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The initial idea for this special issue on relationship-based social work practice emerged during an editorial meeting in the autumn of 2014. Board members pondered over how relationship-based practice was shaping-up in the contemporary climate of financial austerity and efforts to review and reform the profession led by policy-makers and academics (Munro 2011; DoH 2015; DfE 2014). Added to this were questions we had about new media and how these are influencing and interacting with attempts to do social work relationally. It was felt that the time was right to take-stock and to consider how individual caseworkers, managers, organisations and educators were responding to the challenges.

In very recent times, this temperature-check has been somewhat overtaken by events as the repercussions of the UK referendum decision to withdraw from the European Union begin to sink-in. It is difficult at this point in time, so soon after the event, to imagine how Brexit will impact on social work in the UK and on relationship-based practice in particular. We might speculate that the initial negative response of the financial markets forewarns of continuing or deepening austerity measures, with a fear that the impact on service users and the social workers who work with them will be negative and hardening. There may however also be a flush of hope that the bigger issue of how we relate, one nation to another and between different individuals and communities who chose either to 'remain' or to 'exit', may enable us to rethink and enhance our recognition of the importance of relationship. Learning to be together in new ways, respecting difference yet retaining connection, is surely part of the essence of what it means to relate.

There is a long and proud tradition of relationship-based practice in UK social work (Howe, 1998; Trevithick, 2003; Ruch et al, 2010) but it is not an approach which can easily be pinned down or defined. As Howe (1987) pointed out some time ago, social work draws on many explanatory bases, making it possible to use a variety of different theoretical frameworks to conceptualise relationships. In this special issue, using our understanding of practitioner-service user interactions, we choose to look at how practitioners offer themselves as

promoters of change in the life circumstances and emotional health of service users. We argue that practitioners need to work at a variety of levels using a range of methods and resources, applying different techniques which draw on psychological and technological knowledge and understanding to the benefit of the practitioner-service user relationships.

In our view, relationship underpins social work practice in all its forms. We believe that social worker-service user relationships are strengthened by a deeper understanding of the psychodynamics and emotions of those relationships, set within the systems and organisational contexts in which these interactions take place. Many presenting cases have strong psychological demands which require service users to talk about their worries; to face their fears and to gain confidence in their capacities to cope. We recognise that technology has offered huge possibilities to enable help and support to be sought by those in need and in turn for practitioners to respond. However, focusing on the use of technology in itself may result in the neglect of underlying psychological and emotional reasons for service users' requests for help and this may in turn lead to a less than adequate outcome. So how can we enhance the practice of social workers who rely on the act of relating?

Service users benefit from care which includes talking with professionals about their worries, concerns and problems; they seek dependable relationships in whatever form, and via any means necessary, with strong, caring practitioners to help them cope with problems and to lead fuller lives. This involves paying attention to the emotions behind the presenting issues and the context within they emanate and are to be worked with.

A reality-based view sees the aim of relationship-based practice as a way of enabling the development of a solid 'self', including a sense of responsibility for the self and for others in

our care. The problems, issues and predicaments social workers struggle with are not so much the problems and difficulties in themselves, but more often the difficulties faced in resolving them in a relational context and in a respectful manner which includes the delicate process of refining truths; seeking to do justice to our own complexity and that of the service users we are working with.

Like all containing relationships, to survive and grow practice has to respond to the demands and challenges of its environment. However, the continually changing environment in which we practice raises anxieties that nowadays are increasingly met with complaints and negative, punitive consequences. Theses anxieties impact on our capacity to relate, and to engage in meaningful professional relationships.

All the papers in this special issue have engaged, in their own ways, with the challenging situations that social work practitioners and the profession itself is faced with in contemporary society. They also grapple with the tensions and opportunities relationship-based practice generates for professionals as they attempt to develop and sustain supportive relationships.

The first paper is presented by two of the three editors, Hingley-Jones and Ruch. These reflective observations on the challenges facing relationship-based practice, attempt to assist in leading us to consider many of the issues that are encountered by the profession in the context of austerity. The socio-political, historical and contemporary challenges to everyday practice are examined, including the idea of 'social suffering', the contributions of psychodynamic and systemic ideas to relationship-based practice examined. The paper looks at the obstacles to, and opportunities for, relationship-based practice and explores the conditions and qualities necessary to carry out such work in risky situations during times of

austerity. They go on to consider ways in which some of these challenges are met and suggest ideas for practitioners to be supported through good strong supervision and psychoanalytically-informed work discussion groups.

Two of the other papers in this special issue go on to revisit psychoanalytic ideas of relevance to the profession. These ideas have the potential to assist practitioners in their understanding of the quality of engagement with service users, to help guide thinking about the process and dynamic of professional relationships.

Hingley-Jones, Parkinson and Allain, in their paper, re-visit psychoanalytically-informed baby and young child observation in the education of social work students, demonstrating that observation can be a powerful tool for teaching and learning with social work trainees. Here it is argued that observation can make a contribution by encouraging students to risk working with children and families in organisational contexts which are characterised by complexity and challenge. In essence the paper offers three main areas of focus. Firstly, it describes the contemporary policy and practice context for social work education and considers how psychoanalytically-informed observation can assist students and trainees in attaining the HCPC (2012) Standards of Proficiency. Secondly, it outlines the benefits of baby and young child observation for students' learning, making an argument for the way in which it can assist with professional development and building students' reflective capacity. Thirdly, it offers an analysis of a recent group of students' feedback on their learning following carrying out an observation; an emergent typology is described from the results. It is concluded that this type of observation is a useful learning tool for social work students towards the development of the skills needed to do relationship-based practice. Students can be seen to have gained knowledge about human development; to have developed their

'use of self' and; carrying out observations can be seen to be a prototype for home visits. The paper boldly concludes that the psychoanalytically-informed baby or young child observation continues to have much to offer social work education as it enhances and improves social workers' capacities to work in demanding situations.

Tucker's paper on the other hand reminds us of the importance of the organisational context when considering relationship-based practice and revisits the psychoanalytic conceptual idea of 'the organisation in the mind', to show how an individual's conscious and unconscious mental constructs of the challenges they face in role can also illuminate and be a manifestation of organisational dilemmas and challenges. The paper shows what can be understood beyond the personal and interpersonal and provides wider insights into how relations can be perceived in organisations. He reflects on his experiences in different roles as researcher, social work manager and organisational consultant and demonstrates, through research material and examples from his practice, how individual descriptions of experiences in organisations provide insights into the emotional experience of working environments as they relate to the organisation. He explores the impact of the organisation on the mind of the individuals and how it informs behaviour in relationships; how the organisation existing in the mind of the individual might differ from the actual reality, resulting in the interactions occurring within an organisation that might differ from that which was designed or intended. The strength of this paper is that it is rooted in practice examples, as well as research data, which demonstrate how individual struggles can also be understood as organisational struggles; how the images and ideas of the individual can be a product of the interrelationship between individual and context.

The painful and difficult relationship between individuals and the contexts they find themselves in is further highlighted in the paper by Smith. Here, she seeks to show the complex processes and dynamics in the relationships between managers, the team and the wider organisation, as they struggle to cope with the demise of their project. The paper exposes some of the emotional forces and relationship dynamics that impact on the individual managers and their changing relationships to work, as they go through loss and change. The metaphor of the manager as a separating or divorcing half of a couple is used to highlight the difficulties faced during the period loss. We witness the struggles with aspects of primitive behaviour in the relationships between the managers as they journey through a perceived sense of unity based on shared identities and roles, through to increased divergence, as tensions and pressures increased. Smith shows beautifully, how emphasis on relationships, attention to the boundaries, styles of management and focus on subjective processes can reveal how effective service delivery can be interrupted, desired outcomes left unachieved.

In [SURNAMES] David's, Suzette and Sarah paper, we see the gap that exists between what people say should happen and what actually happens as they examine what needs to be done in Health and Social Care to keep people 'safe'. Through their experiences of facilitating a workshop, they tell their story of how they engaged with clinicians to reflect on their experiences of what is required to keep people safe within complex conditions in multiple settings. They reveal their practice as they try to develop an approach to do better at keeping people safe. They describe their methodology and approach to learning; we are exposed to their thinking and vulnerability as they respond to situations they are faced with in the workshop. This paper powerfully displays full engagement in relationship-based

practice; the challenges, dilemmas one faces and the importance of paying attention to what is going on below the surface. It also reveals how exposing more of what is actually going on might question preferred ways of managing and coping. They end on a practice note about the importance of: being both reflexive and conceptually grounded; exploring dilemmas as these can reveal hidden assumptions and; strongly arguing that if you slow people down and create the right conditions, people notice more and with hindsight what was known and hidden from the self and others, can be recovered.

The question of how do we keep people safe can also be applied to the next paper. Here, Turner interrogates how we connect, and the importance of connection, by exploring the opportunities which social media offers to relationship-based social work practice; making a case for 'integration' rather that 'splitting'. The opening quote from E.M. Foster reminds us of the importance of connection and that relationship is about connecting, however, there are different ways of connecting. Turner makes a case for the importance of social relationships, by exploring the challenges and possibilities when attempting to integrate social networking within a relationship-based approach to social work. She uses the Kleinian concept of 'splitting' to show how primitive anxiety triggered by social media can enter the debate about the place of social media in social work. Eloquently making a case for seeing the positives in using the internet, she describes the opportunities offered by online space and she painstakingly shows how with online space and relationship-based social work practice, some interpersonal and social experiences can be found to lie at the heart of both. Turner offers examples of positive relational practice educed by social media within the social work context and makes a case for unity between social networking and relationship-based social work. However, this is not done naively or idealistically. As well as presenting

an argument for this unique opportunity for the profession if this situation is exploited, she also examines the challenges to this type of integration by focusing on highly complex ethical issues and questions for the profession.

We are grateful to the contributors to this issue for their willingness to show the many faces of this topic, for not turning a blind eye and staying committed to their belief in relationship-based practice.

Agnes Bryan, Helen Hingley-Jones, Gillian Ruch

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