



Using poetry to develop service user led learning materials for social work education

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Course details

Course title: Leadership and Management Practice Education

Level: undergraduate and postgraduate

Year :1

Module title: Mentoring and Enabling Others Unit and PQ Service User Steering Group

Discipline/Subject areas: Social Work

Activity details

What I did

I have been leading a group of service users, tutors and social workers on the PQ in social work at London South Bank in the use of poetry as a medium for expressing their creativity in learning.

Why I did it

Service user involvement in the development and delivery of the social work curriculum may become over-dependent on certain types of participation at the expense of others. In our PQ group we wanted to focus more on encouraging interaction, reflection and commitment to learning in partnership with service users by experimenting with the arts.

What I wanted to achieve

To invite tutors working with social workers following Leadership and Management and Practice Education Awards and practice assessors following the Enabling Others Unit to think about the relationships between service users, students and practice assessors.

A short description of what I did

I used my interest in poetry to energize both tutors and social workers on the Enabling Others unit to consider how they would include and involve service users in a number of ways. This is a way of challenging traditional power imbalances between users and professionals and

views the service user as an expert in their own care and in teaching tutors and social work teachers. First I had to build up trust and a working rapport with members of the PQ service users group and I used a number of props such as colours, a wig, or a stick just to free up or encourage them to use and trust their own imaginations. They were then encouraged to create a group poem on a related subject in a spontaneous way. I also shared my own poems with students on the Enabling Others unit which we discussed or simply just reflected on more quietly or privately.

What worked well

- People tend to be more spontaneous and in touch with their learning needs.
- It enables people to develop their knowledge and skills by using direct experience rather than traditional texts.
- I was able to give people a glimpse of some of the experiences and issues faced by service users that cannot be expressed in other ways.

Problems and/or issues

- You need to build rapport and trust with each other, so preparation and planning for these types of activities and learning experiences are important.
- Some social workers want to 'know' the answers to service users' problems and they find it difficult to 'go with the flow'. You need to be able to 'go with the flow'.

What students thought about it

- Initially the members of the PQ group were unsure of their ability to write a poem.
- They were also tentative about using the props.
- Once the group got going and we sat and wrote, the group was excited to see what they had produced.
- Similarly when we collected the poetry together there was a feeling of achievement and of being an important part of the group.
- The practice assessors appreciated a light-hearted session with no note-taking and said they would remember all that had been said and done.
- Social workers thought this was a good way to learn about difficult issues and made an emotional impact on the social workers understanding of service users experiences.
- The session highlighted the need to plan introductions between service users and students carefully.
- To gain feedback from service users about the student all the way through the placement.

Key messages

- Don't be afraid to experiment, its all part of the learning experience.
- Informal knowledge and personal knowledge is as important in professional training.
- Artistic pursuits can unlock the way in which we develop personal knowledge.
- Service users are experts in their own field and as educators.

Related documents or links

See the attached three poems as examples

1. Mentor and Mentee, Could it be You and Me?
2. My student social worker
3. Practice Assessors

Any other comments

Bee is a member of the PQ Steering Group and Service User into Arts group at London South Bank University where a small group of service users and tutors are experimenting with the Arts to get their message across.

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