

THE NEED TO DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP-BASED HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH TO TEACHING SOCIAL WORK IN ENGLAND

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Abstract

For decades there has been a recognition of the need for social workers in England to practice from a Relationship-based approach. This need has changed in response to socio-economic and political shifts over time. The concept of a social work Relationship-based pedagogy was introduced to be congruent with practice. Lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic restricted face-to-face contact, resulting in new challenges to Relationship-based Practice. Simultaneously, critical inequalities experienced by people in poverty and from ethnic minority backgrounds were highlighted. There was also widespread misuse of do-not-resuscitate forms placed on vulnerable older people and those with disabilities. These communities of people often require social work intervention; the systemic injustice they face could be better understood and advocated for from a Human Rights perspective. This paper presents evidence of these issues with the recommendation of a Relationship-based Human Rights Approach in social work education. Proposals are provided for specific elements that should be included in this relational teaching of social work in England.

Keywords: COVID-19, DNACPR, Education, Inequality, Human Rights, Pedagogy, Relationship-Based, Social Work

1. INTRODUCTION

Relationship-based practice in social work has been a recognised intervention in England for decades. The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) suggested that Relationship-based practice is “rooted in relationships that make a difference; social work that is deeply human, that recognises people’s potential and provides personal support as well as solidarity where there is injustice” (2019, p1) [1]. This acknowledgment of the need for solidarity is a relatively new concept in Relationship-based practice and lends itself to a Human Rights perspective. This differs from previous ideologies that Sadd (2012) [2] proposed were underpinned by three theoretical frameworks: psychoanalytical, attachment, and systems theory. Shifts in the focus and popularity of Relationship-based practice have occurred in response to questions about some of these theoretical underpinnings, socio-economic and political influences over time. Howe noted

“In social work, the strength of relationship-based approaches has tended to rise and fall with the changes in the fortune associated with the profession’s following knowledge generators; 1) clinical, frontline, and fieldwork practitioners, 2) researchers, 3) theoreticians and 4) policymakers, administrators and managers” (1998, p47) [3]

Trevithick recognised practice issues that previously contributed to the reduction in Relationship-based practice:

“It is clear that during the 1970s and 1980s - and since – some practitioners fell into the deceptive and perilous trap of thinking that forming and maintaining good relationships, sometimes called relationship building, was an end in itself, rather than a practice approach that provides a foundation to build future work” (2003, p166) [4]

What followed was a period where social work in England became more bureaucratic (Walker 2015) [5]. There was also public scrutiny following the death of a child who was known to social services. A serious case review was held (Laming 2009) [6] and led the Government to request a national reform of social work education in England (The Social Work Task Force, 2009 [7], The Social Work Reform Board, 2010) [8]. The result was a return to Relationship-based approaches to social work practice

(Munro 2012) [9], this position continued to be supported by policy. The Chief Social Worker England (for Adults) stated social workers should know how to build purposeful, effective relationships underpinned by reciprocity (Department of Health, 2015, p4) [10]. The Key Skills Statement for child and family practitioners proposed social workers should “Build effective relationships with children, young people, and families, which form the bedrock of all support and child protection responses” (Department for Education, 2018, p3) [11]. Ruch, Turney and Ward (2010) [12] suggested that for social workers to adopt a relationship-based approach in contemporary social work, they need to be trained to do so. Walker (2014) [13] concurred stating that 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.

2. THE COMPONENTS OF A RELATIONSHIP-BASED PEDAGOGY

Walker defined 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” (2019a p18) [14]. As the concept underpinning the pedagogy was relationships, Walker proposed a relational approach to teaching was needed. Rather than the notion of teaching where the teacher is perceived to hold all the knowledge and pass this to a passive recipient (Freire 1970) [15], Gergen (2015) [16] suggested knowledge is socially constructed in relation to someone or something else. As such, knowledge is gained relationally, therefore we should teach using relational approaches. This method puts relationships at the heart of teaching and emphasises the importance of meaningful connections between educators and learners, as well as between learners and their peers (Bovill, 2020) [17]. Walker advocated for a relational style whereby teaching would need to “encompass mutual engagement, empathy, and empowerment, collaboration and, conversation to enable the co-construction of knowledge, learning and meaning” (2019a, p20) [14]. Walker (2019b) [18] developed a framework to teach social workers from a Relationship-based perspective. The principles that underpinned the pedagogy were constructed of the components of relational teaching; engagement, empathy, empowerment, collaboration; conversation, and culture were further included, culminating in the three E’s and three C’s. These principles were interlinked and not ranked in a hierarchy of importance. They were presented as a tool to guide educators in providing coherence between social work Relationship-based teaching and practice. Engagement emanates from demonstrating an authentic interest in the students and using the self when teaching. To effectively use the self as the teaching tool, the educator must have an understanding of their own beliefs, values, interpersonal skills, and emotional intelligence and how these might impact the engagement and relationship-building process with the students. The educator is responsible for laying the foundation for a safe environment in which the students feel able to engage and begin the reciprocal process of relational teaching. Walker (2019b) [18] suggested empathy is understanding and responding to the emotional and cognitive needs of the students. The educator should be reflexive as empathy occurs when educators are moved by something a student says or does; the educator reflects on this and responds accordingly in the moment. This relational responsivity requires personal resilience as responding to high levels of need can take an emotional toil. Furthermore, the educator would benefit from a flexible approach to teaching as they must pause the planned agenda to be attentive to the student. The educator ought to feel empowered to be able to engage and show empathy. Being responsible for creating a safe teaching environment means the educator needs to feel confident and empowered to facilitate the teaching space. Walker, (2019b) [18] discusses how this sense of empowerment can impact 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 recognition of their relevant experiences and knowledge; they can be empowered by contributing to the learning in their group. Mutual empowerment between the educator and students may come from negotiating specific aspects of the teaching process, which further supports ongoing engagement. Although collaboration has its own category, collaboration with the students has the potential to increase mutual empowerment; one example of how the principles are interlinked. For a relational approach, a conversational style of teaching is essential. Walker (2019b) [18] argued 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 elicited from a range of students. Walker (2018) [19] identified different styles of conversation that the educator should be aware of, which can be conducive to developing and maintaining relationships and enable the educator to be responsive to the group. For example, conversations in which opinions were voiced were indicative of getting to know each other's beliefs and values. Despite debates having the potential to be contentious and conflictual if not well managed, they were important in developing resilience in relationships by opening up (safe) prospects to discuss different views. Additionally, conversations can be collaborative. McNamee (2007) [20] stated that "refiguring teaching — and consequently learning — in collaborative conversation might open new forms of practice" (2007, p316). This can be understood as all students participating in learning and sharing knowledge through conversation in class. The process of collaboration also provides opportunities for those involved to gain an understanding of each other's cultural backgrounds and influences. Therefore, the educator ought to encourage all students to collaborate and commit to creating a learning community. Educators should develop an insight into their own culture and identity and an awareness of how these can present themselves when building relationships. Educators should also gain an appreciation of how the culture and identity of students can impact their interpersonal relationships with each other. Even with groups or communities of students who do not appear to be culturally diverse, it is important to consider the intersectionality of characteristics such as gender, religion, ability, age, education, sexuality, etc. as these can affect relationships. These principles of engagement, empathy, empowerment, conversation, collaboration, and culture are pertinent in face-to-face teaching, however, they are not always present in the relationship or sustained over time. There is potential for hostility or conflict between the student and the social work educator. Yeung et al (2019) [21] explored social work student and practice-educator relationships in England. Yeung et al (2019) [21] and Walker (2019a) [14] concurred that the payment of tuition fees could affect students' expectations of their learning experience with an anticipation that as a "consumer," there would be no need to collaborate; rather, they would be the passive recipient of knowledge. Yeung et al (2019) [21] found when student expectations were not met, it could be a barrier to the relationship, therefore clarifying respective roles early on could help to address this. Another issue that could impact the relationship was when critical feedback was given however, this could be balanced somewhat with constructive comments and recognising the students' strengths. This underlines the ultimate power imbalance between the student and educator which has to be recognised and addressed by the educator to help build trust in the relationship. Many of the principles such as engagement, empathy, empowerment, conversation, and collaboration may also redress some of the power differentiation as the educator is showing a willingness to share their power where possible.

3. THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON RELATIONSHIP-BASED PRACTICE

3.1 Teaching

The impact of Relationship-based teaching can differ depending on the strength (strong or weak) and longevity (established or new) of the relationship between the educator and students as well as a myriad of other factors. Pascoe (2022) [22] recognised that relationships are "multi-layered and complex, shaped by power dynamics and external influences including policy developments, national agendas and multidisciplinary service priorities" (2022, p3272). The sudden arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic compounded these intricacies. Engagement with students was affected by the introduction of synchronous and asynchronous online learning. Synchronous teaching is remote and live, with all students accessing an online session at the same time. Asynchronous learning where students can access a recording of the teaching content at different times, offers no opportunity for direct engagement. Consequently, conveying empathy, collaboration, or conversation is impossible, despite their importance to relationship building and sustainment. When synchronous teaching took place, Hatt and Davidson (2022) [23] identified a sense of a "weird intimacy" (2022, p6) that was created when educators had to accommodate learners through remote technology while in their homes. The principle of empowerment was also compromised. Rawlett (2014) [24] suggested there is a paucity of literature investigating the empirical connections between self-efficacy and empowerment. Cataudella et al (2021)

[25] looked at the self-esteem and self-efficacy of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found a reduction of self-esteem and self-efficacy negatively impacting the 'relational/interactional' dimensions of efficacy for classroom management and student learning. Due to the connection between self-efficacy and empowerment, educators likely felt less empowered when navigating technology while teaching. Synchronous online learning allows more opportunities for conversation however, platforms to facilitate teaching tend to function with one person speaking to several others. Leibiger and Aldrich (2022) [26] suggested that being required to interact with technology to speak or even be seen can inhibit spontaneous conversation exchange. They also noted that the teacher and students often cannot see all the participants, especially in a large group, and may miss important nonverbal cues, such as looks of confusion or understanding. This could result in the teacher and students being unable to recognise the need to show empathy. Furthermore, the opportunity for the teacher to gain a sense of the culture and identity of the student group is lost as they are not being observed as a whole; how they interact, seat themselves, evidence of sub-groups etc.

3.2 Social Work

Heward-Belle et al, (2023) [27] noted the new wave of Relationship-based practice pre-pandemic was promoted against a backdrop of neoliberalism, managerialism, and austerity measures. The COVID-19 pandemic added further complexity when lockdown abruptly severed face-to-face contact. This was replaced by technology such as telephone and video calls which undermined aspects of relationship building and sustainment. Broadhurst and Mason, (2014) [28] noted much of relationship-based practice is influenced by sensory and contextual knowledge which can be lost through digital contact. Chan and Au-Yueng (2021) [29] agreed communication on screen was profoundly different from face-to-face communication. Copson (et al, 2022) [30] posited digital communication appeared to be useful in sustaining existing relationships but could be less effective in initiating new relationships. Pascoe (2022) [22] suggested non-verbal cues such as eye contact, open body posture, and nodding are all used to communicate respect and develop trust, demonstrating that the listener is paying attention. However, these did not translate to reflect the same level of engagement and empathy when on screen and were completely lost during phone calls. Walker (2020) [31] argued when in person, silences can create spaces for reflection and unsaid communication which can help the conversation move on or relay empathy. Yet, Pascoe found silence could be an inhibitor to relationship building when using technology because social workers would rush to speak in this "unnatural atmosphere" (2022, p3276) [22]. Pascoe also noted there were limited opportunities for acts of kindness, for example giving someone a lift home after a meeting; the car has been recognised as a safe space to engage in meaningful conversations (Ferguson 2010) [32]. Age was a factor that influenced how well relationship-based practice could succeed without in-person contact. Copson (et al, 2022) [30] found a four-year-old can become bored and distracted on a video call whereas the flexibility of mobile phone contact can create opportunities for engagement with young people and enable greater participation in their care. Copson et al (2022) [30] further noted that digital poverty could profoundly affect parents' and carers' ability to participate in meaningful contact with their social worker. This poverty can be created by a lack of currency in digital skills or financial resources to possess the technology needed to maintain contact.

4. CRITICAL INEQUALITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS INFRINGEMENTS DURING COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic underlined significant inequalities and vulnerabilities of people most in need of social work intervention. Bald and Walker (2020) [33] argued that the health and well-being of socially disadvantaged people were negatively impacted, which breached Article 2 of the Human Rights Act 1988; the right to life –this right was not equal to all during the pandemic. The Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2020) [34] identified Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) men were four times more likely to contract COVID-19 than their white counterparts. The socio-economic factors that were likely contributors included overcrowded living conditions, reliance on public transport, and low income. Public Health England (2020) [35] found that people from the BME community were most likely to be diagnosed and most likely to die as a result of COVID-19. Bald and Walker (2020) [33] noted that although deprivation was also seen as an indicator, the report stopped short of connecting the two as a

result of structural racism; a social injustice. Further social injustices and Human Rights breaches correlated to the disproportionate deaths attributed to COVID-19 of older people in care homes. Complaints were made to the Care Quality Commission (CQC, 2020) [36] of an increase in ‘do not attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation’ (DNACPR) forms. The DNACPR form is a decision authorised by a clinician not to attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation on a person when their heart has stopped or they have stopped breathing. These forms are often referred to as “orders” giving the false impression they are legally binding (Fitton et al 2023) [37]. They were placed in groups of older care home residents and people with disabilities as opposed to having individual assessments and consultations with the person. The CQC (2020) [36] reported the blanket use of DNACPR forms and poor clinical decision-making limited older people’s access to hospital and treatment, potentially resulting in avoidable death. Green et al (2022) [38] found literature describing older people in care homes, especially those with dementia, as “victims, who are disenfranchised, socially isolated and vulnerable to discriminatory practices and other human rights abuses” (2022: 729). The violation occurs when forms are issued without individual clinical assessment and consultation with the person. Human Rights are also breached when treatment is withheld or compromised when a DNACPR form is in place; the forms apply only to resuscitation, not treatment (BMA, RCN, and Resuscitation Council UK, 2007) [39]. In England, Human Rights have become intrinsically linked to DNACPR decisions following a judgment that the failure to involve the patient in the decision-making process breached Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights, which protects the right to respect private life and family life (*R Tracey v Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust & Others*, 2014) [40]. The General Medical Council (GMC, 2020) [41] noted additional Human Rights that are relevant to decisions about treatment, care and resuscitation:

Article 2: The right to life and the positive duty of public authorities to protect life.

Article 3: The right to be free from inhuman and degrading treatment.

Article 5: The right to security of the person.

Article 9: The right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

Article 14: The right to be free from discrimination in the enjoyment of these other rights.

These Human Rights were breached with the misuse of DNACPR forms. Green et al (2022) [38] suggested the focus on the disproportionate number of deaths in care homes is “likely to encourage a wave of activist scholarship on human rights and care homes” (2022, p734). Furthermore, the disproportionate number of BME people who died as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic indicates their right to life as espoused by Article 2 was breached. Bald and Walker (2020) [33] argued, “The Social Work rhetoric of social justice and equality would become platitudes unless we concede that a clear voice has at least the potential for activism in reasserting Article 2 of the Human Rights Act as the right to a full life” (2020, p165).

5. GUIDANCE TO EMBED HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACHES INTO SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Human Rights Approaches were already being implemented in social work policy and guidance before the pandemic. As early as 1994 the United Nations recognised how ‘Human Rights are inseparable from Social Work theory, values and ethics, and practice ... (1994: p5) [42]. Subsequently, the International Social Work Federation (ISWF), endorsed this position stating “... Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work...” (2014) [43]. The role of Human Rights within social work was further supported in the UK (BASW, 2015) [44] and through guidance developed to assist social workers to promote these rights within their practice, (Harms-Smith et al, 2019) [45]. However, the inequalities highlighted during the early waves of the pandemic refocused a critical lens on injustices already existing or exacerbated by this global disaster, impacting more vulnerable people who may have benefitted from social work intervention. Walter-McCabe (2020) [46] suggested, “There is no limit to the number of issues that need social work advocacy” (2020, p71). This rhetoric is rooted in post-pandemic guidance to regulate the application of a Human Rights Approach in social work education. Social workers who apply this method underpin their practice with principles of human dignity, anti-discrimination, participation, transparency, and

accountability (McPherson and Abell, 2020) [47], yet they have to be taught to do this effectively. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the International Social Work Federation (2020) [48] updated the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training. There were mandatory recommendations made in relation to social work in context, including these rights-based issues:

- Critical understanding of how socio-structural inadequacies, discrimination, oppression, and social, political, environmental, and economic injustices impact human development at all levels, including the global must be considered.
- Knowledge of – human rights, social movements, and their interconnectedness with class, gender, and ethnic/race-related issues.
- An emphasis on structural issues affecting marginalised, vulnerable, and minority populations.
- There were also mandatory recommendations made in relation to social work in practice, including rights-based and Relationship-based interventions:
- Promote healthy, cohesive, non-oppressive relationships among people and between people and organisations at all levels – individuals, families, groups, programmes, organisations, and communities.
- Have sufficient practice skills in assessment, relationship building, empowerment...and fulfil professional obligations to service users.
- Engage in critical analysis of how social policies and programmes promote or violate human rights and justice
- Use peace-building, non-violent activism, and human rights-based advocacy as intervention methods.

Social Work England Education and Training Standards (2021) [49] are the standards against which social work education courses are assessed and approved. Guidance on the curriculum and assessment includes a requirement to ensure that the course is designed in accordance with the equality, diversity, and inclusion principles, and human rights and legislative frameworks. In England, the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) is the overarching framework of social work education and professional development. Of the nine domain descriptors that social workers need to achieve and maintain, descriptor 4 “Rights, justice and economic wellbeing” refers explicitly to human rights. Social workers must “advance human rights and promote social justice and economic wellbeing” (BASW, 2023) [50]. The guidance available does not allude to the potential complexity of embracing a Human Rights Approach in social work. Garrett (2024) [51] noted the rhetoric amplifying a commitment to human rights is often at odds with people’s daily experience which social workers will observe. There is also evidence of resistance from some social workers to embody what could be perceived as a politically situated Human Rights Approach (McPherson and Abell, 2020 [47], Šadić et al, 2020) [52]. There is some opposition to the premise that social work is inherently a human rights profession, arguing that there is a dominance of Eurocentric anthropocentrism and individualisation rooted in human rights and social work which continues to reinforce structural oppression rather than emancipate rights (Samyn, 2024) [53]. Garrett (2024) [51] suggested there has been a failure to “adequately historicise the political reanimation of the concept, particularly since the 1970s”. As such, there is a “pressing need to critically interrogate the profession’s mainstream perspectives on human rights”, (2024, p2). He argues that the law is not neutral but exists within a position of power, exploitation and control. Garrett posits “Consequently, political rights – including human rights – are effectively promissory notes that cannot be delivered on within the prevailing and profoundly unequal capitalist social order” (2024, p5). This contention would need to be addressed in the content of a Relationship-based, Human Rights Approach. Martinez-Herrero and Charnley (2018) [54] noted a tension between the centrality of human rights and social justice in social work values and educators working within systems increasingly influenced by neoliberal ideals. They argue for the development of an alternative ideology of human rights and social justice-based social work to counter the prevailing pressures of neoliberalism. The challenge of this could be more significant in England where Martinez-Herrero and Charnley found ideological,

historico-political, cultural, and socio-economic factors meant social work educators had a less clear understanding of human rights and social justice than their Spanish counterparts. This may be because social work education and practice in England were not historically influenced by a central rights-based activist stance (Walker, 2015) [5]. They also suggest a problematic dominance of English government-invested fast-track social work education programmes and apprentice schemes. These are focussed on the students being embedded in social work placements which diverts funds away from Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and undermines the specialist body of knowledge and value base of social work that should emanate from these HEIs. However, this may be balanced by some of the post-pandemic policy requirements to include human rights teaching in social work education. Martinez-Herrero and Charnley, (2018) [54] identified approaches that educators in England adopted to develop students' critical understandings of human rights and social justice and strategies to resist neoliberalism. These included teaching the history of human rights and social justice, linking theory with contemporary social work practice, creating a safe space to explore human rights and injustice, and raising awareness of international human rights developments in social work.

6. TEACHING HUMAN RIGHTS FROM A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Harms-Smith et al (2019) [45] suggested to support a Human Rights Approach, social workers can incorporate “empowerment-based and structural models of practice that conscientize and alert service users to how their challenges relate to social injustice and the denial of rights” (2019, p11). Such an incorporation of models might have better outcomes for the families when a coupling of approaches is formally taught to social workers. Trevithick (2003) [4] argued that Relationship-based practice should always be seen as an approach that provides a foundation to build future work. There is a potential that a Relationship-based approach could be strengthened by using this as the platform to build a Human Rights Approach. A Relationship-Based pedagogy is relational; therefore, the educator must understand the relational aspects of Human Rights. Herring (2013) [55] proposed that a relational approach exists within the legal framework of the social justice aspects that the Human Rights Act espouses. Herring posited that the central positions of autonomy and privacy presented within human rights legislation are designed to preserve individual rights, yet people are relational. Relationally, each person's rights become intermingled with those who care for and about them (Herring 2013). Herring noted, “From a relational perspective, we need legal tools that uphold caring relationships” (2013, p47). Sevenhuijsen (2003) [56] warned against terms such as ‘self-determination’, often referred to in Human Rights, preferring the phrase “relational autonomy”. Sevenhuijsen suggested the notion of self-determination is individualised, yet it can only take place in a relational context as we have to be recognised by another as having the ability to be autonomous. Nedelsky (2008) [57] argued that legal rights are intended to protect the individual and the values that are important to them but these values are relational to friends, family, communities, or structural processes. As such, the rights should be understood in terms of relationship. When Human Rights are breached, there are consequences not only to the individual or family but to groups with a similar profile, (e.g. older people in care homes as in the case of the misuse of DNACPR forms) the communities or organisations they are connected to. Relationship-based approaches could be coupled with human rights to ensure that as relationships are being built and sustained, the rights of the individual, family and community are actively embedded within the practice of the social worker. What must be rooted within this approach is the use of self to build relationships while having the ability to contest unethical, discriminatory, unjust practices and systems that undermine human rights. To combat concerns raised by scholars about the presentation of human rights in social work as solely for the emancipation of those in need without any acknowledgment of the benefits to the ruling class, a “detailed exploration” should be included in the teaching that addresses “the way that law is used to contain and manage the working class or to help constitute and maintain the gendered and racialised institutional orders that furnish a framework for the social reproduction of relationships conducive to the imperatives of capital (Fraser, 2022, cited in Garrett 2024,p 4) [51]. Furthermore, the relational aspect of human rights once understood by the educator, should be presented within the teaching. Not only must educators include in their teaching concerns about the presentation of Human Rights in social work; but they also need to address concerns raised about Relationship-based practice. Devine (2022) [58] argued the impossibility of fully importing Relationship-based approaches into child

protection social work when parents may be mistrusting and fearful of the authority held within statutory duties. Ferguson et al (2021) [59] noted that such feelings may be mutually reciprocated; some relationships in social work are transacted through mistrust, fear, hostility, and even hate between the social worker and parent/carer. These authors proposed the importance of social workers being aware of the concept of hostile relationships. Hostility does not emanate only from the parent/carers, Ferguson et al (2021) [59] argued hostility was “relational” and had to be recognised as a product of social worker attitudes and how the interactions between them and families developed. In cases where there were statutory concerns, the social worker and families were locked into the relationship for the duration that child protection was required; as such the hostility could be sustained or intensified throughout this period. Social work educators ought to raise awareness of the possibility of such relationships so students might be prepared for this. Students need to have skills to reflect on how they contribute to hostility and explore (with colleagues or supervision support) how they address and minimise the antagonism.

7. CONCLUSION

The unexpected global pandemic as a result of the COVID-19 virus and subsequent lockdown restrictions halted traditional face-to-face approaches and disrupted the potential and principles of Relationship-based teaching and practice. The use of technology had to be introduced to maintain some level of service, regardless of how dissonant this was from more traditional ways of relational working. This unprecedented move was not an intended shift by policy and research, yet a critical change occurred nonetheless. As face-to-face practice resumes in a post-pandemic context, a revised lens on Relationship-based practice is needed. There is a re-affirmation of the need for relationship building as stated in post-pandemic social work education guidance. Whilst educators can embrace the principles of engagement, empathy, empowerment, conversation, collaboration, and culture, they must also appreciate the complexities of relationship-building with students and the potential for hostility in the relationships students might have with families when building and sustaining relationships. A greater policy emphasis has also been placed on the inclusion of teaching Human Rights Approaches in social work education post-pandemic. This is not without contention as scholars have argued the disparity between the *notion* of human rights and the lived experience of families as well as the politicised historical roots of human rights and current neoliberal ideology. However, teaching the history of human rights and social justice, linking theory with contemporary social work practice, creating a safe space to explore human rights and injustice, and raising awareness of international human rights developments in social work can create the teaching of a balanced perspective of human rights. What connects Relationship-based practice and Human Rights Approaches is the relational aspect of both. Relationship-based practice allows for the foundation from which social work students can be taught human rights with full knowledge of its complex historical and current context and the challenges of embedding activism in practice, in relationships. The issues discussed in this paper relate specifically to England where historical and socioeconomic factors may differ from other countries. However, there may be some considerations within the paper that could be pertinent globally.

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