Navigating relationships in practice learning: Voices from practice educators

Abstract

This paper explores the nature and quality of relationships between social work students and their practice educators and discusses how practice educators navigate their multifaceted and complex role in the context of practice learning in England. The data was drawn from individual interviews with 13 practice educators and two focus groups with first year MA social work students. The findings indicate that challenges associated with social differences, in engaging students in learning, and in initiating critical dialogue affect the nature and quality of practice learning relationships. Practice educators need to develop skills, knowledge and confidence to manage the complexities and different demands of their role. It is also important for practice educators to invest time to develop and sustain meaningful relationships with students, and to create a safe space for critical dialogue to take place. A trusting relationship is fundamental if students and practice educators are to raise and explore difficult issues.

Key Words:

Practice learning, practice educator, social work, relationship building, critical conversations

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Social work is an ethically complex, emotionally challenging and intellectually demanding profession in which practitioners use a range of skills, knowledge and values to make sense of and work with diverse social situations (Stone, 2016). Therefore, supporting and assessing those who wish to enter the profession is a very challenging task to undertake. Practice learning is a key component in social work education. The term, used to describe those involved in supporting social work students in practice learning, varies from country to country. For example, in the USA and Canada, 'field instructor' is commonly used (Fortune, McCarthy, & Abramson, 2001). In England the term used has changed over time, from 'student supervisor', 'practice teacher', 'practice assessor' to the current title 'practice educator' (PE) (Finch, 2013).

The role of the PE is a complex one involving educative, supportive, organisational, assessment, mentoring and gate-keeping functions. This role 'encompasses potentially conflictual roles of nurturer and enabler of learning on the one hand and assessor and manager on the other' (Finch & Taylor, 2013, p. 247). The PE, as a gate-keeper to the profession, has a responsibility in making the final decision on whether to pass or fail a student (Finch & Poletti, 2014), which has far-reaching implications for the student. Many PEs may not feel adequately trained or supported to undertake this gate-keeping role (Finch & Taylor, 2013; Waterhouse, McLagan, & Murr, 2011). The PE's role is further complicated by the fact that it is situated in a wider political, social and cultural context of managerialism, bureaucratisation and proceduralism (Wilson, 2012). Organisational procedures,

bureaucratic processes and financial constraints can undermine the development of creative responses to difficult practice situations and erode the time needed to develop meaningful relationships with service users. These shape practice learning in particular ways and pose challenges for PEs trying to develop a conducive environment for meaningful and trusting relationships with their students (Hackett & Marsland, 1997).

The nature and dynamics of the PE-student relationship deserves some scrutiny as it is within this relationship that issues concerning social difference and power are played out (Tedam, 2014). Hackett and Marsland (1997, p. 47) contend that 'examination of power issues is central to the provision of quality practice learning experience'. Students feel especially disempowered if power issues are not properly addressed at the outset. Unresolved conflicts with PEs can hinder students' professional development many years later (Baum, 2011). Key to successfully supporting students and enabling them to develop their professional identity is investing time in building and developing a secure, open and honest relationship (Dore, 2019). The practice learning environment should be able to support as well as encourage dialogue and risk taking (Fouché & Lunt, 2010). Practice learning relationships characterised by respect, mutual engagement, regular debriefing and structured opportunities for reflection and feedback are most likely to yield high levels of student satisfaction with the learning experience, and a greater sense of self–efficacy in the professional role (Vassos, Harms, & Rose, 2018). Responding to the learning needs of students requires PEs to skilfully balance multiple and changing roles, and to be knowledgeable, resourceful, critically reflective and reflexive.

The PE and the student bring to the practice learning relationship their own personal, professional and social identities, which in turn are continually negotiated, interpreted and reinterpreted. It is important to establish and foster open and frank relationships with students to identify and work through discomfort and contentions, and to resolve conflicts that arise (Baum, 2011). The starting point here is developing the relationship in order to be able to have those 'difficult conversations' with students (Finch, 2017). Both the PE and student need to have a relationship so that they can engage in difficult conversations. PEs therefore need to be skilled and possess certain qualities including being approachable, open and non-judgemental to encourage students to bring up difficult issues for discussions (Dore, 2019). This paper reports findings of a study that involves PEs and students and discusses how PEs navigate their multifaceted role in the context of practice learning. It also explores how the challenges related to social differences, in engaging students in learning and in initiating critical dialogue impact on the nature and quality of the PE-student relationship.

Methodology

This small-scale study drew on findings from a larger collaborative multi-professional study involving two online surveys with students and mentors (PEs) from the social work, nursing, para-medicine and teaching professions (Peiser, Ambrose, Burke, & Davenport, 2018). Findings from the multi-professional study showed that a heavy workload presented a major challenge to most PEs. Rogers' (2012) anti-oppressive social work research methodology informed our approach, drawing strong parallels with the widely advocated anti-oppressive practice framework currently rooted in

social work education and practice (Clifford & Burke, 2009). This methodology encompassed key principles of power, partnerships and emancipatory practice and was located within a constructivist, qualitative orientation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Our research is informed by our intersectional positioning as Black, Asian, Minority and Ethnic (BAME) women. We are aware of the reflexive relationship which exists between our social positions, values and perspectives which informs our methodological approach.

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used in the second stage of the study to fully engage with participants, allowing for a deeper exploration of the factors affecting PE-student relationship (Denscombe, 2014). Purposive sampling, a sampling method in which researchers use their judgement to recruit participants who help to answer their research questions (Denscombe, 2014), was used to select participants from a university database of PEs. All three researchers were involved in recruiting and interviewing PEs. They all already had professional relationships with the PEs being interviewed, having worked in partnership with them in student placements as placement tutors. PEs were contacted by email, provided with a participant information form and asked to respond by email if they were interested in being interviewed. Inclusion criteria required participants to have a social work qualification, hold the PE qualification and have experienced a minimum of two student placements. Attempts were made to recruit a diverse group of PEs to capture a range of experiences and perspectives in keeping with anti-oppressive research methodology. Of the 13 PEs recruited, four were men and nine were women working in both statutory and voluntary agencies in the North West of England. Twelve identified as white British and one as 'mixed ethnicity'. Different models of practice education were reflected in the sample, with four offsite PEs

working independently from the agencies where students were placed. These PEs mainly worked with students on their first placement. The other nine participants were on-site PEs working in the agency where the students were placed; seven had worked in a local authority and two in a voluntary organisation. The on-site PEs mainly worked with students on their final placement. Participants' experience in their role as PEs ranged from two and a half to 27 years, with the number of students each PE had supervised ranging from two to 130 students with an average of 30 students.

Focus groups were conducted with first year MA social work students to explore their shared experiences of the practice education role and the PE-student relationship during their placements. A purposive sampling approach was also used to recruit students at the University who had completed their first placement. Eleven students attended two focus groups consisting of two men and nine women who had placement experience in different voluntary agencies in the North West of England. Three students identified as from BAME backgrounds and eight as white British.

Ethical approval was received from the University Research Ethics Committee. Interview participants were free to withdraw consent at any time during the research whilst focus group participants were free to withdraw before data analysis commenced. To respect confidentiality, details of locations of both students and PEs are not provided and all names are pseudonyms. All research data was stored in electronic files and was password protected with, only the researchers having access to the information.

Data Analysis

Data from both the semi-structured interviews and focus groups were audio recorded, fully transcribed and entered into NVivo (Version 11) qualitative data analysis software. Scripts of individual and focus group interviews were read by all the researchers. Initial codes and a coding frame were developed by the research team. A thematic analysis was undertaken in order to identify key themes which were shared and checked (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Limitations of the study

This qualitative study was located in a particular area of England and involved a small number of PEs and students. Whilst some valuable detailed data was gathered, the findings cannot be generalised to a wider population. Even though an attempt was made to recruit a diverse range of participants, most heralded from traditional backgrounds reflecting the current demographic make-up of the pool of PEs and social work students. Future research could focus on seeking perspectives of individuals from a more diverse range of backgrounds, particularly those from BAME communities and those with disabilities. This would extend our understanding of their particular experiences of PEs from different social divisions.

Focus group discussions centred more on student's perspectives on placement issues within a wider context, such as the importance of support from both colleagues and their tutors. Future research could utilise individual interviews as a more appropriate research method to elicit students' individual, personal experiences. This could provide an additional dimension to help understand the complex practice learning relationships. It would also be useful to include the views of students who had experienced both a first and final placement, as it is more likely

for final year placements to involve statutory settings and this type of placement can be experienced very differently (Everitt, Miehls, Dubois, & Garran, 2011). Finally, the voice of the tutor could also be included in further research to enable a more holistic understanding of the environment for practice learning.

Findings

Our findings show that challenges related to social differences, challenges in engaging students in learning and in initiating critical dialogue, can affect the PE-student relationship, which in turn can impact students' practice learning experiences.

Challenges related to social differences

PEs observed that there were more younger students undertaking social work programmes since the introduction of the social work degree in 2003 in England. Some raised their concerns that younger students tended to struggle to meet placement requirements because of their lack of life experiences and emotional immaturity.

> They have never really lived away from home, people are not so emotionally mature. They are really struggling, they ask permission to do everything . . . the younger the students, the more I find they just sit there and wait for me to give them stuff. (Becky)

PEs further elaborated on the implications that limited life experiences had on practice. Students may not be able to appreciate fully the vulnerabilities of people they work with and the duty and responsibilities of the social work profession.

> It’s not because they aren't capable of empathy . . . It is the lack of experience, it's making sure that people are in a position where they can appreciate what the profession is about. (Dale)

PEs found that when working with younger students they needed to ‘adopt a different style’ (Susan). Becky found that when students ‘asked for permission’ to do simple tasks a less directive approach helped students to ‘develop their confidence and become more independent.’ However, she was mindful about the tension between PE’s enabling and educative role. A non-directive approach could be perceived by students as unhelpful and unsupportive. Hence it was important to explain to students the rationale for using such an approach at the outset and review its effectiveness with students at appropriate times.

PEs who were new to the practice education role remembered feeling apprehensive when they worked with students who had higher qualifications and more experiences in a leadership and management role. Reflecting on their practice educating journey, PEs realised that their perceived inability to meet students’ expectations could become barriers to developing relationships with students. They found that by explaining their respective roles in the placement context at the beginning helped to address this issue.

> I've had older students when I was younger. Initially you're going in with apprehension. Then once you get over that barrier and start explaining how the placement is going to work, the general things that people need to know to make them feel comfortable and welcome. (Sarah)

> She was my first student and she was a lot older than me, and she had a PhD and loads of qualifications. Before I met her, it was more of a challenge for me, because I thought she'd know more than me. But then actually it was fine. (Rachel)

Students' discussion in the focus groups confirmed the importance of establishing clear roles and responsibilities from the start of the relationship. They valued highly the knowledge and practice experience shared by their PEs.

> My PE was brilliant. He's got so much knowledge and experience in social work. He explained his role and what he had done so I knew he was going to be a great PE from the start and throughout. . . It's also easier to trust them as they know what they are talking about. (Students)

Some PEs were mindful that students who had strong religious beliefs might be conflicted with some of the core social work values including respect for diversity and equality. However, they were able to have a meaningful exploration with students on how personal beliefs could impact on practice.

> Mostly, the students I work with have a similar value base. In the sense that they come into social work, they have a passion for social justice and change, so that's the meeting ground. I mean I have had students with strong religious beliefs, but we have been able to discuss those religious beliefs and explore them in relation to practice. (Paula)

PEs spoke of the challenges they came across when they worked with students from BAME backgrounds. They noticed that in some cases there were cultural differences in body language including facial expressions, gestures,

mannerisms and degree of eye contact. Effective communication is key in social work practice and body language plays an essential role in communication. Observing and learning how students interacted with other people helped identify possible concerns and develop strategies to support students in improving their communication skills.

> I worked with a student from Nigeria. She spent the whole time looking down at her knees, because in her culture, to look somebody in the eye is very rude. We spent a very long time practising. Because in Britain, you've got to look at people if you're talking to them, otherwise you won't be able to establish rapport with people. (Becky)

A PE raised concern about students' language proficiency in English when English was not their first language. He explained the dilemma other PEs faced and their reluctance to raise their concerns in case it caused offence and upset to students. However, when the issue about language is not addressed properly, it not only affects the student's progression in placement but also has serious implications in practice.

> We've got to be honest within practice that if we don't communicate appropriately . . . we're talking fundamentals of communication. PEs should be raising these issues. I've seen situations like that before which haven't been raised, which have led to problems. (Dale)

Challenges in engaging students in learning

Some PEs found it challenging to work with students who already had much work experience. Some students appeared to have little to learn because of their work experiences or deny that they need to improve or further develop their knowledge

and skills.

> I think that's probably a challenge with mature students, who have worked in public services before. They can be quite difficult sometimes. Mature students being team managers and then they've come to be student social workers, and they're resistant to direction. (Tim)

Resistance to direction not only hinders learning but also can have negative implications on developing a meaningful practice learning relationship. PEs remarked that they need to acknowledge the experiences students brought with them and encourage them to contribute to knowledge development in placement. Another PE talked about the challenge in managing power dynamics because of the impact of the market economy on higher education since the rise in tuition fees in 2012. He noticed that it had shifted students' perception of their role in learning which also permeated the context of practice learning.

> The clarification and the expectations of individuals needs to be crystal clear . . . some students assume that things should be done for them because they are paying customers. (Dale)

PEs described the challenge they encountered when working with students who had negative previous placement experience. Students may lose confidence in themselves or could become defensive. They may harbour feelings of mistrust and anger towards the new PEs. PEs acknowledged that they needed to spend more time fostering a trusting relationship. Focussing on student's strengths and providing constructive comments could help to restore the student's confidence and self-esteem.

> The expectations of practice educators are coloured by previous experience. I've had to deal with that a couple of times . . . they are less likely to trust quickly. You need to build a relationship. (Tim)

> They sometimes were bruised, and you had to build them up first and give them constructive feedback. I mean, not for too long but you did have to because I think they felt quite defensive and a bit crushed. (Simon)

PEs acknowledged the importance of investing time to get to know the students and to find out factors affecting students' learning. However, nearly all PEs expressed concern that because of work pressure, they were not able to devote enough time to support their students, which could potentially undermine their relationships.

> Taking a student is a big responsibility, it's massive pressure, especially when things are not going well, and it generates more work to support the student. (Gail)
>
> I want to give students the best experience but having a full diary . . . I try my best not to miss any supervisions. But when you are busy, you are going in and out of the office. You don't want students to feel neglected. (Tim)

Another PE, Susan, talked about the importance of 'not just looking at them as students but seeing them holistically'. She emphasised the importance of the pre-placement meeting as it provided the opportunity to get to know students' backgrounds, find out their learning needs and put measures in place at the beginning of placement to support their learning. Dale remarked that it was important to 'recognise power imbalance and invest time to get to know the students'

so that a trusting relationship can flourish. This will also allow students to feel safe and supported enough to engage in critical conversations.

Sharing in focus group revealed that students appreciated when their PEs treated them as individuals and tried to identify the knowledge gaps that they needed to work on. Students wanted to be 'constantly pushed, tested and set learning tasks'. They also talked about the importance of having a trusting relationship so that they felt comfortable to bring up difficult conversations to discuss.

Challenges in initiating critical dialogue

PEs acknowledged the importance of giving critical feedback but sometimes felt uncertain how to deliver it. Anna considered feedback to be crucial in professional development and PEs should invest time to develop their own style to engage students in 'critical dialogue and discussions' to support their learning.

> I asked myself, was I too gentle? Actually, gentle is good but people need to learn. Other people had a very different approach, saying "oh, feedback is a gift," and actually you're holding on to that if they don't pull through it. I think you have to develop your own style, I like the idea that you also need to consider it as a transaction between two people who may have two different approaches.

Another PE Stephanie talked about feeling uncomfortable about giving students critical feedback because of the concerns that it might compromise their relationship. However, PEs' experience suggested that students generally appreciated feedback.

> I think when I first started it was harder to give the more critical feedback, because you don't know what kind of response you'll get. But, generally, they take it quite well it makes me more confident. I guess it's how you put it to the student, sort of outline the good things as well as points to work on.

Students involved in our study indicated that they welcomed constructive feedback and appreciated the possible dilemmas for PEs particularly when they had already established positive relationships with students. Some PEs might think: 'oh I don't really want to upset her if I say this and that to her'. Students added that when PEs were open enough to discuss their learning from their own mistakes, it helped to redress power imbalances and establish a more 'equal' relationship. It also encouraged more critical dialogue and exchange of knowledge.

> He talks about his personal experiences, so that helps to see him as not just a scary practice educator but as you know a person . . . It makes me more comfortable. I'm not scared to make mistakes because he talks about his mistakes. He emphasises how you can learn from them. (Students)

Simon added that giving feedback required a 'body of knowledge', skills and confidence. Having a trusting relationship was fundamental so that a truthful account of their assessment could be shared.

> The PE need to be able to pick up what areas to make constructive feedback and help students to promote self-awareness and plus having the confidence, tact, diplomacy, free from anxiety, ability to actually tell them. You've got that sort of honesty with the students to bring that

> out. . . . the student sort of trusts you and has overall found your mentoring positive and helpful, so it's got a purpose of the relationship I think you'd feel more competent to do that. (Simon)

PEs spoke of the dilemmas when they have developed a relationship with the students but faced a prospect of failing them. Many PEs found it emotionally challenging to manage the conflict of wanting to support students to succeed whilst also gate-keeping professional standards.

> It creates a conflict, you want them to succeed and pass everything on to them, and it's very difficult to come to that conclusion . . . safeguarding the profession becomes the main priority, opposed to helping somebody fulfil their career. (Gail)

> Failing a student is a very difficult process, it's very personal, this is the one area you work on a one-to-one basis and you get to know the student. The relationships between all involved is really important. (Paula)

Learning from their experiences, PEs found that by clarifying placement expectations at the outset, seeking support from university tutors and having a safe space for student to explore issues that impact on their progress helped to prevent placement breakdown and alleviate distress associated with working with struggling students.

> It's important I've got a good relationship with the university tutors, so I can raise and discuss the concern . . . I also aim to support students, so they feel confident to speak in supervisions about areas they are

> struggling with and help them understand that it doesn't necessarily mean you're a failing student, you know there's strength in that. It's about giving students permission. There is also recognition that you are being assessed. (Paula)

Discussion

A trusting relationship between students and their PEs is fundamental to enhancing practice learning experience (Lefevre, 2005). Drawing from both PEs' and students' perspectives, our study indicates that getting to know students as individuals and seeing them holistically are key to relationship building, so that students feel valued and respected. The learning agreement meeting provides an opportunity to identify any concerns that may impede students' learning, so that appropriate measures can be put in place at the beginning (Hunt & Mathews, 2018). Similar to previous research findings, our study confirms that younger students, especially those on their first placement, are less prepared to undertake placement (Moriarty et al., 2010). Some students expected to be guided closely to perform simple tasks. PEs found that a less directive approach could help these younger students to develop skills and confidence to work more independently. However, PEs need to be mindful that this approach could be perceived by students to be unsupportive and unhelpful, which could be demoralising and lead to a decline in the relationship. Hence, it is important to explain to students the reasons for using a less directive approach and emphasise the importance of a student's roles and responsibilities in their learning journey (Finch, 2017). Studies exploring students' perspectives also affirmed that students wanted the opportunity to assume responsibility as a part of their professional development (Rehn & Kalman, 2018).

In recent years, the influence of market values of consumerism on higher education which positions students as tuition paying customers, has shifted students' expectation of education and their perception of their role in learning (Bhuyan, Bejan, & Jeyapal, 2017). Finch (2017) adds that because of the changing nature of social work education in England, PEs may be working with a student who has higher academic qualifications than they do. It is also possible that students may have more experience of the world of work. These changes reshape the power dynamic in the context of practice learning. PEs in our study found it increasingly challenging to engage with students in their learning journey; some expected to be given full guidance while others did not see the added value of placement experience. A collaborative approach that emphasises mutual respect and learning together promotes the process of knowledge exchange (Lefevre, 2005). It also helps to acknowledge the skills and knowledge students bring to placement and to engage students in the planning of their development and learning. Working in partnership helps to address imbalances of power, thus contributing to an environment that encourages students and PEs to engage in difficult conversations (Dix, 2018).

PEs spoke of the concerns when working with students with strong religious beliefs as they may be conflicted with some of the social work core values including social justice, equality and diversity (IFSW, 2012). Tedam (2014) asserts that for some students, faith and spirituality play a significant part of their life and it is important to have an honest and open discussion of the relevance of faith in practice. Supervision provides a safe space for student and PE to explore how personal beliefs, values, biases and assumptions may impact on practice and how to resolve conflicts and to find a common ground (Dore, 2016).

Working with students from BAME backgrounds, a deeper level of understanding of students' verbal and non-verbal communication patterns is required. Fairtlough, Bernard, Fletcher, and Ahmet (2014) agree that issues arising from non-verbal behaviour could contribute to poorer progression in placement if they are not addressed properly. PEs in our study felt strongly that they should be upfront about their concerns and bring an uncomfortable topic to discuss early on. It is equally important for PEs to critically examine any potential unconscious bias towards students because of their social difference. Fairtlough et al.'s (2014) study further revealed the possible impact of racism and discriminatory practice on students' learning. Students from BAME backgrounds felt more scrutinised than white students and less supported when difficulties arose during placement. Some PEs displayed disrespectful attitudes towards students and failed to acknowledge and respect diversity and linguistic difference. Tedam (2014) further cautioned that some PEs used a 'micro-management' approach to monitor students' performance which could potentially deflate their confidence and undermine their learning. It could also reinforce their social difference and damage relationships with students. PEs in our study advocated that they should engage students in honest and critical dialogue to acknowledge and work through the differences. Students in our study articulated that it was important for PEs to establish a means of clear communication early in the placement and be available for them when they needed help and advice. They also remarked that PEs should try to get to know the students' preferred learning style and provide them with different opportunities to learn.

Like previous findings, PEs in our study found it difficult to give students critical feedback because of the inherent conflict between their nurturing and assessment role (Bogo, 2007; Finch & Taylor, 2013). The complexity of the PE role

requires PEs to carefully navigate the difficult path between their teaching and assessment roles (Finch & Taylor, 2013). The expectation of students and PEs could be coloured by previous placement experiences. PEs found it particularly challenging to provide feedback to students who had previous negative placement experiences. Baum (2011) suggested that the unresolved negative feelings may adversely affect their relationships with subsequent PEs. Students could be bruised and become defensive when critical comments are delivered by new PEs. Giving encouraging and constructive feedback helps to reinforce positive outcomes which facilitates the development of a trusting relationship (Dix, 2018). Indeed, feedback is a 'gift' and is crucial in professional development. Our students' feedback suggested that students generally welcome and value critical and constructive comments as they help to maximise learning opportunities. Students wanted to be 'pushed' to undertake challenging tasks and to be 'tested' in their knowledge. Reluctance to give feedback is perceived to be unhelpful by students (Lefevre, 2005). PEs shared that they need to equip themselves with a 'body of knowledge' and be skilled in facilitating a range of learning opportunities and assessing the students' practice capabilities. They also need to invest time in relationship building and be confident to deliver unwelcome messages to students (Dore, 2019). Being able to provide honest and constructive feedback also serves to assist struggling students so that more structured guidance and support can be put in place, which may prevent placement breakdown. Support from the university tutor in the process of decision-making and formulation of an action plan is important so that PEs do not feel alone to manage an emotionally demanding task (Finch, 2017).

Finally, our findings show that some PEs may be holding certain unfounded preconceptions about students that can create barriers to relationship building. PEs

talked about feeling apprehensive when working with students with strong religious beliefs and high academic qualifications. Their actual experiences revealed that most students were open to ideas that might not be in congruence with their beliefs and were receptive to critical comments. These preconceptions reflected PEs' concerns that students might make judgements about their relative lack of knowledge and qualifications, especially among those who were new to their PE role. We found that PEs' confidence and competence grow with experience in practice education (Waterhouse et al., 2011). Training, sharing with other experienced PEs and working in alliance with university tutors is crucial to help the PEs to address challenges in their practice educating journey (Domakin, 2015).

Conclusion

Our findings show that the PE-student relationship in the context of practice learning is far from straightforward. Critical and honest conversations with students in relation to their responses to practice situations, their understanding of theoretical and practical knowledge, matters relating to oppression, inequality and social justice have to take place within a safe learning space and within a relationship which is sensitive and supportive. Honest dialogue can only take place if there is mutual respect and unhelpful perceptions of power differences are actively acknowledged and worked on. It is important to consider the impact that social divisions which exist between student and PE can have on the relationship and the student's learning. Failing to consider structural factors, which impact on students' life chances and their learning journey, merely adds to their marginalisation, exclusion and oppression. Having a 'body of knowledge' helps PEs to manage the multifaceted demands of their role. Developing and sustaining meaningful relationships which are

ethical and supportive is vital if open and critical dialogue is to take place. PEs in our study stressed the importance of investing time to establish a relationship with the student, however, factors such as workload pressures and limited availability of quality time can often impinge on sustaining quality relationships with their students. Support from organisations is vital in not only acknowledging the important role played by PEs but also in relation to providing PE with the time, emotional and professional space to undertake this important task.

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