

## FROM CONFLICT TO CONNECTION. A SYSTEMIC AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH TO TEACHER–STUDENT RELATIONAL PEDAGOGY.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Educational environments have traditionally been shaped by transmissive and hierarchical models, positioning the teacher as the primary source of knowledge and authority and the student as a passive recipient. These paradigms privilege unidirectional communication, fixed roles, and disciplinary structures that often constrain dialogical engagement and relational complexity within the classroom (Freire, 1970/2017; Giroux, 2011). In recent decades, however, alternative perspectives rooted in social constructionism and systemic psychotherapy have challenged these assumptions, reconceptualizing the classroom as a dynamic relational space where knowledge, identity, and power are co-constructed through interaction and dialogue.

Social constructionism, as theorized by seminal figures such as Kenneth Gergen (1985, 2009), Mary Gergen (2001), and Sheila McNamee (2010), posits that reality—including educational realities—is not objectively given but constructed through language and social processes. Knowledge and identity emerge in ongoing relational interactions shaped by cultural, historical, and institutional discourses. This perspective moves beyond individualistic and essentialist views of learning and subjectivity, emphasizing the social and dialogical nature of meaning-making (Burr, 2015; Shotter, 1993).

Systemic psychotherapy offers a complementary lens by focusing on patterns of communication and interaction within relational systems

(Bateson, 1972; Minuchin, 1974; Boscolo & Bertrando, 1993). It highlights the principle of circular causality, whereby actions and responses form feedback loops that sustain or transform relational dynamics. Systemic approaches to therapy and supervision also underscore the role of co-agency, reflexivity, and multiplicity of perspectives in facilitating change (Tomm, 1988).

Despite the growing attention to dialogical and relational pedagogies, the integration of social constructionist and systemic perspectives in educational research remains relatively underexplored. Several recent Spanish studies reveal that while emotional intelligence, social-emotional competence, and inclusive education are increasingly prioritized among teachers and teacher training programmes, there are significant gaps in how relational and interactive meaning-making—particularly authority, conflict, and co-construction of identity—are conceptually theorized (Lucas-Mangas et al., 2022). For example, while future secondary education teachers in Spain show positive attitudes toward diversity and significant levels of emotional intelligence, those studies also report deficiencies in explicit relational training and in understanding how power and conflict are negotiated relationally rather than managed behaviorally. This chapter is among the first to explicitly bring systemic psychotherapy tools into dialogue with social constructionism in the Spanish educational context—offering a novel conceptual contribution to the study of relational pedagogy and teacher training. It aims to fill the gap by examining not only emotional or behavioral dimensions but by analysing relational and communicative interaction patterns, exploring how conflicts are co-constructed and circularly sustained, and illustrating through a detailed case how new relational narratives might be fostered.

Bringing social constructionist and systemic frameworks into dialogue within educational research and practice opens new possibilities for understanding teacher–student relationships as fluid, co-constructed phenomena embedded in broader cultural and institutional contexts. This orientation aligns with contemporary educational goals in Spain and globally, which increasingly emphasize inclusivity, emotional intelligence, and socio-communicative competences (OECD, 2022;

Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2023). It challenges rigid authority structures and encourages pedagogical practices that foster dialogue, collaboration, and ethical responsiveness.

This study develops these ideas through a theoretical analysis of a constructed case study set in a Spanish secondary school. The case illustrates how classroom conflicts—often regarded as disruptions to be managed—can instead be reframed as opportunities for relational insight and transformation. By examining this interaction through the dual lenses of social constructionism and systemic psychotherapy, the study proposes a relational pedagogy that promotes teacher reflexivity, student engagement, and the dynamic co-construction of meaning.

The subsequent sections outline the chapter’s objectives, detail the methodology, present results derived from the case analysis, and discuss their implications for teacher training and educational practice in Spain. The chapter concludes with recommendations for incorporating systemic and social constructionist principles into pedagogical frameworks and teacher education programs.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this study is to advance the development of a relational pedagogy grounded in social constructionist and systemic psychotherapy frameworks, with particular relevance to the Spanish educational context. Drawing on a constructed case scenario that reflects plausible and nuanced dynamics between a teacher and a student, the study aims to:

1. Theoretically examine the co-construction of meaning, identity, and conflict in everyday teacher–student interactions, moving beyond individualized or pathologizing accounts of classroom behavior and highlighting the relational and systemic dimensions of educational encounters.
2. Demonstrate how conceptual tools derived from social constructionism and systemic psychotherapy—including circular causality, reframing, and dialogical reflexivity—can provide

a deeper understanding of the relational processes underlying pedagogical interactions.

3. Propose a model of teacher identity that is dynamic, reflexive, and contextually responsive, challenging the static and prescriptive notions often perpetuated by conventional teacher training programs.
4. Reflect on the potential of integrating dialogical supervision and systemic thinking into teacher education and professional development in Spain, with the aim of fostering educational practices that are relationally attuned, ethically responsive, and co-constructive.

Through these objectives, the chapter seeks to enrich both theoretical discourse and practical pedagogy, positioning teacher–student relationships as sites of meaning-making, transformation, and co-agency.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This work employs a theoretical case study methodology, using a constructed (composite) scenario to ground conceptual analysis. The case is based on plausible teacher–student interactions within the Spanish educational context and serves as the foundation for an interpretive, theory-driven discussion that illuminates relational and systemic dynamics in the classroom.

The use of a composite case study is particularly valuable in educational research for several reasons. First, it allows for the integration of diverse experiences and dynamics observed in real classrooms into a coherent and analyzable narrative, without being bound to the contingencies of a single empirical case. This approach offers both flexibility and depth, providing a context that is sufficiently realistic to generate meaningful insights while avoiding the ethical and practical limitations of working with identifiable participants. Composite cases also make it possible to highlight structural and systemic patterns rather than focusing on individual particularities, thereby illuminating broader pedagogical and cultural dynamics. As Flyvbjerg (2006) and Yin (2014) argue,

case-based reasoning enables researchers to capture the complexity of social phenomena in ways that abstract models or large-scale quantitative studies often cannot, especially when the focus lies on interaction, meaning-making, and relational processes.

The case focuses on Clara, a secondary school teacher in a public high school in Spain, and Dani, one of her adolescent students. Clara is a mid-career educator committed to academic excellence and classroom order. Having been trained within traditional pedagogical paradigms, Clara's professional identity is deeply intertwined with her role as an authority figure responsible for maintaining discipline and fostering student success. Her teaching style reflects values commonly found in Spanish educational culture, which often emphasize respect for authority, clear behavioral expectations, and structured learning environments. These values are reinforced by national educational policies and longstanding cultural norms that place a premium on teacher authority and view classroom discipline as essential to effective learning.

Psychologically, Clara carries implicit expectations shaped by her upbringing and professional experiences. She perceives student misbehavior or challenge as potential threats to classroom harmony and authority, triggering a stress response that leads her to reinforce rules more rigidly. This rigidity, while well-intentioned, creates emotional distance and limits her openness to alternative perspectives from students. Clara's stance is not uncommon in the Spanish context, where many teachers, especially those in secondary education, report experiencing high levels of stress and tension when faced with student opposition (Esteve, 2003).

Dani, in contrast, is a 15-year-old student navigating the developmental tasks of adolescence, including identity formation and social positioning. He is socially outgoing but experiences academic difficulties, often feeling misunderstood and undervalued within the school system. Dani's family context combines high parental expectations with limited emotional support, contributing to ambivalence toward authority figures. Emotionally, Dani experiences frustration and a need for recognition, which he expresses through verbal challenges, sarcasm, or disengagement in the classroom. Such behavior is not atypical in Spanish

secondary schools, where the tension between adolescent self-assertion and institutional demands frequently gives rise to conflictual dynamics (Martínez-Garrido & Murillo, 2021). Dani embodies many of these tensions, simultaneously desiring recognition and resisting the rigid structures that constrain his agency.

The relational dynamic between Clara and Dani is shaped by these emotional and psychological backgrounds, but it is fundamentally co-constructed within the classroom interaction. Their exchanges unfold as a recursive loop: Clara's efforts to assert control through strict rule enforcement elicit Dani's oppositional responses, which, in turn, reinforce Clara's perception of him as "disrespectful" or "disengaged." This pattern escalates into a cycle of mutual misunderstanding and emotional distancing, perpetuating classroom conflict.

From a social constructionist perspective, the meanings attributed to Dani's behavior and Clara's authority are not fixed but emerge through ongoing dialogue and interaction within broader cultural and institutional contexts. What Clara interprets as "disrespect" may, from Dani's perspective, constitute an attempt to assert identity or seek voice. Conversely, Dani's challenges can be seen as attempts to negotiate power and recognition in a setting that privileges hierarchical structures.

The conflict exemplifies the systemic principle of circular causality (Bateson, 1972; Tomm, 1988), wherein each participant's behavior both influences and is influenced by the other's responses, creating a self-sustaining feedback loop. Clara's escalating firmness reinforces Dani's oppositional stance, which further entrenches Clara's disciplinary approach. This interactional pattern is embedded within the broader socio-cultural system of the Spanish educational context, including normative expectations regarding teacher authority, student compliance, and the role of the family.

A turning point occurs when, through an imagined supervision process, Clara becomes reflective about her interaction patterns. This meta-perspective allows her to reframe Dani's behavior not as defiance but as a relational signal, fostering curiosity and empathy. By introducing alternative narratives and adopting a more flexible, dialogical stance, Clara creates space for

re-engagement, breaking the cycle of tension and enabling a renewed, co-constructed understanding of authority and participation.

This constructed case thus serves as a rich site for examining how relational meanings, identities, and power dynamics emerge, are maintained, and can be transformed within educational settings, viewed through the complementary lenses of social constructionism and systemic psychotherapy.

The analysis is approached through two complementary theoretical frameworks. On the one hand, Social Constructionism, advanced by Kenneth Gergen, Mary Gergen, and Sheila McNamee, provides a lens to examine how knowledge, identity, and authority are not inherent properties of individuals but emerge dialogically within cultural and relational contexts. This perspective highlights the centrality of language, positioning classroom conflict not as a matter of personal deficits but as a site of meaning-making where alternative narratives can be constructed. On the other hand, Systemic Psychotherapy, grounded in the work of Gregory Bateson, John Tomm, and Salvador Minuchin, complements this by focusing on relational patterns, circular causality, and the recursive loops that sustain interactional dynamics. When applied together, these frameworks illuminate both the discursive and systemic dimensions of teacher–student interactions: social constructionism provides a conceptual vocabulary for exploring meaning, while systemic psychotherapy offers practical tools for reframing and transforming entrenched relational cycles.

Rather than evaluating empirical data, the aim is to generate theoretical insights by examining realistic relational dynamics. This methodology enables exploration of how meaning, identity, and interactional patterns are co-constructed in educational settings and how these processes can be interpreted using dialogical and systemic perspectives.

#### 4. RESULTS

The detailed analysis of the constructed case reveals several critical insights into the relational dynamics between Clara and Dani, illustrating broader processes relevant to teacher–student interactions within the

Spanish educational context. More than a singular conflict between an individual teacher and a student, the case highlights how classroom tensions emerge as relationally co-constructed events that are deeply embedded in cultural expectations, institutional frameworks, and developmental challenges. Through this lens, three interrelated dimensions become particularly salient.

First, the case exposes how meanings such as “respect,” “authority,” or “engagement” are not universal categories, but context-dependent constructs negotiated in the flow of interaction. Clara’s interpretation of Dani’s behavior as disrespectful reflects wider cultural scripts that position teachers as unquestionable authorities, while Dani’s counter-interpretations underscore adolescents’ search for recognition and agency within hierarchical systems.

Second, the results underscore the cyclical and systemic nature of conflict. Rather than attributing Dani’s actions to individual traits such as defiance or disengagement, the case demonstrates how Clara’s disciplinary strategies and Dani’s oppositional responses sustain each other in a recursive loop. This circularity exemplifies systemic processes observed in many Spanish classrooms, where rigid disciplinary traditions often clash with adolescents’ developmental need for autonomy.

Third, the findings point to the transformative potential of reflexivity and dialogical practices. Clara’s shift, supported by the imagined supervision process, illustrates how stepping back from entrenched meanings and adopting a systemic lens can disrupt negative cycles, open space for empathy, and reconfigure relational possibilities. This process resonates with current pedagogical debates in Spain that emphasize the role of socio-emotional learning and reflective practice in building inclusive, dialogical classrooms.

In sum, the results do not merely recount a fictional exchange but offer a conceptual demonstration of how systemic and social constructionist approaches can illuminate, challenge, and ultimately transform the ways teacher–student relationships are understood and navigated.

#### 4.1. REFRAMING CLASSROOM CONFLICT AS RELATIONAL INSIGHT

A central finding is that classroom conflict should not be reduced to a problem to be managed or eliminated; rather, it represents a valuable opportunity for relational insight and growth. The repeated clashes between Clara and Dani, initially perceived as disruptive or antagonistic, can be reinterpreted as meaningful communicative acts reflecting underlying emotional and identity needs on both sides. Dani's oppositional behaviors—such as sarcasm or disengagement—when viewed within the broader relational context, emerge as attempts to assert his voice and negotiate recognition within a system that often marginalizes student agency. Clara's initial framing of these behaviors as “disrespect” reflects dominant cultural narratives about authority and discipline but simultaneously obscures the nuanced relational dialogue occurring in the classroom.

Seen from a systemic perspective, conflict functions as a relational signal rather than a simple disruption. Every escalation, sarcastic remark, or moment of disengagement communicates something about the quality of the teacher–student relationship, the distribution of power, and the unmet needs circulating within the system. By viewing these moments as communicative rather than pathological, educators are invited to shift from reactive discipline to curiosity-driven exploration: *What is this behavior telling us about how the student experiences the classroom? What does it reveal about the teacher's identity and assumptions?* Such questions foster an interpretive stance that treats conflict as data for relational understanding.

Within the Spanish educational context, this reframing has particular relevance. Spanish classrooms have historically emphasized order, compliance, and respect for authority, legacies of both cultural tradition and institutional design. Within this model, student opposition is often categorized as misbehavior, leading to punitive measures that reinforce hierarchical divides. However, as educational reforms in Spain increasingly stress inclusivity, socio-emotional learning, and dialogical pedagogies, there is growing recognition that conflict, if approached reflexively, can generate precisely the kinds of critical conversations needed

to humanize education. Clara and Dani's case illustrates this transition in microcosm: what begins as a disciplinary clash becomes, under reflective analysis, an invitation to revisit and renegotiate the relational foundations of teaching and learning.

From a social constructionist lens, the meaning of "conflict" itself is not fixed but constructed through language and interaction. The label of "disrespect" is a discursive act that positions Dani as a problematic student and Clara as a beleaguered authority. By re-storying the situation, however, the same interaction can be understood as a developmental struggle, a plea for recognition, or an experiment in negotiating agency. This shift in narrative demonstrates the power of discursive reframing: the same set of behaviors can produce very different pedagogical responses depending on how they are interpreted.

In practice, reframing conflict as relational insight does not imply ignoring disruptive behavior or abandoning standards of respect. Rather, it suggests that behavioral incidents must be situated within their relational, cultural, and emotional context. For teachers, this entails cultivating reflexivity and dialogical competence: the ability to pause, consider multiple possible meanings, and respond in ways that preserve relational dignity. For students, it opens pathways to greater self-expression and recognition, fostering an environment where agency is not opposed to authority but co-constructed through dialogue.

Ultimately, Clara and Dani's case illustrates how reframing classroom conflict can transform moments of tension into opportunities for pedagogical growth. By shifting from a deficit-based model that sees conflict as a threat to order, toward a relational model that treats conflict as a communicative resource, educators can move closer to a pedagogy that is not only more effective but also more humane, culturally responsive, and ethically grounded.

#### 4.2. TEACHER IDENTITY AS A CO-CONSTRUCTED AND DYNAMIC PROCESS

Another significant insight concerns the fluid and co-constructed nature of teacher identity. Clara's self-perception as a strict authority figure is not fixed but continuously shaped through interaction with Dani and

the wider classroom environment. Her professional role, emotional responses, and disciplinary strategies evolve as she engages in reflective practice. The imagined supervision scenario facilitates a meta-perspective, enabling Clara to recognize the circularity of the conflict and her own contribution to sustaining it. This reflective shift underscores the potential for teacher identity to be re-negotiated through reflexivity, dialogical engagement, and openness to alternative relational narratives.

This observation challenges the widespread assumption—still prevalent in many teacher education programs—that teacher identity is a stable trait derived from training, personal values, or professional expertise. From both systemic and social constructionist perspectives, identity is not something a teacher *has* but something a teacher *does* in relation to others. Every classroom interaction invites teachers to enact, confirm, or modify their sense of self, as they are positioned by students, colleagues, parents, and institutional norms. Clara, for instance, perceives herself as a disciplinarian because her exchanges with Dani repeatedly trigger patterns where authority is tested and defended. Yet, when she adopts a reflective stance, she discovers alternative ways of positioning herself—not merely as an enforcer of rules but as a co-participant in meaning-making and relational growth.

In the Spanish educational context, this dynamic process is particularly salient. Traditional pedagogical models have long emphasized the teacher as a figure of authority, respect, and discipline, with identity anchored in professional expertise and hierarchical distance. Such models provide security and legitimacy but can limit flexibility in responding to diverse student needs. Contemporary reforms, however, increasingly call for teachers to embody relational and emotional competencies, requiring them to balance authority with empathy, structure with flexibility, and guidance with dialogue. Clara's case demonstrates how these tensions are lived out in practice: her professional identity is not a predetermined role but a relationally negotiated performance, continuously shaped by the expectations of students like Dani, institutional policies, and broader cultural narratives about education.

The role of reflective supervision is critical in this process of identity transformation. By stepping outside the immediate demands of the

classroom, teachers gain the opportunity to explore how their interpretations and behaviors contribute to the dynamics they experience. For Clara, recognizing that her identity as a “strict teacher” was co-constructed within a relational loop with Dani allowed her to experiment with new narratives—such as being a facilitator of dialogue or an empathetic authority figure. These identity shifts are not superficial changes in behavior but profound reconceptualizations of what it means to teach, grounded in relational reflexivity.

Furthermore, the case illustrates that teacher identity is inherently multi-layered, shaped not only by immediate interactions but also by broader systemic and cultural influences. Institutional discourses about “good teaching,” parental expectations about academic success, and national reforms emphasizing inclusivity all feed into how teachers imagine and perform their roles. At times, these discourses may conflict—pushing teachers to be simultaneously strict and flexible, authoritative and empathetic, efficient and relational. Clara’s negotiation of identity thus exemplifies a broader professional reality: teachers inhabit complex, sometimes contradictory expectations, and their identities evolve through navigating these tensions in practice.

Finally, reframing teacher identity as dynamic and co-constructed carries important implications for professional development. Instead of training teachers to adopt fixed roles or “best practices,” educational programs might better serve them by fostering reflexivity, dialogical competence, and systemic thinking. These capacities enable teachers to adapt their identities in responsive and ethically grounded ways, creating classrooms where authority is not imposed but relationally enacted. Clara’s journey underscores the transformative potential of such an approach, suggesting that identity work is not ancillary to pedagogy but central to its practice and ongoing evolution.

#### 4.3. THE ROLE OF CIRCULAR CAUSALITY IN SUSTAINING INTERACTIONAL PATTERNS

The case vividly demonstrates the systemic principle of circular causality, a cornerstone of systemic psychotherapy and family systems theory. Unlike linear models of cause and effect, which attribute behaviors

to isolated individuals, circular causality emphasizes the reciprocal and iterative nature of human interaction. In the relational loop between Clara and Dani, Clara's authoritative interventions trigger oppositional responses from Dani, which, in turn, reinforce Clara's perception of him as a "problem student." This perception justifies stricter enforcement of rules, which further fuels Dani's resistance. Over time, this reciprocal loop creates a self-reinforcing cycle of disconnection, escalating tension, and relational rigidity.

One of the strengths of applying circular causality to educational contexts is that it moves away from locating problems within individuals—such as labeling Dani as inherently "disrespectful" or Clara as excessively authoritarian. Instead, it frames conflict as an emergent property of a relational system. This perspective not only reduces the tendency toward pathologizing students but also distributes responsibility across the interactional field. Clara and Dani are both co-authors of the dynamic; their actions gain meaning only in relation to one another and within the broader cultural and institutional frameworks of Spanish schooling.

Within the Spanish classroom context, circular causality is particularly relevant. Traditional hierarchies often normalize teacher-centered authority and student compliance, setting the stage for oppositional behaviors to be interpreted as moral failings or threats to discipline. When these interpretations dominate, teachers may escalate control, inadvertently perpetuating the very resistance they aim to eliminate. Recognizing circularity allows educators to reframe resistance not as a flaw within the student but as a relational signal, pointing to unmet needs for recognition, autonomy, or dialogue. In this way, circular causality opens new possibilities for empathy, curiosity, and systemic intervention.

Practical implications of this principle are profound. Rather than targeting isolated behaviors through punishment or reward systems, educators can intervene by altering the interactional patterns that sustain conflict. For example, Clara might shift from rigid rule enforcement to exploratory dialogue, asking Dani about his perspectives and experiences. Small relational adjustments—such as acknowledging Dani's frustration or providing him with alternative ways to express agency—can disrupt the feedback loop, fostering new dynamics of engagement and

mutual respect. Systemic tools such as hypothesizing or circular questioning provide structured ways to explore these loops, helping teachers recognize how their own actions contribute to the cycle and where they might introduce change.

Ultimately, the recognition of circular causality encourages a paradigm shift in education: from focusing on behavior management to understanding and transforming relational systems. By seeing conflict as co-constructed and recursive, teachers are empowered to move beyond reactive control and toward more ethical, dialogical, and relationally attuned pedagogical practices.

#### 4.4. ADAPTABILITY AND VALUE OF SYSTEMIC TOOLS IN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

Systemic tools such as hypothesizing and circular questioning prove highly adaptable and valuable within educational contexts, especially when applied through reflective supervision. These tools allow teachers to step outside entrenched conflictual patterns and adopt new perspectives on relational dynamics. In the case of Clara and Dani, hypothesizing enabled Clara to move beyond her initial surface-level interpretation of Dani's sarcasm and disengagement as "disrespect." Instead, she began to consider alternative explanations: that Dani's behavior might reflect a struggle for recognition, a defense against feelings of inadequacy, or an attempt to negotiate autonomy within a rigid classroom structure. By generating multiple possible narratives, hypothesizing opened space for empathy and reduced the risk of pathologizing the student.

Circular questioning further expands this relational insight by actively encouraging the consideration of multiple perspectives and the interconnectedness of actions. For instance, Clara might ask herself: "*How does Dani see my strict enforcement of rules? How does his response to me affect how I feel about my role as a teacher? How might his family interpret our interactions?*" These types of questions highlight the systemic web in which teacher–student dynamics are embedded, inviting reflection on how individual behaviors ripple across relationships and contexts. In supervision or training, circular questioning can also be

used collaboratively, allowing groups of teachers to explore how their collective practices reinforce or transform classroom patterns.

The adaptability of these tools lies in their capacity to move seamlessly from therapeutic to pedagogical contexts. While originally developed for systemic psychotherapy, hypothesizing and circular questioning are not bound to clinical settings; their focus on meaning-making, reflexivity, and relational patterns aligns closely with the aims of relational pedagogy. In Spanish classrooms, where traditional authority structures still shape expectations, these tools can be particularly transformative. They empower teachers to soften hierarchical rigidity, foster more dialogical relationships, and address conflict without defaulting to punitive measures.

Practical applications might include structured reflective sessions within teacher training programs, where educators practice generating hypotheses about student behavior that go beyond disciplinary explanations, or using circular questioning as part of restorative practices in conflict resolution. Such exercises can help teachers shift from asking, *“How can I stop this behavior?”* to *“What does this behavior communicate, and how are we co-creating it?”* This subtle shift has the potential to change the entire trajectory of teacher–student interactions.

Ultimately, systemic tools provide educators with concrete strategies to disrupt rigid interactional patterns and co-construct more flexible, adaptive relational narratives. They foster empathy, collaborative problem-solving, and shared responsibility, equipping teachers to transform conflict into opportunities for connection and growth. Their integration into teacher education and professional development represents a promising step toward embedding relational pedagogy into everyday classroom practice.

#### 4.5. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AS A FRAMEWORK FOR COMPLEXITY AND DIALOGUE

Social constructionism provides a robust conceptual framework for embracing the complexity and multiplicity of meanings that characterize teacher–student relationships. Rather than treating behaviors or identities as stable, pre-given entities, it emphasizes that they emerge dialogically through interaction, language, and cultural discourse. In the case

of Clara and Dani, what is interpreted as “disrespect” or “authority” is not a universal truth but a meaning co-created in the moment, shaped by the historical and institutional narratives that inform Spanish schooling.

This framework encourages educators to move beyond binary categories—such as “engaged” versus “disruptive” or “teacher in control” versus “student resistant”—and to recognize the fluidity of relational roles. Teacher identity and student agency are continuously negotiated, adapting to the shifting dynamics of the classroom. By adopting a social constructionist lens, educators are invited to consider how their own language and assumptions contribute to sustaining or transforming these dynamics. This reflexive stance helps them acknowledge the diversity of student voices and incorporate them into shared meaning-making processes.

Importantly, social constructionism also foregrounds the value of dialogue as a pedagogical tool. Dialogue does not simply involve exchanging information but represents a collaborative process in which participants co-create understandings and open new possibilities for action. In contexts like Spain, where hierarchical norms of respect and authority remain deeply embedded, dialogical pedagogy has the potential to reshape traditional power relations. It validates student perspectives, promotes inclusivity, and supports responsive teaching practices that address both academic and emotional dimensions of learning.

Ultimately, social constructionist insights provide educators with a framework for working productively with ambiguity and complexity rather than reducing them to simplified categories. By engaging with multiple perspectives and narratives, teachers and students can co-construct more flexible, ethical, and empowering educational relationships that resonate with contemporary goals of inclusivity and socio-emotional development.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The case of Clara and Dani offers a compelling illustration of the complexity inherent in teacher–student relationships, demonstrating how these interactions are deeply relational and shaped by co-constructed meanings, cultural contexts, and systemic patterns. Central to their dynamic is the ongoing negotiation of what constitutes “disrespect” or

“engagement”, alongside implicit rules regarding what may be said and the manner in which it is expressed. These meanings are not fixed or objective but emerge through interaction, influenced by broader cultural norms in the Spanish educational context, which traditionally privilege teacher authority and expect student compliance. Clara interprets Dani’s behavior as disrespectful—a meaning co-produced within their communicative space—whereas Dani’s actions can be understood as attempts to assert identity and communicate distress within the constraints of the classroom environment.

From a social constructionist perspective, this negotiation of meaning and identity illustrates how language and interaction co-create educational realities. Roles such as teacher and student, authority and compliance, are fluid and contingent on ongoing dialogue, consistent with Kenneth and Mary Gergen’s view that identity and knowledge are relationally constituted. Educational settings function as cultural systems where power, language, and social norms converge, shaping interactional possibilities. Dani’s expressions of frustration and Clara’s exercise of authority are therefore embedded within broader socio-cultural narratives, including family expectations and institutional disciplinary frameworks, which collectively influence perception and response.

Applying the lens of systemic psychotherapy highlights how the conflict between Clara and Dani emerges from circular causality, wherein each participant’s behavior both influences and is influenced by the other, creating a feedback loop that sustains escalating tension. Clara’s well-intentioned efforts to assert control are met by Dani’s oppositional responses, which in turn reinforce Clara’s perceptions and prompt stricter enforcement, perpetuating a rigid interactional pattern. This cyclical dynamic exemplifies the systemic understanding that conflict is not a trait or problem inherent in an individual but arises within relational systems. Consequently, Dani’s behavior should not be simplistically labeled as “resistance”; instead, it represents a co-constructed pattern signaling relational distress and unmet needs on both sides.

The emotional dimensions of their interaction further enrich the analysis. Clara’s professional identity and emotional investment in her role amplify her responses, as perceived challenges to authority may

threaten her sense of efficacy and self-worth. Dani's behaviors can similarly be interpreted as expressions of frustration, marginalization, or a search for recognition beyond observable conduct. These emotional experiences are socially constructed and mediated by classroom communicative practices, highlighting the importance of attending not only to overt behavior but also to underlying affective meanings that sustain interactional patterns.

A pivotal turning point occurs with the introduction of reflective supervision, conceptualized as an imagined space where Clara steps back from the immediate conflict to reconsider her interpretations and responses. This reflective stance allows her to break entrenched cycles, generate alternative narratives, and hypothesize about Dani's behavior, thereby fostering empathy, flexibility, and re-engagement. Such supervisory processes align with systemic psychotherapy's emphasis on reflexivity and multiple perspectives, illustrating the value of supportive spaces in which teachers can critically examine relational patterns and explore new ways of engaging students. Integrating reflective practices into teacher education can promote ethical, responsive pedagogies that prioritize relational complexity over simplistic behavior management.

The insights derived from this case resonate with developments in relational pedagogy, which advocate for dialogical and co-agential approaches to education. Moving beyond hierarchical, transmissive models, relational pedagogy positions teacher and student as partners in knowledge and identity construction, where authority is enacted through mutual respect and negotiated responsibility. Applying systemic and social constructionist frameworks allows educators to reframe classroom conflict as an opportunity for relational meaning-making rather than a problem to suppress. Techniques such as circular questioning and hypothesizing, adapted from systemic therapy, offer practical means to explore and transform interactional dynamics, fostering nuanced and empathetic engagement with students.

Finally, the case emphasizes the specific contextual challenges and opportunities within the Spanish educational system, where traditional disciplinary norms coexist with progressive reforms promoting inclusivity and socio-emotional learning. Recognizing and integrating

cultural and institutional factors is essential for effectively adapting systemic and social constructionist approaches. Although the case study is theoretical and composite, it invites further empirical research and practical experimentation to investigate how these frameworks can inform teacher training and pedagogical practice, contributing to more relationally attuned, ethical, and effective educational environments.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The integration of systemic psychotherapy and social constructionist perspectives into education provides a transformative lens for understanding and enhancing teacher–student relationships. This chapter has demonstrated how relational pedagogy, grounded in these frameworks, shifts attention away from simplistic individual attributions of conflict toward a nuanced appreciation of interactional patterns and co-constructed meanings within cultural and institutional contexts. Through the examination of the constructed yet realistic case of Clara and Dani, it becomes evident that classroom tensions are not immutable obstacles but dynamic processes that can be approached as opportunities for relational insight and pedagogical growth.

Central to this reconceptualization is the understanding that teacher identity and authority are emergent, co-constructed phenomena shaped through ongoing dialogue and reflexivity. This perspective challenges traditional hierarchical models of education and encourages educators to view authority as relationally enacted rather than unilaterally imposed. The systemic principle of circular causality reframes conflict as a recursive loop of interactions, emphasizing that meaningful change in relational dynamics requires shifts at multiple levels, including emotional, cognitive, and communicative domains.

Reflective supervision, as illustrated in the case study, emerges as a critical pedagogical tool, enabling teachers to step outside entrenched interactional patterns, reframe narratives, and develop empathetic and flexible responses. When embedded in teacher education and professional development, such reflective practices hold substantial promise for fostering responsive, ethical, and dialogical classrooms. In addition, systemic techniques such as hypothesizing and circular questioning

provide practical methods for educators to analyze and intervene in interactional loops, enhancing relational attunement and supporting co-agency between teachers and students.

This chapter also underscores the importance of situating these approaches within the specific cultural and educational landscape of Spain, recognizing the influence of national norms, institutional expectations, and socio-political realities on classroom dynamics. Such contextual sensitivity is essential for the effective translation of systemic and social constructionist principles into educational policy and practice.

Although the analysis relies on a constructed theoretical case, it establishes foundational groundwork for empirical research and applied innovation in relational pedagogy. Future studies might explore the implementation of systemic supervision models in teacher training, examine their effects on teacher–student relationships, and investigate the intersection of these approaches with broader educational reforms promoting inclusivity, emotional well-being, and socio-communicative competencies.

In conclusion, adopting a systemic and social constructionist approach to relational pedagogy provides a promising pathway for reimagining education as a collaborative, evolving process in which authority, identity, and knowledge are co-created through dialogue. This paradigm fosters learning environments where teachers and students act as co-agents, classroom conflict is transformed into connection, and educational relationships are recognized as fundamental to both personal and academic development.

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