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Key Indicator Taxonomy of Relational Teaching

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ABSTRACT

How teachers relate to their students when they teach can contribute to a deeper and more coherent relational understanding of teaching as an interpersonal profession. This article presents a key indicators' taxonomy of relational teaching. Within the theoretical perspective of teaching called Pedagogical Relational Teachership a taxonomy to inquire the relational dimension of the teaching profession is developed. The concept of relational teaching is categorised into a model under the themes of Tact and Stance and then further organised into six smaller units. These six relational key indicators can be used by empirical researchers to capture and illuminate the ongoing relational processes between teachers and students on a micro-level, as well as support pre-service and in-service teachers to create sustainable and trustful relationships with their students. Finally, the article discusses how this nuanced taxonomy can be applied in practice and research to cultivate the relational proficiencies of teachers in the twenty-first century.

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Introduction

Teaching is a profession full of interpersonal challenges. Delving deeper into the nature of teaching makes it obvious that it is not sufficient for teachers to simply know their subject matter and support their students. Levels of complexity lie in how teaching involves didactics, pedagogy and interpersonal processes that are highly contextualised and situated. In every moment of teaching, the relational dimension is constantly at play, providing in-depth knowledge that teaching is an interpersonal profession (Ljungblad 2021). Consequently, it is essential that the teachers of today and tomorrow are capable of handling diverse relational challenges in everyday practice.

This article emphasises a central aspect of relational pedagogy, namely, the interpersonal relationships between teachers and students (Bingham and Sidorkin 2004; Hinsdale 2016; Ljungblad 2021). Relational pedagogy is a theory of education with a focus on the 'relationality' of the relationship (Biesta 2004). This perspective on education sees teaching as relational processes and places the relationship between teachers and students at the core of the profession. Within relational pedagogy, the theoretical perspective *Pedagogical Relational Teachership (PeRT)* (Ljungblad 2021) has emerged as a branch that highlights the central role that relationships play at all levels of the education system.

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However, within the relational field there is an existing problem. One side of the problem is that the theory, mostly of a philosophical nature, does not have empirical confirmation that is accessible for in-service and pre-service teachers to apply. Sidorkin (2000) clarifies how relational ontology can be traced back to Buber (2011), however, Buber's theoretical binary concepts, *I-Thou* and *I-It*, have limitations since empirical research has not clarified how they can be applied in real life. Lately, some researchers have increasingly started to use Buber's educational philosophy in empirical studies (eg. Fredriksson 2019; Asakavičiūtė, Sederevičiūtė-Pačiauskienė, and Valantinaitė 2022). The other side of the problem is that the teaching profession has developed an in-depth professional didactic language but has not yet developed a rich relational language to express how teachers relate to their students. Hence, to capture different relational qualities and to make sense of what is actually happening in the classroom, Sidorkin implies that there is a need for a more nuanced relational taxonomy that can bridge abstract theory and practice. This article presents a relational taxonomy that can be applied in practice to explore the relational dimension of the teaching profession. The purpose of this study is to develop a key indicators' taxonomy that can bridge theory and practice as a tool for empirical researchers to capture and illuminate the ongoing relational processes between teachers and students, as well as support in-service and pre-service teachers to create sustainable and trustful relationships with their students.

For professional growth, it is important for in-service and pre-service teachers to have access to models that are based on classroom research. The key indicators' taxonomy derived from several qualitative empirical studies and can illuminate the constant ongoing relational face-to-face interaction between teachers and students (Ljungblad 2016). In modern society, teachers meet complex relational challenges, which requires theories and models to support the educational pathways throughout their careers (Strom and Mitchell Viesca 2021). PeRT's nuanced relational taxonomy is such a pragmatic tool that can be applied in practice and research to cultivate the relational proficiencies of teachers in the twenty-first century.

The relational dimension of the teaching profession

In later international research, the teacher-student relationship emerges as a factor of great importance with implications for research and policies, as well as in practice (Cornelius-White 2007; Roorda et al. 2011). The results of Hattie's (2009) meta study show that a trustful teacher-student relationship has a greater influence on students' achievements ($d = 0.71$) than the teachers' subject knowledge ($d = 0.09$). This result gives insight into the importance of the relational dimension of teaching. Between 1990 and 2010, research has provided strong empirical support for the provision that supportive teacher-student relationships promote positive social and emotional classroom environments and academic achievements (Hughes 2012). Underscored by strong empirical support and knowledge, Hughes concludes that these two decades of research can be seen as the first-generation research about the importance of supportive and trustful teacher-student relationships.

During the past ten years, the second-generation research is well on its way with an aim to increase our understanding and knowledge about *how* teachers can develop supportive and trustful teacher-student relationships. As contemporary

research about interpersonal relationships between teachers and students moves into a new generation, diverse definitions of defining the relational dimension of the teaching profession arise. Some researchers use the concept of *relational competence* (Nordenbo et al. 2008). Other concepts in use are the *teacher's relational eye* (von Wright 2006), *pedagogical tactfulness* (Rinne 2014; Ljungblad 2016), *relational practices* (Frelin 2010), as well as *relational teachership* (Ljungblad 2021). Overall, these concepts describe relational capabilities and capacities within the teaching profession.

At the same time that researchers highlight teachers' relational proficiencies, Biesta (2020) underscores that it is essential to take a pragmatic look at theory and trace educational theory back to the original question it was trying to answer. As researchers develop new theory about 'relationality' of the relationship (Biesta 2004) one must bear in mind where the different concepts were derived. Today, one common discourse in use is teacher competencies, a trend coming from international policymakers. Biesta problematises the notion in the following way:

While certain competencies may constitute a necessary condition for good teaching, they can never be a sufficient condition as there is always a need for judgement about which competencies should be utilised in each particular and unique educational situation (Biesta 2012, 45).

Thus, competence is a concept based on the notion of a predictable reality. Biesta (2012, 120) clarifies the problem with the view of how competence 'tries to cover for all possible educational eventualities ... forgetting the role of judgement'. We then lose sight of a teacher's capacity for judgement and wisdom in educational unpredictable situations, which characterises *the whole person* and is something different from competence. As an alternative approach, Biesta underlines a *virtue-based* concept of teaching that focuses on educational wisdom and how teachers can be educationally wise in open and unpredictable situations.

The concept used in the empirical studies in this article is *relational teachership* (Ljungblad 2021) based on the theoretical concepts of *practical wisdom* (Biesta 2012) and *pedagogical tact* (Løvlie 2007). It originates from a micro ethnographic study (Ljungblad 2016) exploring how successful teachers relate to their students when they teach in compulsory school, upper secondary school, and individual programmes for learning disabilities. The results highlight how the teachers created trustful and respectful teacher-student relationships in ways that greatly influenced the students' growth and achievements. Based on how the model for the study empirically operationalised a relational perspective on teaching, the theoretical perspective PeRT (Ljungblad 2021) was developed, in which relational teachership is the umbrella concept. However, within today's use of diverse relational definitions, the concept of relational teaching will be used in this article as a synoptic concept of how teachers relate to their students in teaching.

Compared to other research about teacher-student relationships (Wubbels and Brekelmans 2005; Pianta 2006), PeRT's relational taxonomy goes deeper into the micro-level of interpersonal interaction between teachers and students (Biesta 2004) and can thereby contribute with microscopic relational analysis (MRA) (Aspelin 2022) in a more systematic way than before. To conclude, the key indicators' taxonomy has the potential to

capture the relational processes embedded in the microworld by searching for new understanding and knowledge about how teachers can handle complex relational situations.

Empirical basis

PeRT's relational taxonomy emanates from qualitative empirical studies and is elaborated on in four empirical phases. All the empirical studies had a special interest in complex relational situations, exploring how in-service teachers, pre-service teachers and school leaders handle open and unpredictable situations. In the in-depth analyses of relational scenarios, the data was systematically collected and analysed with a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Grounded theory can uncover social relationships and social processes and offers a rich understanding of the phenomena being studied. The results from one study, with new insights and knowledge, was reanalysed and developed in the next studies.

- (1) The first phase is the qualitative classroom study (Ljungblad 2016); a thesis with profound microanalysis with detailed descriptions of how successful teachers relate to their students in ways that create trustful relationships. The theoretical concept of *Tact* (Løvlie 2007) was used as an analytical tool to capture how the four participating teachers acknowledged their students at a microlevel. An exploration of how teachers related to their students during a year highlighted how the phenomena of trustful relationships emerged over time. The results were presented under the two themes of *Tact* and *Stance*. However, these descriptions are very rich and comprehensive (Ljungblad 2016, 2023).
- (2) To elaborate on easier ways of describing different aspects and characteristics of relational teaching on a metalevel, a new qualitative empirical study, *A school's collaborative learning to develop relational teaching* (2020-2021), was conducted. In this study, 50 teachers in a multicultural school with social and pedagogical challenges participated. 98% of the students had a mother tongue other than Swedish, speaking 25 different languages, and 30% of the students were considered newly arrived. During the inquiry, easier descriptions of the eight categories within *Tact* and *Stance* were developed and constructed into an observation scheme. The teachers used this tool during a semester to observe each other's teaching and discuss the results. The first results led to a reduction to six categories and a new observation scheme was established. During the next semester, the teachers filmed themselves and tried the new observation scheme, which was found to be easier to use. However, the second observation scheme seemed to work best for the participating experienced teachers, which led to the need for the observation scheme to be modified for pre-service teachers who have much less teaching experience.
- (3) The observation scheme based on *Tact* and *Stance* was further elaborated on in an ethnographic study, *The relation dimension of the school leader profession* (2020–2021). For one year, a school leader was shadowed one day a week, exploring how she relates to her personnel when they collaborate, face to face. Since video cameras could not be used for ethical reasons, a similar observation scheme based on *Tact* and *Stance* was developed, but with an emphasis on school leaders'

assignments. This method worked well for capturing the relational dimension of the school leader profession.

- (4) In higher education, a new study is being conducted (2022–2023) with the aim to observe how pre-service teachers can explore their relational teaching in order to create sustainable teacher-student relationships. In this study, a new observation scheme with nuanced descriptions of the six key indicators was developed to support pre-service teachers during internships.

In conclusion, these empirical phases revealed how participating in-service teachers, pre-service teachers and school leaders interpreted and practiced the six key indicators' taxonomy of relational teaching. These qualitative studies have shown that *tact* is a strong analytical tool with a particular potential to capture how teachers relate to their students on the micro-level (Ljungblad and Rinne 2020). Another strength in the theoretical concept of *Tact* is that it upheaves the dichotomy between theory and practice (Løvlie 2007) by illuminating momentary images of what happens in the now when teaching. In the search to understand relationships within teaching, PeRT's relational taxonomy can be applied as a systematic method for MRA (Aspelin 2022) to strive for trustworthy interpretations. Regarding trustworthiness (Tracy 2010), the key indicators' taxonomy of relational teaching is a worthy topic based on empirical research with a meaningful coherence in the synthesised version presented below, with the aim of being a significant contribution to both scholars and practitioners.

Analytical tools for exploring relational teaching

On any one day, a teacher may be involved in 1,000 interactions with students (Jackson 1990). This relational dimension of the teaching profession is developed during working years in interaction with students. On a daily basis, teachers and students continuously participate in interpersonal relationships within the dynamic, ever-shifting nature of teaching scenarios involving uncertain processes (Ljungblad 2016). Some of these interpersonal interactions can be described as communicational flow where teachers and students look relaxed; however, sometimes teachers must cope with difficult and incalculable situations that arise (Biesta 2001). An essential part of creating trustful teacher-student relationships emanates from how teachers relate in pedagogical tactful ways to their students in dilemma situations. PeRT's taxonomy focuses on such significant relational characteristics (Weiss 1998). The model is organised into six smaller units, key indicators, alongside definitions of what characterises each unit. These key indicators can be used for micro-analysis, as well as guiding in-service and pre-service teachers to observe their interaction with students. These relational analytical tools highlight important aspects to be observed during teacher-student interaction. The holistic approach of relational teaching is presented under the two themes of *Tact* and *Stance* (Figure 1). Accordingly, a teacher's tact and stance characterise *the whole person* (Biesta 2012) and can thereby illuminate both a non-reflective and a reflective level of relational teaching.

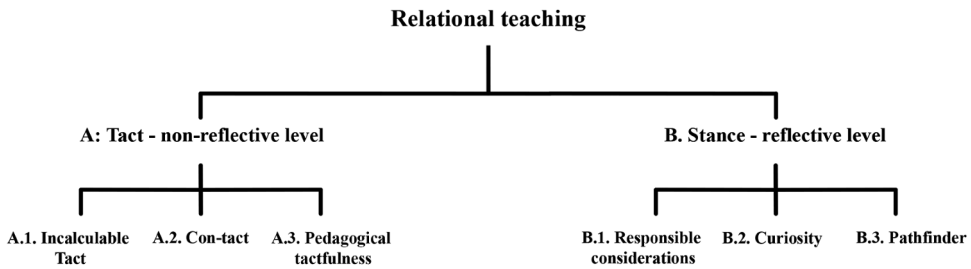


Figure 1. The Key Indicators' Taxonomy of Relational Teaching.

Tact

When exploring how teachers relate to their students, it becomes clear that the teachers' acknowledgement of students is ever-present in situated teaching (Ljungblad 2016), which can be understood and explained in terms of *pedagogical tact* (Løvlie 2007). Løvlie's view on tact goes beyond the psychological level and highlights a pedagogical and aesthetic spontaneous flow without reflection. This is a natural spontaneous flow in interpersonal meetings, since if reflection and distance take priority there is a risk that the relationship can be lost. Consequently, when teachers focus on the didactic aspects of teaching, they are not aware of how they relate to their students, which makes it an unconscious dimension to a large extent. We now turn our eyes towards the faces of the teachers, which is what the students see in every lesson of every day and experience in every interaction. For detailed empirical descriptions of each key indicator A 1, A 2 and A 3, see the 'Pedagogical Tactfulness' chapter in *The Relational Dimension of the Teaching Profession* (Ljungblad 2023).

Incalculable tact

A 1: The first key indicator observes how teachers adapt their levels of acknowledgement in the form of movements, gestures, glances or tones of voice. These ways of relating to students are not based on strategies or methods on a reflective level. Instead, teachers' pedagogical tact is derived from their senses and aesthetic experiences (Løvlie 2007) which allow them to adapt and follow their students' leads. Consequently, *incalculable tact* is composed of small nuances that are improvised during moments of teaching and it cannot be planned in advance in the same way as the lesson plan. The teachers feel with their senses and seek to balance and adjust their pedagogical tact. Such an adaptability emerges as different *shifts of tact*, which can be captured in changes to a teacher's glances, gestures and tones of voice.

Researchers: Observe when shifts of tact occur since different shifts create different atmospheres. Are there similarities or differences between different degrees of shifts of tact when the teacher approaches the whole class, a group or different students? It is also important to observe how teachers relate to students in flow situations compared to dilemma situations. It is essential to describe in detail how a teacher seeks eye contact with students or leans forward to create a welcoming atmosphere with body language. After analysing the teacher's ways of relating, the students' response can be noted to

determine if they are relaxed or insecure and if the teacher's shifts of tact need to be improved to encourage student participation.

Teachers and pre-service teachers: Knowledge about that my tact is improvised in the moment during teaching and cannot be included in lesson planning beforehand. How do I improvise my tact and adaptability? How can I find my tact? Illuminating the aesthetic of teaching and the act of improvisation gives insight into the relational dimension that teachers have to improvise every day.

Con-Tact

A 2: The second key indicator follows teachers' pedagogical tact over time, with a focus on how they seek *contact* with their students (Ljungblad and Rinne 2020). In order to enlighten the relational value of *trust*, the time aspect is significant by distinguishing between two facets of trust: at any specific moment, trust can come into the present as an atmosphere that surrounds the student and gradually develops into a trustful interpersonal relationship. By following teacher's pedagogical tact over time, it is possible to capture how trustful relationships emerge.

Researchers: Observe how the teacher seeks *contact* with the students with two different emphases: how the teacher shows interest in the students' different ways of working and reasoning with the school subjects and how the teacher grasps who the student is as a person by searching for answers to the question – *Who* are you as a person? Eye contact is a significant way for a teacher to create and maintain contact with a student. A teacher's glance can show belief in a student's potential and invite the student to engage in mutual exploration. When teachers initiate contact and are truly interested, the student can feel the experience of it being *You* and *Me*. The relationship becomes *We*, and such cooperation encourages students to dare to ask their questions and speak with their own voices. Analysing how teachers seek *contact* over time deepens the understanding of how students can participate in meaningful and trustful teacher-student relationships.

Teachers and pre-service teachers: What do my changes in tact look like when I seek contact with students in flow situations compared with dilemma situations? How do I create and maintain contact with my students over time?

Pedagogical tactfulness

A 3: The third key indicator digs deeper into an extended relational understanding of situated teaching. When a relationship has evolved between a teacher and a student, a continual pedagogical tactful balancing act is still required of the teacher while teaching. *Pedagogical tactfulness* emanates from similarities and differences between how successful teachers handle dilemma situations. When dialogue flows, teachers and students look relaxed and there are fewer nuances in the teachers' shifts in tact. However, in dilemma situations, when a student shows signs of insecurity, an important shift of tact can be illuminated.

Researchers: Observe how the teacher might turn her or his head to one side, seeking to catch a student's eye and speak in a softer, more cautious tone of voice. Other shifts of tact ease tension in the atmosphere when the teacher's positive tone reveals faith, humour or the playing down a problem. Such pedagogical tactfulness can create space for students to emerge and talk with their unique voices. To understand student participation more deeply, it is important to observe how the teacher in the same situation might relate in different ways to different students since students are different as people with varying needs. The characteristics of pedagogical tactfulness highlight how teachers sensitively support different students at crucial moments in diverse ways, which is a complex pedagogical balancing act. Consequently, teachers' pedagogical tactfulness is important for all students' participation, but it is particularly decisive for socially vulnerable students.

Teachers and pre-service teachers: Pedagogical tactfulness involves that I as a teacher relate to a group of students in various ways in the same teaching situation, based on students' varying needs and personalities. How can my *pedagogical tactfulness meet the diversity* in the classroom?

Stance

Furthermore, a teacher's pedagogical tactfulness emanates from the *teacher's stance*. Essentially, an open and nonjudgmental stance welcomes students to bring forth their ideas and to ease into dialogue with the teacher. Such a stance comes with the experience of engaging oneself in pedagogical judgements. A teacher's way of being in teaching moments can be observed in lesson planning, interaction, and reflection. To a greater extent, this relational dimension is easier for teachers to reflect upon and put into words, compared to the dimension of tact. For detailed empirical descriptions of each key indicator B 1, B 2 and B 3, see 'The Teacher's Stance' chapter in *The Relational Dimension of the Teaching Profession* (Ljungblad 2023).

Responsible considerations

B 1: The key indicator of *responsible considerations* is ethically based and includes a respect for diversity. In teaching, situated considerations have different characteristics and are reflected and improvised by the teacher depending on what support the student may need in different situations.

Researchers: Observe different kinds of responsibilities that teachers reflect on and act upon. How do teachers take responsibility for teaching in a way that enables all student to participate? How do teachers take responsibility for the relationships with their students? It is also essential to analyse a responsibility stance in dilemma situations. Consequently, in educational environments where teachers take a double responsibility for both teaching and their relationships with students, the students do not end up bearing the weight of the difficulties of teaching.

Teachers and pre-service teachers: How do my stance and my way of being in the now appear to the students? Which different inclusive didactic and relational considerations

do I reflect upon in my lesson planning? Which responsible considerations do I improvise in my teaching?

Curiosity

B 2: The next key indicator of *curiosity* reveals the teacher's search for *Who* the student is as a person and an understanding of their different ways of working. Curiosity can be observed in a teacher's eyes, facial expressions and questions that show interest in a student's thoughts. Analysing the interaction in the classroom can also bring clarity to what kind of norms and values are established in the educational setting.

Researchers: Observing the characteristic of curiosity can reveal two facets. The first facet consists of the teacher's active listening to create space for students to speak with their unique voices. The other facet is how the teacher approaches the whole class, creating space for students to listen to each other's voices. Such a curious stance animates human-to-human meetings where the teacher, as a person, meets the student, as a person. Thereby, the teacher can create pedagogical meetings that embody a curiosity for unique children and their participation in educational settings that support student growth.

Teachers and pre-service teachers: How do I show curiosity for the students' various ways of taking on the challenges of the lessons? How can I listen actively to the various thoughts and ideas of students? How can I create space in the class to listen to everyone's different thoughts and ideas?

Pathfinder

B 3: The last key indicator is *pathfinder* which highlights how teachers show the students several possible paths to explore the content of a subject. It is a pedagogical stance without demands on a particular performance, where the student and the teacher can be in the now. At the same time, since they are in an educational setting, the teachers need to engage in a sensitive balancing act of pushing (not pressing) the students to try new things.

Researchers: A key feature to observe is how teachers listen in an active way to guide students to the path they wish to explore and support that choice. It is also essential to observe how teachers encourage, show faith in the student's potential and stand by the student's side in a mutually explored process. The analysis of such a pedagogical stance might reveal new possibilities for students to influence their own participation.

Teachers and pre-service teachers: How can I guide and show students different ways of exploring subject content? How can I create meaningful pedagogical situations in which students are comfortable to actively choose to explore different paths?

Conclusion

PeRT's taxonomy exposes pedagogical fundamentals in the teaching profession, the relational constituent of pedagogy in practice. The holistic approach with the

conceptualisation of the two dimensions of *Tact* and *Stance* highlights six key indicators of teachers' relational capabilities and capacities that can be developed in practice. Consequently, the key indicators' taxonomy of relational teaching can capture the micro-world and shed new light on the rapidly changing educational environment.

The taxonomy is relational from two perspectives. The first is interpersonal, with the aim of developing the relational dimension of the teaching profession by striving to create trustful teacher-student relationships and sustainable social climate. The second is systemic, with relational levels in the taxonomy structure where the key indicators are integrated, which contributes to a deeper and more coherent understanding of the composite whole (Hook and Mills 2011). The starting node is the notion of relational teaching from which the essence of the taxonomy navigates over two parametric trees – *Tact* and *Stance*. Each tree is based on several classroom studies including microanalyses where six key indicators are specified. Furthermore, each tree has a path but, at the same time, the taxonomy allows the trees to traverse dynamically. Finally, the two trees are dependent on each other, which gives insight into the complexity of the relational dimension in teaching. The key indicators' taxonomy has the potential to scrutinise relational teaching through smaller analytical tools which contribute to a deeper understanding of how to develop teachers' relational capacities and capabilities.

The taxonomy can contribute to the existing problem in the field of relational pedagogy with little empirical research and the lack of theory that can be applied in practice. Researchers can use the categories as analytical tools on a code level to analyse different qualities of teaching. For example, while doing microanalysis of video-recorded teaching, the researcher can code A.1, A.2, A.3 or B.1, B.2, B.3 in the computer program when nuances of tact and stance occur. Thereby, the taxonomy can contribute to more systematic research with a potential to expand our relational understanding of teaching as an interpersonal profession. Furthermore, in action research there is a possibility for researchers to first code a relational scenario and then together with the teachers interpret the students' participation and develop the teaching environments.

The contribution to in-service and pre-service teachers is the pragmatic nuanced questions in each key indicator to guide teachers in cultivating their relational teaching throughout their career. The model is innovative for higher education, since it mediates teacher activities based on empirical research about how successful teachers relate to their students, which is presented in a visible way for pre-service teachers to perceive and explore during internship. The nuanced questions in each key indicator can also be constructed into an observation scheme which teams of teachers can use to collaboratively find ways for improvement.

In accordance with the key indicators' taxonomy capturing the fundamental relational dimension of teachers and students meeting face to face, it also supports other interpersonal professions, where the nuanced key indicators can be constructed in observation scheme for further research, such as the relational dimension of school leaders (Ljungblad 2023). To conclude, PerT's taxonomy has the potential to create new professional relational understanding and knowledge on different levels within the educational system.

Finally, regarding limitations in the key indicators' taxonomy. While outlining different layers of relational teaching, it is paramount to underscore that such relational values cannot simply be measured in a quantitative way (Biesta 2010). The holistic model consists of relational values and characteristics that are elusive and not easy to capture

or measure. The development of the key indicators' taxonomy of relational teaching is just one way of bridging theory and practice. Hopefully, more key indicators and models can be developed in the future within the field of relational pedagogy.

Discussion

Within current and future schools, there is a need to expand conceptualisations and elaborate on new frameworks to improve our understanding of what teachers and students in the twenty-first century experience. Two decades into the new millennium, a new generation of teachers leave teacher education with little knowledge about the relational dimension of the teaching profession. This is a challenge they share with earlier generations of teachers who to a large extent had to deal with the relational hard work by themselves. When relationships flourish in the classroom, teaching can be a great profession. However, today there is a tendency for teachers to leave the profession, along with a negative trend of many students dropping out. The research community has a responsibility to counteract educational inequalities and explore high quality educational environments where students can flourish and achieve their academic goals. Sustainable social climates and trustful teacher-student relationships are beneficial for all students (Hughes 2012), particularly for socially vulnerable students and special needs students (Ljungblad 2016). To counteract teacher turnover, researchers also have a responsibility for creating innovative ideas and models for a sustainable twenty-first century teaching profession (Ovenden-Hope et al. 2018) and supporting the educational pathways of teachers throughout their careers.

To oppose the current trend of measurement (Biesta 2010) with an instrumental understanding of the teaching profession, an alternative relational approach is presented. The aim is to respond to the existing problem of the explicit lack of relational theories that can be applied in practice and support teachers' professional development. Furthermore, teacher education needs to prepare the next generation of teachers for relational challenges in today's schools, with models and concepts that are intermediary and bridge abstract theory and classroom practice. PerT's relational taxonomy creates the potential to capture and highlight the pedagogical foundation for all teachers – how they relate to students. The key indicators' nuanced model can inspire teachers to support each other's professional growth in trustful communities. This holistic approach emphasises a deeper relational understanding of teaching as an interpersonal profession by providing teachers with insights and understandings about how pedagogical tactfulness plays an important role in the judgements they make in open and unpredictable situations (Ljungblad 2016, 2023). This balancing tactful act in relational teaching highlights how teachers can be educationally wise in open and unpredictable situations, a *virtuosity* at the heart of education (Biesta 2012). Accordingly, PerT's nuanced relational taxonomy is an invitation to cultivating relational professionalism.

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