



Post-qualifying specialist awards: approaches to enabling work-based learning in social work

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Course details

Course title: Specialist Award

Level: undergraduate

Year: 3

Module title: Enabling Work-Based Learning

Discipline/Subject areas: Social Work

Activity details

What I did

A new programme unit was developed for inclusion in Post Qualifying Awards at the Specialist level to meet the revised GSCC requirements that all such awards should develop skills and knowledge that would prepare candidates to 'enable the learning of others'. The unit was designed to enable specialist social workers to provide basic support to a wide variety of learners in the workplace, equipping them to facilitate and assess the development of competency and develop an understanding of how they could also support 'learners' to develop the wider notion of professional capability.

Why I did it

The revised post-qualifying (PQ) framework for social work education and training sets out a new compulsory requirement for 'enabling others' within the Specialist Awards which is intended to ensure that all social workers qualified at the specialist level have the knowledge and skills to contribute to the support of all forms of workplace learning. The requirement is to specifically develop knowledge and skills in supporting and mentoring colleagues and in teaching and assessing social work students and others.

What I wanted to achieve

In order to deal with the complexity of practice we placed importance on practitioners being able to identify and interpret the multifaceted nature of situations whilst considering a range of alternative options. The design of this Unit aims to equip specialist social workers with the knowledge and skills required to provide for more holistic and flexible outcomes when enabling such learning and development in self and others.

A short description of what I did

We came to accept that at any level or stage someone's practice is always more than a set of mechanistic processes, and so the more holistic and interpretive processes have also to be acknowledged and valued within experiential and reflective learning, teaching and assessment methods and activities. This range of activities was best achieved via a mix of learning environments - workshops, self-managed learning and workbased experience.

We had to ensure the necessary coverage as specified by the GSCC for 'enabling others' at specialist level, i.e. the three domains (organising, facilitating and assessing learning)

The Unit was designed to encourage candidates to:

- Take active responsibility for their learning now and in the future;
- Adopt a critically reflective approach to practice learning;
- Adopt an inductive approach to learning and assessment theory;

This is mainly achieved through a self-managed learning guide and a specially written book which adopts a critically reflective (analytical and evaluative) approach to practice. Its emphasis is on understanding the various holistic and interpretive approaches and processes at work (capability) and the ways they can be facilitated and developed, for example with the use of critical questioning. It also encourages an inductive application of learning and assessment theory, i.e. where practice situations and requirements are considered first.

The Unit's assessment is constructively aligned by consisting of a Record of Competence (where candidates present 'evidence' of their competence) as well as a reflective assignment (to evidence capability and depth of understanding).

What worked well

- The mix of environments allowed individual learning and social learning
- The mix of assessment methods allowed both aspects of work-based learning to be demonstrated (competence and capability) for many students
- Writing our own book allowed us to explicitly foster and enable the approaches we required of students towards the theory etc
- The workshops allowed us as facilitators to also model the critically reflective and questioning approaches required

Problems and/or issues

- Within previous units on their Specialist Award, many students would have been taught in different ways and therefore were expected to change their approaches to learning for this Unit – in the time available this was not always possible
- A 'transmission' approach to the subject matter had to be totally dismissed for the workshops – emphasis on the issues of enabling work-based learning had to become the explicit focus here – this has taken practice to achieve well
- Students needed to fully commit to the time allowed for the Unit as a whole – i.e. it is a 5 day Unit – 2 days of contact and 3 days of self-managed learning. Some students (and the managers sometimes) felt they could not leave the workplace for the 3 self-managed days.

What students thought about it

- Candidates particularly valued the opportunities to share experiences and ideas in small groups and liked the opportunities for in-depth discussions around the handbook's group exercises focusing on complex issues
- They liked the way becoming self-managed learners would help them enable others to be the same in the workplace
- They thought the book and guide was clearly written to help the reader explore issues and make practice to theory links
- Some students did not like the self-managed learning, wanting more didactic methods

Key messages

- Approaches to the subject and practice outcomes need to be understood first
- These approaches should then be embedded in the Unit's design and modelled in its learning activities and teaching methods etc.
- Students need to be fully prepared and allowed to understand the approach required

Related documents or links

Williams, S., & Rutter, L. (2007). *Enabling and assessing workbased learning for social work. Supporting the development of professional practice*. Birmingham: Learn to Care.

Any other comments

There is nothing unique in any of the Unit's features. However, the way they have been brought together has, for us, created a distinctive pedagogical style.

An added bonus is that the important but less explicit elements of practice can become more visible and more clearly articulated for feedback and assessment purposes of this Unit. The candidate's professional voice is more likely to be heard and the values implicit in social work practice become apparent in practice education as well.

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