Is there a shared social work signature pedagogy cross-nationally? Using a case study methodology to explore signature pedagogy in England, Israel, Finland, Spain and Sweden

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Finns det en 'signatur-pedagogik' för hur socialt arbete lärs ut i olika länder? - Att använda en case study metodik för att utforska 'signatur-pedagogik' för socialt arbete i länderna England, Israel, Finland, Spanien och Sverige

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ABSTRACT

While there is an international definition of social work as a profession, little is known about whether there is a shared pedagogy in social work cross-nationally. To our knowledge, this paper is the first empirical study which aims to fill this gap by applying the concept of signature pedagogy in social work education to explore the commonality of social work pedagogy across countries. The study uses a multi-site case study (six universities in five European countries) through applying a 'critical teacher-researcher' approach in generating the data, followed by a two-phased thematic analysis. The study evidenced a shared principle of social work pedagogy which nurtures social work students to think and perform like a social worker and develop the professional self through developing relationships and dialogue, professional practice, group work, self-reflection and critical thinking. It is argued from, this exploratory study, that even between countries which have different welfare ideology as well as social work history and education systems, there is some common ground in social work pedagogy where one can learn from another through the use of 'teacher as researcher' methodologically.

ABSTRAKT

Det finns en internationell definition av socialt arbete som profession men vi vet mindre om huruvida det finns en gemensam pedagogik i hur socialt arbete lärs ut mellan länder. Utifrån vår kännedom är detta det första paper som genom en empirisk studie utforskar vad vi har gemensamt i hur vi lär ut socialt arbete. Studien använder en multi-site case study (sex universitet

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i fem europeiska länder) genom att använda "critical teacher researcher" som metod för att samla in data som sedan följs av en tematisk analys i två steg. Studien visade ett gemensamt förhållningssätt i den pedagogik som lär ut socialt arbete där vi alla fokuserar på att ge studenterna en förmåga att tänka och verka som socialarbetare och utveckla det professionella "jaget" genom att utveckla relationer och dialog, professionell praktik, grupparbete, självreflektion och kritiskt tänkande. Det finns, utifrån den här utforskande studien, grund för att påstå att även länder som inte har en gemensam välfärdsideologi, historik eller utbildningssystem, ändå har några gemensamma principer i pedagogiken i socialt arbete där vi kan lära från varandra genom att använda "teacher as reasercher" metoden.

Introduction

The International Federation of Social Work began in 1994 to work on establishing a global definition of social work in response to economic and social globalisation. As a result, an international definition of social work was launched in 2014, which has stimulated active debates around the global. These debates orientate around arguments that assume a Western perspective is universal which positions social work as an 'agent of colonisation' (Coates et al., 2006; Haug in Coates et al., 2006; Haug in Coates et al., 2006; Leung, 2007; Sewpaul, 2006). Nevertheless, there is general agreement that there are some shared principles of social work cross-nationally. However, the question of how social workers are trained is seldom studied from an international perspective. To the best of our knowledge, the potential for this synergy has not been explored through theoretically informed research. Our research, therefore, seeks to address this gap and to capture and interrogate detailed examples of social work pedagogy.

This paper begins with a discussion of social work education in the countries studied. It then discusses the idea of a signature pedagogy framework (Larrison & Korr, 2013) which we used to consider underlying similarities of teaching and learning approaches across the participant universities. Some of us have used this framework previously (see Wallengren -Lynch et al., 2018, for example) when looking at a social work programme in Sweden. The paper then uses data gathered from the 'teacher as researcher' methodological approach based on the sample from England, Israel, Finland, Spain and Sweden. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of its main findings and their implications for social work education.

The current state of social work education in Europe

Social work education is context-dependent in that it is bound to particular countries and times. Nevertheless, despite the different welfare state models, social work shares common values and an aspirational international definition. Similarities also appear to exist in the education of social work with curriculums combining social science subjects, professional & personal development with student placements. In many countries, students use the last few terms to develop their interest in specific areas. Following graduation entry to the workforce as a social worker in the participating countries have commonalities and differences as Table 1 outlines below.

The development and journey of social work as a profession also feeds into how the subject is taught. Vicary et al. (2018) argue that social work has grown mainly as a western project and has ingrained in its identity issues of gender, class and racism. It is important to be reminded that social work 'developed as a response to industrialisation and urbanisation, out of a genuine human response to suffering; it was also, from its beginnings, intended to shape and train the working classes and so manage problems of social unrest' (p 225).

Table 1. Entry requirement to the social work practice.

Country	Number of years in social work undergraduate education	Requirements for employment/title of social worker	National Registration required for practice	Postgraduate qualification course as option
Sweden	3 1/2	Complete recognised social work undergraduate degree	No	No
Finland	5	Complete recognised social work MA degree	Yes	No
United Kingdom	3	Complete recognised social work undergraduate degree	Yes	Yes
Israel	3	Complete recognised social work degree	Yes	No
Spain	4	Complete recognised social work degree	Yes	No

In the year 2020, Europe is seeing increased 'xenophobia, legitimised by policies promoting stricter immigration controls for refugees from regimes with little regard for human rights, and for European citizens whose right to free movement is under threat from Brexit' (Martinez Herrero & Charnley, 2019, p. 235). Neo-liberalism has impacted social work practice and education across the continent. In some countries across the Europe, such as the United Kingdom social work education is

> under attack with the introduction of fast track training programmes and apprenticeship schemes that prioritise socialisation into practice settings commonly concerned with the social control functions of social work. Government investment in these schemes, together with arrangements that incentivise the development of teaching partnerships between local government social work departments and universities, divert funds away from social work education in higher education institutions, further undermining the specialist body of knowledge and value base of the social work profession and limiting the development of critical thinking associated with higher education. (Martinez Herrero & Charnley, 2019, p. 235)

Across other countries such as Spain, social work is not immune to global economic pressures and austerity which impacts practice education and practice. On the flipside these pressures are also opportunities to generate new ideas and questions about the nature of social work itself (García-Moreno & Anleu-Hernández, 2019). The degree to which social work responds and is shaped by economic factors varies. For instance, there is an appreciation in Spanish social work education that there is a general 'commitment to the interconnected importance of human rights and social justice in social work education and practice with explicit acknowledgement of the relevance of structural causes of social problems' (p. 236 ibid). However, with the changing political landscape across Europe, Spanish social educators experience growing challenges in maintaining the community focus of their students.

In Israel, social work has developed as a profession since 1934 (Spiro, 2001). The influence of American social work on Israeli social work education cannot be understated. A consequence being that some commentators feel as this approach has not adequality prepared students for working in the multicultural society of modern-day Israel. This cultural diversity, 'it's unique composition and history, and the enduring hostilities between Israel and its neighbours have, and still are, influencing social work practice in the nation and differentiating it from other Western countries' (Azaiza et al., 2015, p. 76). Given the instability of the region, the impact is felt by social work educators, students and clients alike. Cultural sensitivity and skills to work in a multicultural society are now key demands on social work practice and education.

In Scandinavia, social work has enjoyed university status since the 1970s. Finland is unique to many other countries in Europe in that the academization of the profession happened early and happened fast. However, the gulf between research and practice was significant in 1980s and 1990s. Since the 1990s there has been a growing appreciation of reflectivity as a way to bridge the gap

between the university and practice field (Satka & Karvinen, 1999). Social work in Sweden continues to be a popular choice for students to study at university level (Sandström, 2007). The Swedish experiences are similar to other countries when it comes to student sense of readiness for practice (Tham & Lynch, 2019). For examples, social work graduates report feelings of unpreparedness for their new roles in practice; this type of research is essential to remind us to remain connected to practice and be cognisant of the importance of staying relevant.

Social work is an established discipline worldwide. Globally, Pawar and Thomas (2017, p. 648) identified that approximately 2,110 institutions are providing social work education spread over 125 countries. Webber et al. (2014) highlight the contrasting educational approaches across Europe, in terms, for example, high regulation in the UK in contrast to decentralised approaches in Sweden and at the same time stressing that there is a common fostering of 'a sense of professional identity with social work students' (p. 370). The discussions cited suggest that social work education looks different across Europe, influenced by the historical, social and cultural characteristics of the various countries and welfare states; and yet has something which binds and connects social work educators. It is these connections that this research project seeks to understand.

Why signature pedagogy as a theoretical reference point?

The aim of the paper is not to weigh in on defining signature pedagogy but rather ask whether the framework provided by Larrison and Korr (2013) is useful to help us see connections between the contributing universities. As pointed out in the previous section, there are many differences between the participants not least the use of course literature, theoretical references, and incorporating research into curricula. So, while this research is not seeking to make definitive statements regarding what constitutes a signature pedagogy in social work education, it is more interested in understanding if the framework can be useful to help us interpret our findings.

The interest in a signature pedagogy across different disciplines (see, for example, Motley et al., 2017, for an application in the arts) and the social work-specific setting is growing. Dellgran and Höjer (2005, p. 43) hinted at a signature pedagogy in social work when they discussed the link between professionalisation and the socialisation process of becoming a professional. They state that the 'identity-building, social and cultural process starts during undergraduate education and differs between professions'. The different perspectives on a signature pedagogy in social work can shift from the role of placement coordinators (Asakura et al., 2018) to the actual placement as the most significant (Boitel & Fromm, 2014; Lyter, 2013; Wayne et al., 2010). Larrison and Korr (2013) argues that there are three interrelated aspects to a signature approach to social work education, namely (1) *modelling relational connectedness, core practice skills, and values*, (2) *fostering transformative awareness,* and (3) *nurturing personal and professional growth*. The first aspect is 'modelling relational connectedness, core practice skills, and values: modelling practice and values within the teaching-learning encounter is paramount to student understanding and the duplication of those same core conditions in their practice' (ibid., p. 202). The second aspect that they identify is 'fostering transformative awareness: acknowledging students own search for meaning through developing a capacity for intellectual and personal growth' (ibid., p. 202). Finally, they argue that 'nurturing personal and professional growth' is a key aspect of social work training that is crucial to the development of social work students. The social work education 'helps socialise the emerging social worker into the profession and thus shape how students employ knowledge and skills to make informed decisions and judgments' (ibid., p. 202).

In other words, the role and tasks of social work educators are to nurture students to think and perform like social workers and to develop the professional self through multidisciplinary knowledge-based and critical reflection to link knowledge and practice. It raised the question for us whether this framework applies to our diverse positions given the different welfare systems, social work, cultural tradition and status as well as social work education

Methodology: 'teacher as researcher'

The methodological challenges for this project were significant given the following characteristics of the group: a spread of five countries, five different languages and six courses. Therefore, it is crucial to show how we responded creatively and rigorously to meet these challenges. The starting point is the recognition that the process of cross-national qualitative case study was essential for the success of this project (Chen, 2012). Comparing cases is one of the most well-established methodological approaches in the social sciences but often, such approaches have been built on quantitative methods for studying a large number of cases, the approaches are typically ill equipped to capture and compare context-specific 'deep' knowledge (Wendt, 2019). Therefore, this study applied a cross-national qualitative case approach to gain a deeper understanding of how social workers are been trained.

Finlay's makes the point that 'the process and outcomes of data collection depend fundamentally on how the research relationship evolves' (2002„ p. 539). In line with this way of thinking the relationships formed through the research process has given rise to specific methods of data collection and data analysis for this project. Care and attention were taken to building up relationships in the group. This was facilitated by using a focus group method across a two-day workshop that had the aim of sharing similarities and differences of pedagogical approaches amongst the research team of social work educators. The workshop took place at University of Gothenburg, Sweden. During the workshop participants collaborated, listened to each other and moved towards shared understanding social work education practices at their universities. The discussions enabled us to identify a research focus which then lead us to develop an agreed stage-by-stage research plan. Our experiences confirmed the research that shows that workshops can be a useful approach to kick-start a research process which can fulfil participants' expectations to achieve something related to one's own and each other's interests (Jaipal & Figg, 2010; Wakkary, 2007).

As a way of further contextualising our roles in this research project we used the term 'teacher-researcher' to help frame the activities. This idea is based around recognising the inseparable relationship between teacher as researcher and the data being analysed. We are aware bias had a potentially significant role in this research so instead of denying its presence we sought to discuss it and attempt to compensate for it. For this research we understood the 'teacher-researcher' as a reflective practitioner who is expert in their day-to-day experiences of delivering social work education and is aware of differences between 'reflecting in action' and 'reflection on action' (Schön, 1982). This ontological preference for seeing the teaching environment as subjective and relationship-based reflects the idea that social work education can mirror social work values and practices (Wallengren -Lynch et al., 2018). In this research, the 'teacher-researcher' positioning was applied as each of the social work educators considered how our classroom moments reflect the discipline's ways of thinking, knowing, doing, and feeling (Motley et al., 2017). The social work educators in this research embraced the role of 'teacher-researcher' and also the idea of a 'community of research practitioners (CoRPs)' (Holmqvist et al., 2018). While social work educators are often involved in research, for this project, the role of the educator was given primary focus. This community of research practitioners is a term that has developed over the last number of years and provides a robust framework for this research process. In essence, this means that the participants all follow a collaborative, systematic, and iterative process to study learning and teaching in the classroom to improve the learning experience of the students (Holmqvist et al., 2018). There are three dimensions to the CoRP approach: the community is not static as its members constantly renegotiate it. There is mutual engagement that binds members together into a social entity and, finally, it has shared resources (Wenger et al., 2002; Levine & Marcus, 2010). The shape of the group can change such that an active group can change position with several people on the fringes. This approach was a guiding factor of our interactions right through the process as evident in our triangulated approach to analysis and the way the group interacted throughout the research process. Our online interactions where such that some members cooperated more closely than other dependiong on which phase on the research process we were (Table 2).

Table 2. Represents the research process of this study which conducted between October 2018 and May 2019 (a total of 8 months).

October 2018	October 2018 – January 2019	January 2019 – April 2019	May 2019 – August 2019
Workshop	Use of 'teacher as researcher' methodology to gather data	Coding of data	Synthesis of sub-themes into over-arching themes

As part of this initial brainstorming session at our first meeting, the method of case study was discussed and agreed. This approach would enable us as collaborators to focus on one example of our teaching, easily engage with each other's examples, and to analyse this data systematically. Within the case study methodology an embedded approach was taken, rather than a holistic one, given that the research is looking at one case (a course) from an entire social work programme (Scholzm & Tietje, 2002). As a consequence, this research is qualitative based and in the form of a multi-site embedded descriptive case study. The social work educators sourced courses from the various programmes in our institutions that reflected, in our view, examples of teaching social work as opposed to other areas, such as sociology and psychology. In addition to country specific variations, five out of the six courses were undergraduate social work qualification courses. One course was a specialist international social work postgraduate Masters course. It can be argued that this heterogeneity in courses is useful in testing the concept of a signature pedagogy for social work education. We combined frequent online meetings and one onsite meeting at the University of Sussex, United Kingdom. Records of these interactions where not kept and in insight this would have provided an interesting layer on information for the analysis (Table 3).

Utilising a two-phased thematic analysis with a qualitative focus

A thematic analysis was used to process the data systematically. Cross-national analysis does not automatically prevent the reproduction of nationally naturalised ideas, sometimes referred to as

Table 3. Overview of the empirical data sources, sample and methodology.

University & Country	Course name	Content of course	Student sample	Data collection methodology
University of Gothenburg, Sweden	Social Work on a Structural level	Mix of pedagogical approaches, inspired by critical approaches.	11 students	Participations observation (field notes and student comments) on classroom-based group activity, called photovoice
University of Helsinki, Finland	Professional and client work skills	Mix of pedagogical approaches, with focus on learning practical skills of social work practice and peer support.	NA	Content analysis of student handbook
University of Sussex, United Kingdom	Adults Social Work	Mix of pedagogical approaches, lectures, working with service users, groupwork and discussions	40	Student feedback at the end of the course
Sapir Academic College, Israel	Person-in-environment	Mix of pedagogical approaches, group work, role play, skills based	30	Student feedback at the end of the course Content analysis of student handbook
University of BedfordshireUnited Kingdom	International Social Work and Social Development	Student self-analysis of a group assignment	9	Analysis of student assignment (permission granted by students), teacher reflections notes and course materials
University of Madrid, Spain	Mediation: A System for Conflict Management and Resolution	Practice workshops over two terms, roleplay, practice skills	29	Content analysis of handbook & Student feedback at the end of the course

'methodological nationalism' (see Chernilo, 2006). For example, an *insider* might become too familiar with the material and contrarily or over-emphasise aspects of their own cultural context. Given that fact that the participants lived in different countries, a creative solution to producing credible and trustworthy information was deployed (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003). Accordingly, two phases of analysis took place. For the first phase, the group decided that a step process regarding the thematic analysis was needed. The first step was that the descriptive case examples of the included courses submitted by each participant were to be read by another member of the research team. As in any thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), each reader identified a set of codes connected to the case presentation. The next step involved the two readers comparing both sets of codes with a final discussion between the two researchers as to which themes would be created to reflect those codes. This process was conducted by the researcher online.

Phase two of the analysis focused on working with the subthemes. For this, the primary author sorted and processed the themes into similar groupings (see Table 4), then consulted with team members regarding their trustworthiness (Cohan et al, 2007). From this phase two process, four themes were created. These represented the spread of the data from the six universities.

In the next section we will present these themes in more detail and conclude by reflecting on the theme's connection with the signature pedagogy framework.

Results and analysis

Personal and professional development through relationships and dialogue

Under this theme, personal and professional relationships are critical to the case studies presented for this research. For example, in the Swedish sample, the observer witnessed '*a student commenting that*

Table 4. Creation of codes, subthemes and themes.

Generated codes from indicative content analysis

Relationship & communication
Group dynamics, Local culture
Control & Decision making, Shared and dialogical knowledge-creation.
Teaching combined experiential knowledge, modelling practices and learning practice.
Teaching supports the personal and professional growth of reflective practitioners and the integration of theoretical and practical knowledge.
Modelling professional relationships & supporting professional and personal development.
Active learning, Self- disclosure, critical thinking, Academy & Field integration & Group dynamics/atmosphere.
Individual-based work, role play,group work/decision making
Critical perspectives on diversity and gender, modelling professional practice & Emotional content

Subthemes

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Relationship & communication	Group dynamics	Experimental modelling practices	Critical thinking
Dialogical knowledge creation	Local culture	Professional & personal growth	Diversity, culture & gender challenges
Supporting personal & professional development	Control & Decision making	Active learning	
Self -disclosure & developing a professional identity	Group work & decision making	Modelling professional practice	
	Group dynamic & atmosphere		
	Individual work		
	Roleplay		
	Emotional content		

Themes

Personal and professional development through relationships and dialogue (group 1)
  Pedagogical approaches focusing on group work and the self (group 2)
  Modelling professional practice (group 3)
  Critical perspectives for social justice (group 4)

the teachers were very competent in creating spaces and opportunities for the relationship to develop, such as their use of seating and organisation of the room'. This facilitated opportunities '*where the teacher and the student developed trust*'. These skills are not exclusive to social work education, but given that social work students will use such skills in their work setting, it becomes essential that students see these skills in action.

In the Finish example, the analysis of the course guide for a module on practice skills identified the following: the course '*aims to create collaborative learning spaces in which the participants create together knowledge in social work*'. This collaborative approach to knowledge construction aims to '*enhances equal and democratic dialogue*'. To facilitate dialogue and building knowledge together with the client models the values of democracy and promotes ongoing reflection on power relationships. This importance of dialogue was also something which colleagues in Sussex emphasised in their analysis of the course aims: '*students were able to demonstrate their learning when working with service users as part of the module*'. Involving service users is well established in social work education in contrast to the other countries in this research. By involving service users, educators are modelling the values that social work purports to uphold. In summary, understanding the role of power in social work practice is an ongoing theme in social work education. Therefore, the importance given to the role of building relationships and fostering dialogue encourages reflections on power relations and ensuring that power is-not-taken for granted.

Pedagogical approaches focusing on group work and the self

The case studies identified the importance of group work and individual approaches in the delivery of pedagogy in social work courses. Using group work also helped the students understand how to understand and work with the group process. In the Swedish case, the observations helped identify '*the importance of being able to read the energy levels in the group and to trust that the group will find its balance in its own time*'. Groupwork is something crucial for social work practice and hence the benefits of using group work as a pedagogical tool. Groupwork also teaches about cultural sensitivity as noted in the same example by the independent observer of '*the importance of teachers bringing coffee and "fika" (cake)*'. Fika has a strong Swedish cultural tradition, and according to the observer, had a visible impact on creating a positive atmosphere. The observer noted many incidents where the teachers invited the students to make decisions for themselves regarding the running of the workshop and to '*let go of control*'. This act of trust is essential and brings power dynamics again to fore. By letting go in the right context, the teacher is inviting the students to own the space, modelling the relationship social workers hope to create with their clients.

In the Spanish example, group work helped students meet students from other countries so that they could '*work with people with different backgrounds and cultures*' (student feedback). The group work can mean different things to students than it does to teachers; in the Israeli example the group work experience '*seemed that the group became a safe place for the us students, a place that enable us to express ourselves freely*'. Recognising the importance of the social aspect for students is something which supports groupwork pedagogy. In Israel, students shared that they '*initiated a meal at the end of the first semester and a farewell party at the end of the course*'. There are several examples of spontaneous social events initiated by staff or students; the point is that they serve as an essential role in education.

Individual-based approaches to social work education were also very prominent in the case examples, especially in the nurturing of self-awareness and self-development. In this context, the Israeli case the students used a metaphor of '*bringing a suitcase*' along everywhere on their social work education, implying the individual journey of self-discovery and collection as '*ways of working*'. The importance of having self-awareness, for example when it came to the use of language was highlighted in the Spanish case when a student commented that

> for me, the most difficult thing was explaining the result of mediation with words that a client will understand. I had prepared a very professional speech, but it was not the best one to make to help the client feel comfortable.

Also using student feedback, in the United Kingdom at Bedfordshire, the teacher reflection note identified individual reactions to participation in group work as '*highly significant … (the students felt) … anger, pride, resentment and increased self-esteem and confidence*' during their course work. It was clear from the cases that recognising the emotional impact the course and the pedagogies have on students is crucial if one is expecting to help students develop the emotional resilience for social work practice.

Modelling professional practice

Another dominant theme represented by all the examples is the idea of modelling professional practices. This approach can influence which pedagogical method teachers put into action. For instance, in Bedfordshire, course tutor's reflection notes pointed out that '*that students often struggle with working together effectively as a group. While group work and multi-disciplinary working is a core skill for social work, students are often reluctant to take part in groups*'. The importance of group work for social work practice cannot be understated. Groupwork was taken one step further in Sussex where students and service users meet as part of the course makeup. Feedback from students showed that '*they were able to identify … the ways of making service users feel less oppressed in the group meetings*'. This required preparation work on the part of the student, for examples '*all of the groups took time to prepare for their meeting with service users with agreed questions and arrangement*'. This approach helps the students develop '*equal partnerships with service users*' and presents student opportunities to practice professional dialogue with service users. In Finland, modelling practice was exemplified in the course handbook by having '*students sign a supervision contract in which the student also commits confidentiality*'. The modelling of practice required a plethora of pedagogical approaches and was evident in the case examples discussed.

Critical perspectives for social justice

Critical perspectives related to social justice hold a dominant place in social work theory and practice, and the same is true for the examples in this project. There are many different understandings of what critical theory is concerning social work. For clarity sake, the authors have agreed that we hold a 'critical pragmatic' approach, one that seeks to combine critical theory and a pragmatic philosophy with a view to transformative awareness. This approach translates as an action-orientated, practice-based approach that aims to meet the challenges of social justice issues through structural and individual perspectives (Kadlec, 2006).

For instance, in the Israeli case, the students were encouraged '*not to take the theory for granted, but rather to ask professional questions, and to apply critical thinking about the skills and concepts of the profession*'. Significantly the '*students were encouraged to bring their own practice mistakes (from placement) to the classroom*' for discussion. A critical perspective also means recognising the self is vulnerable and identifying blind spots and challenges is an essential aspect of social work education. In Bedfordshire the importance of focusing on the benefits of working with people from different backgrounds was shown by the comment, again from a teacher reflection that, '*students also reflected on difficulties encountered in styles of communication, and attitudes to each other in agreeing on tasks and fulfilling roles*'. It is argued that any time power was discussed in the education setting a critical perspective was engaged. In Spain, the student's awareness of structural inequalities is summed up by one student's comment that '*power is everywhere*'. Critical perspectives, as suggested by this data, is core to social work education discourse.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper aimed to identify common ground amongst the participating universities approach to teaching. The second aim of the article was to discuss these themes in the context of the signature pedagogy framework proposed by Larrison and Korr (2013). That framework has the following components: (1) *modelling relational connectedness, core practice skills, and values*, (2) *fostering transformative awareness*, and (3) *nurturing personal and professional growth*. The signature framework focuses on integrating three features: Thinking and performing like a social worker, the development of the professional self and the characteristic forms of teaching and learning. The question is, therefore, do the themes created in this research project make sense in the context of Larrison and Korr's (2013) framework? It also has to be said that we are aware of the limitations of this research, such as the debate of what constitutes a signature pedagogy in social work and that this research looked to identify converging themes and did not seek out areas of divergence. As such the results should be considered with these limitations in mind.

This research identified the themes: (1) Personal and professional development through relationships and dialogue, (2) Modelling professional practices (3) Pedagogical approaches focusing on group work and the self, (4) Critical perspectives for social justice. This research project, in a different approach to Larrison & Korr's work, has reached similar conclusions but has arrived by way of inductive analysis of empirical data rather than presenting a conceptual argument. To make these connections visible, we argue that themes one and two meet the idea of 'thinking and performing like a social worker' and 'development of the professional self'. These two themes are connected by a reflexivity that is essential for the sustaining critical perspectives. Theme three and four provide an empirical foothold for the idea of 'characteristic forms of teaching and learning' in social work education as discussed by Larrison and Korr (2013). This was exemplified by the six different cases presented in this paper.

Our analysis provides empirical evidence to support the argument that certain commonalities appear to exist in a sample of courses and can be empirically recognisable in the signature pedagogy framework of Larrison and Korr (2013). This analysis leads the authors to suggest that a cross-cultural and cross-national theoretical framework on signature pedagogy can help educators connect theory, practice and values.

Research addressing these issues would be an exciting approach to take forward in further exploration of the idea of signature pedagogy. This paper acknowledges the contrasts which exist between the different welfare states and educational institutions within Europe, but despite this, the results indicate that it is a shared common ground. As Larrison and Korr (2013) point out, 'signature pedagogy emerges in our classroom and the educator-student interaction'. As a recommendation for further research it would be exciting to see the use of 'teacher as researcher' methodology to gather more empirical data from educators across Europe to further the idea of a signature pedagogy across the region. The paper also contributes to an inter-cultural discussion and sees the potential this offers as a platform for international dialogue on social work education. It would also be worthwhile exploring if the framework of Larrison and Korr (2013) can be used to reflect on the pedagogy within post-qualifying courses such as offered in the United Kingdom. A discussion on this was outside of the scope of this paper given the sample was from courses from undergraduate and an international master. One can speculate that the lessons learnt from this analysis could be applicable to understanding post qualifying course but this would require closer examination. In the final analysis we can say that in an effort to bridge the theory and practice worlds we build on the realisation that what happens in the classroom is of key importance in the creation of social work identities and social work practices.

Disclosure statement

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