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Proposing a conceptual framework for relational pedagogy: pedagogical informality, interface, exchange and enactment

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ABSTRACT
This paper outlines a conceptual framework for enacting relational pedagogy. Commencing with a description of a relational ontology that can work to provide the foundation for engaged and participatory enactments of teaching and learning, the paper moves to consider the *dynamics* that support inclusive modes of education and the *dimensions* of relational pedagogical encounters. In particular, the pedagogical encounter is examined with a view to illuminating how the ontological and epistemological dynamics and dimensions of relational pedagogy open opportunities for inclusive and participatory modes of teaching and learning. In addition, the practical implications of pedagogical informality are considered, including the in-the-moment immediacy inherent to the relational encounter and concomitant enactments of the pedagogical exchange. In doing so, we argue for a relational pedagogy that widens the possibility for meaningful engagement with young people through pedagogical enactments that build upon the inter-relationality of teachers and students.

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Relational pedagogy; democracy; pedagogical exchange; interface; enactment; informality

Introduction

This paper outlines a conceptual framework for considering the pedagogical relation. Extending descriptions from the field of relational pedagogy (e.g. Bingham and Sidorkin 2004; Sidorkin 2022) on the sociocultural, spatiotemporal and material dimensions of education (e.g. Aspelin 2022; Hinsdale 2016; Ljungblad 2021), here we offer a framework that positions the pedagogical relationship at the *centre* of classroom teaching and learning encounters. We commence from the perspective that education, as a necessarily relational undertaking, proceeds upon 'the interaction of three agencies—the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they produce together' (Lusted 1986, 3). A relational pedagogy draws attention to this imbrication of teacher and student *with* knowledge to position enactments of teaching and learning as the 'outcomes' of this interrelationship. On this, we follow Biesta's (2004) observation:

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> The relation between teachers and students can be understood as a process of communication. But what is communication? How does it take place? And what kind of relation between teachers and students is established through communication? … Rather than thinking of communication as a direct relation between teachers and students, I argue that there is a gap between the teacher and student. This gap is a necessary condition for communication – and hence education – to take place. A pedagogy of relation should therefore acknowledge and affirm the uncertainties and risks and the possibilities that are at stake in this gap. (11)

It is the encounter *between* teachers, students and knowledge that is important, and from which the locus of educational enactment is found. Relational pedagogy emphasises the significance of the encounter and the relationships that are made possible in the moment of interaction (Hickey and Riddle 2022; Riddle and Hickey 2022). The relationship establishes the nature of the pedagogical encounter, and where opportunities for an inclusive education that values participatory and dialogic engagement gains form. The encounter shapes what is 'done' in the name of education and is defined by the mediative effects of different formulations of the interactions that teachers and students negotiate in the daily life of the classroom.

A relational pedagogy gives attention to the ways that students and teachers come to the teaching-learning encounter as engaged participants. This is an approach to pedagogy that moves beyond 'teaching innocently" (Brookfield 1995, 1) to draw attention to the nature of the exchange and the conditions that frame how students and teachers encounter each other. A relational pedagogy works to engage students and teachers as mutual constituents in inclusive modes of encounter that value (and interrogate) the positionality that each hold in context of the pedagogical encounter (Moll 2019).

The relational encounter

Taking the positioning of the relationship *between* teachers, students and the production of knowledge as the centre of the educational encounter, we note that relational pedagogies: i) position the encounter between teachers and students at the core of education; where the process of producing knowledge leads to ii) pragmatic deliberations on the effect that this encounter has on learning; which in turn define iii) the ethical dynamics at work between teachers and students. On this last point we take as our clarion Ljungblad's (2021) assertion that a relational pedagogy represents a commitment to inclusion, pluralism and diversity, and further, that relational ways of enacting teaching and learning carry a primary intent toward participatory modes of engagement (Florian and Linklater 2010; Moll 2019). Under a relational pedagogy, the encounter between teachers and students should work to enable students 'to stand in relationship with the world; that is, to be present "in between"' (Ljungblad 2021, 591).

In this sense, relational pedagogy is a distinct way of 'doing' education; one that proceeds as an ethically motivated provocation toward inclusive, engaged and participatory enactments of teaching and learning. Relational pedagogies recognise 'the complex web of relations that students and teachers exist "within" and as part of' by remaining attentive to the 'positionality that students and teachers hold' (Hickey et al. 2021, 206). By deliberatively engaging the pedagogical encounter as a site of inter-action, a pedagogy

is provoked that remains responsive to the emergent conditions of the pedagogical encounter and the positionality maintained by students and teachers.

Our purpose in this paper is to articulate a conceptualisation of these aspects of the pedagogical relation. We commence with a description of the terrain of the pedagogical relation to consider the context within which teaching–learning encounters proceed. From this, we move to describe the pedagogical 'interface' that emerges between teachers and students when engaged in processes of producing knowledge together. Within this we consider the modalities of exchange that define how teachers and students come *into* relation and turn to theorise 'informality' as a useful conceptual motif for thinking about how pedagogical encounters might take stock of the respective positions maintained by students and teachers. This leads to a consideration of the intent to which the pedagogical relation might be directed, and we close with a deliberation on the moral–ethical responsibilities that relational pedagogies prescribe. On this last point, we echo Bingham and Sidorkin's (2004) sense that 'education is only meaningful and successful when students and teachers are in *mutual* relation with each other' (24, emphasis added) and cast our closing deliberations under the consideration of educational democracy. We argue that a genuinely relational approach to education and learning has at its core this participatory democratic remit (Hickey et al. 2022; Riddle 2022).

Totalising fantasies: a relational pedagogy?

Conceptualising relational pedagogy in this way might imply a reductive remit – one that reduces accounts of relational ways of doing education to a singular and perhaps simplistic formulation. We note that our intention is not to characterise a *particular* illustration of relational pedagogy as definitive, but instead to configure a way of thinking about the pedagogical relationship according to the conditions within which pedagogical encounters can occur. It is in terms of these conditions that the pedagogical relation is mediated and shapes the ways in which teachers and students come into relation.

With this purpose in mind, we proceed from the basis of defining what is *categorically fundamental* to considerations of relational pedagogy, and while we give reference to earlier descriptions (e.g. Hickey, Pauli-Myler, and Smith 2020; Hickey and Riddle 2022; Ljungblad 2021; Riddle and Cleaver 2017), our intention is to offer a way of thinking about the constituent *dimensions* and *dynamics* that order the conditions of the relational encounter. As such, this paper does not cast specific descriptions or instances of practice but instead seeks to define the general coordinates – the *conditions* – under which the pedagogical relation proceeds.

We prefigure the concept 'conditions' to refer to the assemblage of forces that influence and configure the relational encounter. These include sociocultural, spatiotemporal and material forces that constitute the setting of the pedagogical encounter (e.g. classrooms and similar 'sites' of education, both formal and informal), and that influence how teachers and students come to the pedagogical exchange. Also apparent are the ways through which teachers and students are afforded possibilities to mediate and engage with the curriculum and produce knowledge in contextually contingent forms (Hickey and Riddle 2022). We assert that each of these 'forces' is contingent on the context of the pedagogical exchange and note that, in the moment of encounter,

the ways that teachers and students enact teaching and learning derive influences from the sociocultural, spatiotemporal and material 'conditions' inherent to the educational context. In other words, 'the relationship between teacher, student and knowledge evolves as the primary "site" of learning [and] from which the contextualised realities of the experience of schooling become apparent, negotiated and grounded' (Hickey et al. 2022, 294). A relational pedagogy accounts for these forces in 'recognition of the idiosyncratic, in-the-moment character of the pedagogical encounter' (Hickey et al. 2022, 296) to provoke modes of teaching and learning that are deliberative, participatory and relevant to both teachers and students.

The dynamics and dimensions of relational pedagogy

To delineate the ontological configuration of the pedagogical relationship from the techniques and practices that constitute activations of teaching and learning, we invoke the term 'dynamics' to refer to the ways in which the relation is framed by and constituted within the context of the pedagogical encounter and the positionality of teachers and students. The intersubjective nature of the encounter between teachers and students establishes the dimensional 'frame' of the pedagogical encounter, with manifestations of relational pedagogy drawing attention to the coming-into-relation of teachers and students. The dimensional frame of the pedagogical exchange also suggests something of the constitutive conditions of the pedagogical encounter and the positionality of teacher and student *in relation* to each other and the context of this encounter.

As an indication of what we include under this designation, we note Duff's (2013) consideration of the 'compound of forces' that emerge as part of the encounter and which work to describe how teachers and students 'compose affective relations with other bodies' (195). At this fundamental level, the pedagogical relation is defined as the intersubjective 'merger' of teacher and student[1], where any attempt toward education becomes contingent on these actants coming *into* relation. As such, the relational pedagogical dynamic is one of encounter, in which teachers and students come into relation from their respective positions, and from where education proceeds at this interface. It is what then happens (and what is enabled to happen) at this 'interface' (Hickey and Riddle 2022; Hickey et al. 2022) that is important. As Healy and Mulcahy (2021) noted, 'entities such as human subjects and subjectivities emerge *through* relations' such that, 'ontologically, it is relations that come first' (559, emphasis added). Instead of focusing on individuals (i.e. teachers and students), the relational ontology of the interface brings the 'shared space between teachers and students and learning and classrooms and knowledge and school and life' (Riddle and Hickey 2022, 4) into sharp focus as the driving affective force of education.

Further, it is through the interface that the *dimensions* of the relation – as empirically observable workings of the pedagogical encounter – surface and become recognisable. The dimensions of the pedagogical relation indicate the practical *doing* of education, such that it is in terms of the material–physical dimensions of the site of learning (including the material-physical presence of classrooms and other sites of the pedagogical encounter), and the psycho-socially informed 'rules' (both formal and informal and that are evident in the psycho-social dimensions of the encounter) that constitute modalities of conduct appropriate to the setting. The emplacement of teachers' and students'

within these spatio-temporally defined settings of teaching and learning draw on these vectors of positionality, psycho-sociality and spatiality to mediate how the pedagogical encounter will proceed and how these actants will practically come into relation. These dimensions of the pedagogical relation implicate factors including the physical contexts of the site of the pedagogical exchange, as well as broader socio-cultural factors that determine how students and teachers come to be physically positioned as actants in this exchange.

The dynamics and dimensions of the pedagogical exchange provide a basis for categorising the ontological and practical aspects of the pedagogical encounter, and it is from these that we offer Figure 1 as a visual representation of this arrangement. In particular, the pedagogical interface is characterised by the key dimensions of *mutuality*[2] and *informality*.

The ontological dynamics of the pedagogical relation

Gergen's (2009) assertion that 'we exist in a world of co-constitution … *we are always already emerging from relationship*' (xv, emphasis added) provides a useful starting point for considering the ontological dimensions of the pedagogical relation. The important realisation inherent to Gergen's account is that we are always already in relation, with any pretence toward assertions of individual boundedness rejecting the reality that we are – as situated beings – always set in relation with Others and the world-at-large. As Gergen (2009) noted, 'there is no isolated self or fully private experience' (xv). In terms of the relational nature of pedagogy, it occurs that education is enacted at the interface of the 'mutual constitution of entangled agencies' (Barad 2007, 33) of

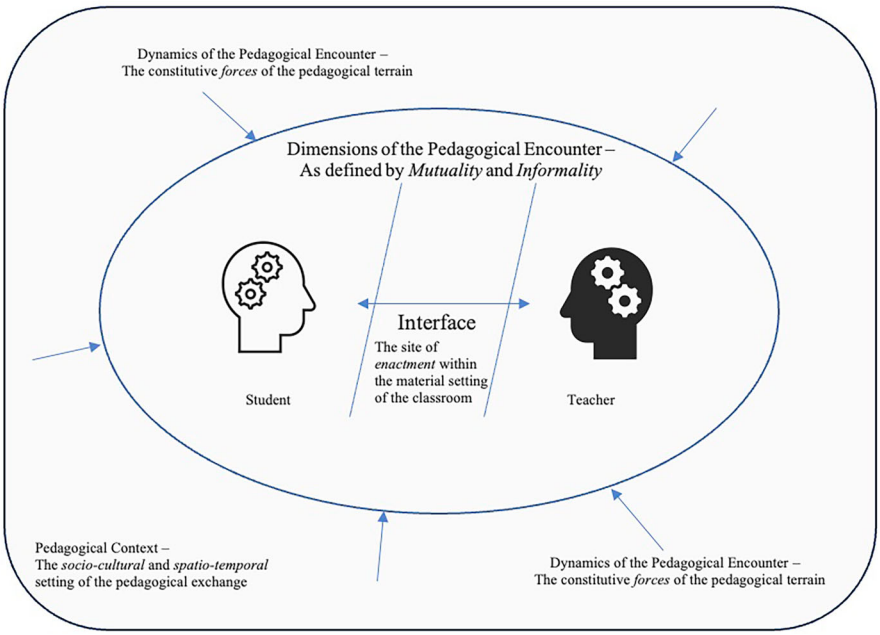

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for a Relational Pedagogy.

teacher, student and knowledge all set within a wider socio-temporal context. We suggest that the complexity and the co-constitutive nature of the pedagogical relation positions the encounters that teachers and students have as 'central to the educational endeavour' and as more important 'than what we learn or how we learn it' (Bingham 2011, 517).[3] The implication is in recognising that how we come into relation extends from complex webs of encounter, which exert effect over learning and the progression of the pedagogical exchange. As Healy and Mulcahy (2021) noted, the interpersonal/intersubjective encounter that constitutes the pedagogical relation functions as an 'interplay of affecting and being affected' (557), and within which the conflation of embodiment and interaction are shaped by prior encounters, the conditions of the moment and the positionality that students and teachers maintain. When teachers and students come into relation, they do so according to the contingencies of the moment and their positionality as beings-in-relation.

It is at the interface, enacted in-the-moment of encounter between teachers and students, and informed and shaped as this is by the positionality of these intersubjectively emplaced beings that education proceeds. Emirbayer (1997) referred to the nature of this encounter under the guise of the 'trans-action', and in doing so drew on Dewey and Bentley's (1949) usage of this term to refer to 'systems of description and naming employed to deal with aspects and phases of action, without final attribution to elements or other presumptively detachable or independent entities, essences of realities, and without isolation of presumptively detachable "relations" from such detachable "elements"' (108). Like Gergen (2009), Emirbayer (1997) rejected any sense of a bounded and unified 'I' to preface the relational, intersubjective and co-constitutive nature of being. What this implies is that any consideration of the transactions that beings in-relation invoke order the nature of the relationship as a 'dynamic, unfolding process' (287).[4] In education this manifests in the form of the 'mutuality' that is inherent to the pedagogical encounter and the immediacy of the relation.

The interface and exchange

In a summary of the dynamic process of educational relations, Ljungblad (2021) observed that pedagogical relationality is 'ontologically based on the idea that people share a social living space with other people' (863), highlighting that education proceeds intersubjectivity 'in and through the practices shared by people' (864). As Ljungbald (2021) made clear, 'teachers and students are constantly involved in relational processes' (864), with enactments of this inter-relationality mediating the encounter and the conduct of learning. We have described in earlier work (e.g. Hickey and Riddle 2022; Hickey et al. 2022) how this encounter occurs at the interface between teacher and student, with the interface representing a 'site' – a *location* – where a shared space between teacher and student is provoked as the setting of the pedagogical exchange. In other words, 'it is at the interface … between students, teachers and the site of learning that education occurs' (Hickey and Riddle 2022, 791).

However, we are careful to note that this location of the pedagogical encounter is not purely constituted by the spatial-geographic alone. Conceptually, this positioning of the interface as something emergent *and prone to* the interactions of teachers and students corresponds as much with the establishment of an affective and emotionally contingent union, as it does material and physical emplacement. The interface signifies more than:

> A sense of 'emplacement' … as a defining feature of the engagement. Such considerations of emplacement often infer a sense of 'positioning' that consequently locates the engagement *in* place, with this coming to stand as the central feature through which the pedagogical encounter is understood. (Hickey 2020, 1344)

Instead, we argue for something that takes account of the resonances and percepts, affects and flows that emerge between teachers and students (Riddle and Hickey 2022). Although the physicality of the pedagogical exchange is important, with the material dimensions of the site of encounter prescribing its own influences and requirements, these alone do not explain the interaction. Something further – something more resonant – is also at work in this moment, in turn informing the encounter as one that is mutually constituted and interpersonally shared. Osher et al. (2020) provided a sense of this aspect of the pedagogical encounter when noting that the progression of learning is 'influenced by the idiographic pathways of others' (6). They further argued that it is important to understand that there are 'significant relationships in each microsystem context that children experience directly and how children *appraise and interpret their relationships and experiences*' (Osher et al. 2020, 7, emphasis added). Central to this assessment is the consideration of 'relationships that are reciprocal, attuned, culturally responsive, and trustful', and which provide a 'positive developmental force between children and their physical and social contexts' (Osher et al. 2020, 8). The place of the pedagogical encounter is, by these accounts, one that is attuned to the interpersonal resonances it produces. The intra-actions (Barad 2007) that mediate the experiences of the pedagogical encounter position students and teachers not only in terms of their physical situatedness, but also in terms of the dynamics of the interpersonal encounter.[5]

The practical dimensions of the pedagogical encounter

With this deliberation of the ontological condition of the pedagogical relation established, we turn now to consider the practical *doing* of a relational pedagogy. As Lingard (2007) noted, 'it is through pedagogies that education gets done' (247), with the dimensions of the pedagogical relation crucial for describing how the interface finds form between teachers and students, and how this site of exchange translates into discernible enactments of teaching and learning.

Recognition in-the-moment

In a discussion on the importance of *recognition* in teaching and learning encounters, Rodríguez (2008) highlighted that recognising the pedagogical Other 'signals to the student that the teacher knows, cares, and values the student' (440). To recognise represents a responsiveness to the pedagogical encounter, wherein teachers and students acknowledge not only the presence of their respective Other but work to meaningfully engage within the moment to generate approaches to teaching and learning that take account of this positioning. Morgan et al.'s (2015) observation that meaningful education 'involves building relationships of trust and safety that support the development of social and emotional foundations' (1039) signals a useful prompt toward a relational practice; a point that Aspelin and Eklöf (2022) echoed when observing that 'positive and supportive relationships between teachers and students are crucial to students' academic and socio-emotional development' (1).

Recognition in the pedagogical encounter provides the basis of this mutuality. We conceptualise mutuality in terms of the development of the understanding of the pedagogical Other that forms as attempts are made to take account of the positionality that teachers and students bring into the classroom. In the moment of the pedagogical encounter, teachers and students mutually engage in the exchange, with the challenge for relational pedagogy relating to how one takes stock of the positionality that comes into the classroom and as mediations of the pedagogical exchange proceed in-the-moment. We invoke here the establishment of what Margonis (2007) called a 'relational ethic of solidarity', in which teachers and students recognise each other as mutually engaged in the moment of the pedagogical activation.

An illustration of this move toward recognition is found in Freire's (1992) accounts of convening culture circles with 'fishers, with peasants and urban labourers' (36). For example, Freire (1992) recalled the following exchange:

> First question:
>
> 'What is the Socratic maieutic?'
>
> General guffawing. Score one for me.
>
> 'Now it's your turn to ask me a question', I said.
>
> There was some whispering, and one of them tossed out a question:
>
> 'What's a contour curve?'
>
> I couldn't answer. I marked down one to one.
>
> 'What importance does Hegel have in Marx's thought?'
>
> Two to one.
>
> 'What's soil liming?'
>
> Two to two.
>
> 'What's an intransitive verb?'
>
> Three to two.
>
> 'What's a contour curve got to do with erosion?'
>
> Three to three.
>
> 'What's epistemology?'
>
> Four to three.
>
> 'What's green fertilizer?'
>
> Four to four.
>
> And so on, until we got to ten.
>
> As I said goodbye, I made a suggestion. 'Let's think about this evening. *You had begun to have a fine discussion with me*. Then you were silent and said that only I could talk

> because I was the only one who knew anything. Then we played a knowledge game and we tied ten to ten. I knew ten things you didn't. And you knew ten things that I didn't. Let's think about this'. (37–38, emphasis added)

This anecdote details how the establishment of mutuality forms as part of the pedagogical encounter. What Freire (1992) achieved in this exchange was the recognition of his pedagogical Other and the establishment of the legitimacy of the positionality that he and his students held. It was through dialogue that Freire initiated this mutuality, and importantly, through dialogue that his students gained insight into who he was, and he them. However, and more intrinsically, an understanding of how the pedagogical exchange *could* proceed was also established, with the responsibility for the pedagogical encounter shared in deliberative negotiation. We have argued that this sort of in-the-momentness is a key part of relational pedagogy (Hickey and Riddle 2022; Hickey et al. 2021; 2022) and note that how the pedagogical exchange is mediated as a responsive outcome of the encounter sets the tenor for the mutuality possible in this moment.

From this, we contend that teaching and learning occur *in-the-moment* and according to the affordances and constraints that inhere to the condition of the situation. By meaningfully coming into relation and setting about the task of negotiating how learning should proceed as a mutual undertaking, teachers and students give credence to the immediacy of the moment – to the immediacy of the pedagogical encounter – and the context within which this relationship is activated (Hickey and Riddle 2022). A relational approach to teaching and learning places emphasis on the formation of relationships that enable this recognition of the pedagogical Other to occur; relational encounters that function as foundational to deliberative negotiations of learning. A relational pedagogy, as a pedagogy that recognises the centrality of the relationship between teachers and students to learning, remains responsive to the dynamics of the encounter and provides the conditions necessary for an emancipatory possibility in education.

It occurs, though, that within systems of education that are increasingly defined by 'hyper-rationalised policies, over-elaborated administrative systems, and highly regimented teaching programmes' (Edwards-Groves et al. 2010, 46), enacting such relational exchanges represents a challenge. An outcome of the stark systemic changes that have characterised schooling in recent decades has been the rationalisation (and reduction) of what is *possible* in the relationship between teachers and students. Narrowed (and narrowing) measures of what counts as 'effectiveness' in student learning and teacher performance define the pedagogical encounter (Biesta 2009), and where possibilities for relationality are reduced to transactional encounters geared toward defined student achievement and behaviour outcomes (Riddle and Hickey 2022). Mediated via sets of 'performative truths' that establish the 'ordinary everyday life and work' (Ball 2015, 1129) of teachers and the educational experience of students, what counts as learning and teaching is increasingly 'only what can be counted' (Kamler and Comber 2005, 121). In this situation, ideals of success are reduced to prescriptively defined performativities, each mediated by 'increasing levels of managerialism, bureaucracy [and] standardization [in] assessment, and performance' (Evetts, cited in Brass and Holloway 2019, 2). As a result, teaching and learning under this dynamic emerge as *transactions*, narrowly defined by prescribed curricula and regimented pedagogical enactments that order rigid modalities of encounter.[6]

Informality

We suggest that what is required under the prescriptive conditions that characterise predominant expressions of teaching and learning is the reclamation of the 'informality' that marks mutually contingent relational encounters (Hickey and Riddle 2022). As a first step toward a more inclusive and democratic reshaping of education systems, schools and curriculum, mobilising the in-the-moment mutuality that marks the sort of relational pedagogical enactments we are arguing for here represents a dynamic modality of encounter that works to recognise ways of speaking, of expressing opinion, and of moving about and using space that defy the 'rules'. Informality is an expression of this impulsiveness – of following the moment and the energy of the encounter – and which works toward prompting inquiry and the development of knowledge. Such an activation of the relational exchange signifies a reformulation of the interactions that typically demarcate the ritualised performances of classrooms (McLaren 1999) to instead encourage forms of dialogue and modes of encounter that are immediate and in-the-moment, free of the strictures of the formalised, 'reserved' decorum that obstruct imaginative inquiry. Informality represents a generative modality of productive interaction that gives credence to ways of acting, speaking and being that work in-the-moment and that support the mutuality of the encounter between teacher and student.

We have described empirical accounts of these formations in earlier works (e.g. Hickey and Riddle 2022; Hickey, Pauli-Myler, and Smith 2020), but in such formations we note that a relational pedagogy emerges when meaningful relationships are enabled to form through dialogue and ways of being that are responsive, impulsive and in-the-moment. It is in these moments of interactivity that mutuality and trust emerge, and where knowledge organically arises as a response to the pedagogical encounter. As crucial conditions of the pedagogical encounter, nurturing these responsive and impulsive interactions via the enactment of meaningful inter-relationships provides the foundation for something more generative than the current regime of prescriptive designations of curriculum and pedagogy might permit.

Conclusion: toward a democratic relational pedagogy

We argue that the intent of a relational pedagogy must be toward the opening of opportunities for students and teachers to examine 'personally relevant questions … and create unique ways of sharing what they have learned' (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, and Caspari 2015, 4). Biesta (2010) noted that the challenge of such conviction rests in recognising 'not *that* we are committed to equality, democracy, and emancipation, but *how* we are committed to these concepts and *how* we express and articulate this commitment' (57, emphasis in original). Progression toward a relational pedagogy means meaningfully working toward ensuring that these opportunities for creative inquiry are central to the pedagogical encounter and that the conditions necessary for teaching and learning enactments that hold equality and emancipation at their core are made available. Given the complex world that young people find themselves in, with growing social and economic inequality, rising authoritarianism, a rapidly intensifying climate crisis and increasing global political, economic and social instability, there is an urgency toward developing more inclusive and democratic modes of education that help young people to become critical and creative agents of change (Riddle

2022). This includes opening opportunities for teachers and students, and students as peers, to come together in deliberative union to engage the pedagogical encounter.

We contend that approaches to teaching and learning that operate under the designation of relational pedagogy must infer this democratic intent, and indeed a growing body of literature supports this position (e.g. Aspelin 2021; 2022; Bingham and Sidorkin 2004; Ljungblad 2021; Morgan et al. 2015; Sidorkin 2022). When activated as participatory enactments in the negotiation of knowledge, ways of teaching and learning that emphasise the positionality of students and teachers and that respond to the mutuality of the pedagogical encounter are established. For these pedagogical encounters to occur, the formation of a meaningful relationship between student and teacher is fundamental. A relational approach to teaching and learning requires teachers and students to recognise – and respond to – this moment of the pedagogical encounter and to contextualise its workings toward exchanges that are negotiated and deliberative. Such an approach to teaching and learning makes explicit the inter-personal nature of the pedagogical encounter and how learning proceeds as an outcome of the ordinary day-to-day encounters that students and teachers share.

In context of systems of schooling that prescribe limited possibilities for what counts as learning, finding the space to build relationships between teachers and students represents a significant challenge. Activating relational ways of teaching and learning that recognise (and respond to) the positionality of teachers and students *and* the conditions of the moment of encounter adds to this challenge. We argue, accordingly, that this is an issue for policy as much as it is one of practice. Providing a basis for teachers and students to come together in the ways that we have described will require the deliberate formation of structures and approaches to schooling (and education more broadly) that enable relational enactments to proceed. As Edwards-Groves et al. (2010) identified:

> Life in education is becoming highly constrained, controlled and restricted by the meta-practices of educational policy and administration that commodify and regulate education at every level and to an unprecedented extent. What is being challenged … is the scope of action which enables educators to act and interact with freedom, agency and integrity in their professional relationships. (46)

The challenge comes in finding the space to enact modalities of practice that enable students and teachers to come *into* meaningful relation with each other and with knowledge, in ways that foster imaginative inquiry as the foundation of learning. We argue that approaches to schooling that take account of these things can accurately be defined as being inclusive and democratic in terms of the commitment they give to ensuring that students are recognised. A relational pedagogy that takes account of the significance of the context of learning, the positionality maintained by students and teachers, and the dynamics inherent to the pedagogical encounter, works to ensure that an inclusive and democratic possibility in this way of doing education is achieved.

Notes

1. We note here that relational encounters are also evident between students, and with others involved in the day-to-day practice of teaching and learning (parents, community members, the school's executive, departmental representatives, and so on). We draw this formulation not to suggest that the only relation evident in classrooms and contexts of learning is that

between teacher and student, but as a shorthand way of signifying the pre-eminence of the teacher-student relation in the conceptualisation of relational pedagogy offered here.

2. The reader might infer a connection to Wenger's (1998) deliberations on mutuality in this invocation of the concept. Wenger (1998) notes that mutual engagement functions as a primary function of an effective pedagogical encounter. While we don't go so far as to imply that a relational pedagogy functions under the guise of a 'community of practice' (per Wenger's deliberations) we do draw a parallel with this assertion around the significance of mutuality as the foundation for a participatory and dialogic relational pedagogical encounter.
3. This represents a theme that is also evident in classical accounts of education and schooling (e.g., Dewey 1899; 1916; Freire 1970; Rancière 1985). For example, Dewey (1916) highlighted that 'in such shared activity the teacher is a learner, and the learner is, without knowing it, a teacher' (167), which pre-empted a similar logic found in later work by Freire (1970) and Rancière (1985).
4. Emirbayer (1997) rejected the suggestion of 'inter-actions' under the 'notion that one can posit discrete, pre-given units such as the individual or society as ultimate starting points of sociological analysis' (287) to emphasise that human *trans*-actions in the world proceed as 'dynamic, continuous, and processual' (281). Any inquiry into the social activity of human beings must emphasise what Emirbayer (1997) identified as the 'relational pragmatics' at work in these human trans-actions.
5. Biesta (2004) cast this moment as 'the in-between', but in taking this notion further, we invoke a more active sense of this encounter according to the 'exchanges' that occur at the interface of teacher and student. The exchange – mediated via the intersubjective coalescence of beings in-relation – situates the pedagogical exchange as a point where learning proceeds *in terms of* the relationship constituted. The exchange emerges from the interface, an active product of the coming into relation shared by teachers and students. What it means to be pedagogically in-relation emerges from what is interpersonally possible in this moment of encounter; a point that Edwards-Groves et al. (2010) observed when noting that 'education occurs through lived and *living practices* that relate different people to one another' (52).
6. Lingard et al. (2015) pre-figured this situation in terms of 'globalising educational accountabilities' and attendant 'testing regimes' that define schooling. Under a performative logic defined by rationalisation and accountability, 'privatisation, individualisation, competition, choice, devolution of responsibility, user-pays ideology and self-management' (Smyth 2016, 314) provide a set of normative characteristics for schooling.

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