/relational elements in the use qualitative tools, such as the use of transcripts and the use of IPA principles in the data analysis process. I am aware of the challenges in finding research tools that fit with systemic inquiries; as such, this contribution is one that other (systemic) researchers should find useful. As I previously noted, Knudsen (2010) urged: 'If we want systems theory to be more than a world scheme then we need methods which can help us generate further analyses' (2010: 1-2). I have taken some steps towards responding to this request. It is also worth explaining the relational aspects of how I use literature reviews. In Walker (2015a) I note 'the relational connectedness takes place between the words, themes, topic of inquiry, researcher, and research participants. I seek to find other papers that can respond and connect on any of these levels' (2015a: para 8) Discussing literature reviews with students through this systemic lens has been a useful way for them to appreciate the purpose of literature reviews and to commence their dissertations.

The importance of writing in the first person has been written about by others (Gergen, 2015; Kirsch, 1994; Shotter, 2010). I, however, position writing in the first person as a subjective epistemology that contributes to new knowledge. I argue that writing in the first person allows voices to be heard – my voice as the writer – as 'it opens up a number of possibilities which writing in the third person purposefully seeks to shut down: subjectivity verses objectivity, dialogical verses monological, and transparency verses concealment' (Walker, 2015a: para 6).

I propose that by writing in the first person I seek to have transparency with the reader, to build a relationship by inviting them to see and hear how I locate myself in the world through my thoughts and writing. This is a subjectivity that is honest and is self-contested through reflexivity, and offered to the reader as an ethical way of writing. I suggest that writing in the first person is a subjective epistemology that belongs within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explain this as having

a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities),

a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and

a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedure (2011: 13).

I argue that first person writing should be recognised as a subjective epistemology that supports the co-creation of knowledge between the writer and the reader. Using direct quotes is a way for me as the author to bring the voice of another author or researcher into my own paper. I aim to reflect how our words can co-create knowledge or understandings with the reader. Others have written about the use of direct quotes within qualitative research. This is generally to discuss the importance of interview respondents having their own words heard (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006; Roller and Lavrakas, 2015; Sandelowski, 1994). However, I am referring to the use of direct quotes from other scholars/researchers in academic writing. I am suggesting using quotes rather than paraphrasing for similar reasons to those for using verbatim quotes from participants; ethically it allows the scholar's/researcher's own voice to be heard without risk of misrepresentation. It also provides the opportunity for a textual conversation between the owner of the quote and the author of the paper to be present in the text.

These contributions are useful for both academics and students to incorporate into their writing or to appreciate that they are opportunities for subjective ways of generating knowledge. They should therefore legitimately be positioned as an epistemological approach within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm.

3. Culture and identity in relationship-based teaching; transferability of knowledge

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. The multi-faceted historical factors that shape our identity and how we position ourselves and others in society can be reflected in the classroom and affect the relationships we make as educators and students. This concept fits with systemic ideology in that what happens in the macro systems in society is connected to and reflects the micro systems in which we live.

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, 2017c). This was unexpected emotional toil that led me to realise the *depth* that was needed from my emotional self and the need to review my identity. I have 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 and Guba, 1985). This transferability extends not only to black and minority ethnic (BME) educators, but includes white educators, 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).

In addition to this, although I noted that I and many of my BME students were striving between two cultures, I also identified a similar phenomenon with white British students from the east of England university. Many had previously had a taken-for-granted white existence that came to be challenged by the presence of the black students. They were then left with the realisation that other identities were beginning to move into their previously protected space and they were unsure about engaging or unwilling to engage with these 'other' students. On that basis, 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.

My three contributions to new knowledge are intended to make a difference to social work education, practice and research. Among the number of practitioners/researchers who take aspects of my ideas forward, from a systemic perspective, the difference my contribution makes to their immediate and wider systems can be far reaching. The impact of these differences can permeate across other systems the practitioner is connected to, causing a gradual shift that in the longer term could lead to significant changes.

6. Moving Forward: future research?

Responding to social work education needs

Since I started my inquiry, the Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) for adults and for children and families developed by the Chief Social Workers have been implemented nationally. Both state the need for social workers to have the ability to develop relationships with service users. In addition to this, there is a possibility that this aspect of the KSS will be used as a post-qualification standard for social workers and practice supervisors. This provides reassurance that the requirement for social workers to have relationship-building skills maintains currency.

Limitations and future research

Despite the contributions the body of work has made, there are some limitations that it would be useful to consider if someone were to build on my research. I suggest that the main limitation of my research 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 contributions that have 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.

Next steps

From a personal perspective, I feel that what I have learned most about my-self is in relation to culture, race and identity. Reflecting on what I have written over the past four years and on what has shaped my thinking and writing has added a further layer of knowledge of my-self. However, my learning has not stopped with the body of published work; writing this covering document has further added to my learning, in relation to epistemology for example. I hope to conduct some research into Black, British, female epistemology. Most importantly I have understood my commitment to teaching from a relationship-based approach and will continue to teach from this method.

7. Final Reflections

Reflecting on the process of writing the covering document, I realise how much it has fitted with systemic thinking. The publications, which might usually be read individually, are arranged together to form 'the body of work'. The covering document functions to connect the papers in a way that is reflective of how systemic ideology suggests we should consider all interconnecting parts that make the whole. It provides a written discourse that explains the relationships between the papers. The themes and overarching connections in relation to the aims, theory, methodology and contribution to new knowledge are threaded through the published papers, linking them together.

As systemic thinking is important to me – as someone who started her doctoral journey engaged in a Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice – I feel I have come full circle and ended with what I now consider a systemic process, that of PhD by prior output.

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Appendix 1

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Framework for a systemic,

relationship-based pedagogy

in social work education

Contents:

Explanations of key terms

What is a pedagogical framework?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a pedagogy in education as 'The method and practice of **teaching**, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept'. The pedagogical framework presented here serves as a guide to the principles and practice of a systemic, relationship-based teaching of social work students.

What is systemic practice?

Systemic practitioners view people as always being in relation to others in human "systems" such as the family, the community, wider society and is concerned about the interdependent relationships that occur in these systems. Campbell (2000) defines systemic practice as:

> 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).

What is relationship-based social work teaching?

Walker (2018) defines systemic, relationship-based social work 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 (Walker 2018: 13, unpublished PhD covering document).

What is a use of self?

In the context of the working relationship, the practitioner becomes part of the interdependent relationships with their clients, service users or students. As such, how they use their "self" in the relationship is crucial to the change or knowledge generating process.

> 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 (Ward, 2010: 52).

Introduction

The current document has been developed to provide a framework from which to deliver a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy in social work education.

Systemic practice has an emphasis on the interdependent role of relationships; there is no focus on an individual. Each person is seen to be in relation to another in human systems such as the family, network of friends, colleagues at work, the neighbourhood or wider society; all parts of these systems are interdependent. As such social work practice can be seen as one system where social workers intervene in the lives of children and vulnerable adults. Social work education is a related system where student social workers are taught how to intervene. Social workers are expected to intervene by using a systemic, relationship-based approach, and supported by having systemic-relationship based supervision, therefore social work education should be systemically relationship based in order to provide coherence between all aspects of social work practice. Walker (2015) noted

> Relationship based practice is more than just using relationship skills in social work; I suggest the nature of the relationship is central to the potential for learning and change between the service user and social worker, similarly, for the educator and social work student (2015a: 49).

This framework is intended for all 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 are engagement, empathy, empowerment, conversation, collaboration and culture. These are described in more detail in this framework.

This framework includes a context for the need for a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy. It goes on to provide a short narrative for each of the principles that need to be embedded in the teaching of social work educators.

Important Note:

The use of the pedagogical approach should not deter educators from delivering the curriculum of the social work programme. The curriculum approved by the social work governing body must be adhered to in order to maintain accreditation standards.

Context

There is a need for a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy for social workers in England. Such a pedagogy was developed in response to the abundance of policy documents that emerged following the serious case review of Peter Connelly (Laming, 2009). One theme that was threaded throughout these documents was the recommendation that social workers be adept at building relationships with their service users and colleagues (Munro 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Social Work Task Force, 2011; The College of Social Work, 2011). Similar recommendations are made 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).

The framework for the pedagogy was developed by combining the work of Edwards and Richards (2002) with that of McNamee (2007), and was built on further by Walker (2014, 2015a, 2015b). This has resulted in a pedagogy that is coherent with relationship-based practice and the relationship-based supervision recommended by the Chief Social Workers. The pedagogy responds to a suggestion from Ruch, Turney and Ward (2010), who stated 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). The pedagogy provides the education (training) element, while the Chief Social Workers (2018) recommended the supervision element. The pedagogy completes the systems needed to create coherence between relationship-based social work education, relationship-based social work practice and relationship-based social work supervision, as Diagram 1 suggests:
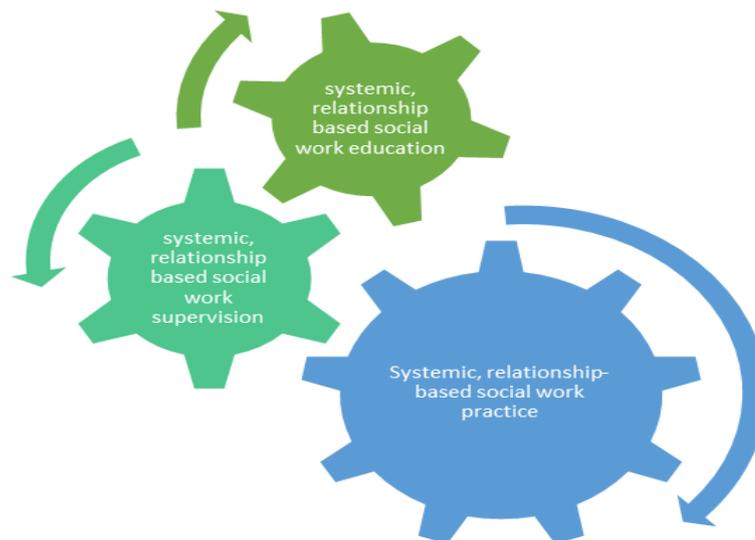

Diagram 1 – Systemic, relationship-based social work education, practice and supervision

Principles of the pedagogy

Engagement: Showing an authentic interest in the students and using the self when teaching

Empathy: Understanding and responding to the emotional and cognitive needs of the students

Empowerment: Feeling empowered to build relationships and enable student empowerment

Conversation: Teaching in a conversational style and being aware of different types of conversation

Collaboration: All students participating in learning and sharing knowledge in class

Culture: Understanding how culture and identity play a role in the relationship-building process
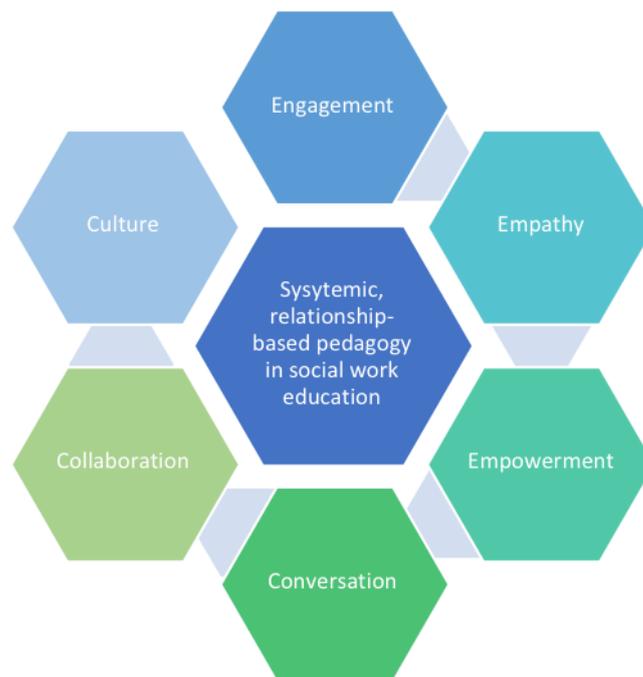
Diagram 2: Principles of the systemic, relationship-based pedagogy for social work

An overview of the principles of the pedagogy

The principles of the pedagogy are all interlinked and relate to each other. Engagement and conversation are presented at opposite ends of Diagram 2; however, they could be said to be two sides of the same coin. Edwards and Richards' (2002) mutual engagement is enhanced by coupling it with McNamee's (2007) emphasis on conversation. The more conversation with and between the students, the more engagement in learning is increased, as is the relationship-building process. Edwards and Richards (2002) also introduced the concepts of mutual empathy and mutual empowerment when teaching social work students and suggested that empathy will lead to empowerment. Walker (2018) noted that the educator needs to feel empowered when entering the teaching space, as this has an impact on engagement. The level of conversation not only influences engagement, it can also increase the potential for collaboration with and between the students. Additionally, Walker (2019) found that the culture and identity of the educator can leave them positioned by others in academia, which can impact on how relationships are built with students. Furthermore, an appreciation by the educator of how the culture and identity of students can impact on their interpersonal relationships will support the engagement process.

Engagement

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).

Walker (2019) suggests 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

Edwards and Richards define mutual empathy as 'a universal capacity to understand the thoughts and feelings of others' (2002: 38). Walker (2019) advises 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; Walker (2019) suggests 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

Edwards and 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). Walker (2019) 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. Walker (2019) notes 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. Walker (2019) 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

McNamee (2007) used the metaphor 'teaching as conversation'. As such, Walker (2019) suggests 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.

Walker (2019) 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. The types of conversation identified in the study were:

Clarification: These conversations indicated that the students were unclear about something, and other students were invited, or volunteered, to explain and provide clarity to the cohort.

Voicing opinions: When opinions are voiced there can be dissent among the members of the cohort. However, this is indicative of their getting to know each other's beliefs and values, which can differ as a result of culture, experience and knowledge.

Questioning: This may take the form of a question or, at the other end of the spectrum, the students challenging what is being taught. This has the potential to increase knowledge, if managed appropriately by the educator.

Confirmation: The nature of the dialogue means there is validation or corroboration of what is being said.

Debate: This could become contentious and conflictual, yet debates are important in developing resilience in the relationships through having (safe) opportunities to discuss conflicting views.

Concur: A conversation may occur in which the students are sharing their knowledge, experience or beliefs to agree with what is being said.

Collaboration

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 encourage 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). Collaboration means that the educator will need to be flexible and responsive in their teaching approach, for example willing to include elements suggested by the students that may stray from the lesson plan yet meet the learning outcomes.

Culture

Walker (2017) 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 multi-faceted historical 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 with students. Educators should also gain an appreciation of how the culture and identity of students 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.

Conclusion

This framework is a useful working tool that provides social work educators with the principles they need to teach from a systemic, relationship-based pedagogy. The framework is not a prescribed set of instructions; the educator has to use their 'self' as the teaching tool and be responsive to the needs of the students, which makes specific instructions unrealistic. The six principles have been developed to inform teaching and provide coherence between the social work relationship-based practice and supervision that is currently being championed in social work policy.

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