

'We're here tae make a difference' – Involving a group of young people with experiences of care in the teaching of social work students

Authors	Jeremy Millar & the group 'A voice of reason'
Role	Lecturer in Social Work & group of young people with care experiences
Organisation	The Robert Gordon University
Contact	

Course details	
Course title	Social Work Values, Roles And Tasks
Level	UG
Year	1
Module title	
Discipline/Subject areas	Social work

Activity details (total approx. 500 words)	
What I did	<p>The group 'A voice of reason', which is comprised of young people with experiences of being in care, worked together with 60 first year social work students in a 3 hour session structured around two group exercises. The first exercise was about meeting and greeting, emphasising the importance of first impressions. The second exercise focussed on the qualities which make up the ideal social worker. This involved drawing around a person on a large sheet of paper and placing the 'good' qualities inside the body and the negative characteristics outside. The discussion generated during this process gives the student an insight into the lived experience of the young people.</p>
Why I did it	<p>The group 'A voice of reason' came into being as a response to the requirement laid out in the Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social work Education (SCIE) Annual Report 2003/2004, (Future Objectives: Theme 4; Developing Learning Organisations) to establish collaborative learning experiences for students of social work involving service users, carers and employers. The group has a membership drawn from a representative cross section of young people with experiences of care and beyond.</p> <p>The motivation for the group of young people with care experiences is to share their stories and reflect back to the students their feelings about the quality of social work and residential work, with the goal of improving the standards of practitioners, particularly in respect of the relational aspect of the job.</p>
What I wanted to achieve	To give the students direct contact with service users and their life experiences, to promote a better understanding of the complexity of the social work task.
A short description of what I did	In the 'meeting and greeting' exercise groups of eight students led by a young person are asked in turn to stand up and greet the

	<p>young person for the first time. They are then offered feedback and asked to reflect on their feelings during the interaction. Following the introductions a more general discussion takes place around good and less positive examples of relationships with social workers and residential workers.</p> <p>In the 'ideal social worker exercise' the same groups under the direction of the young person construct a large sheet of paper from a flipchart, a student lies on the sheet and is drawn around. The students are then asked to identify desirable qualities for a social worker. These are then written down within the 'body'. They can be located in physically appropriate areas e.g. 'kindness' in the heart or 'a good listener' in the ear. The student can give reasons as to why they are including the quality. The group can move on to locate less desirable characteristics outside the body. During the session stories are shared and the students can relate these experiences to qualities identified.</p>
<p>What worked well</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modelled a positive image of service users as competent, insightful experts in their own reality • Gave young students a first experience of meeting a service user and going some way to alleviating anxiety • Identifying and refocusing students' motivation for embarking on social work as a career • Gave the young people a sense of agency and achievement
<p>Problems and/or issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presented a challenge in terms of perceived power imbalance for some students • Confidence issues for some young people dealing with strong personalities in the student group • Organisational issues for teaching staff member supporting the session • Awareness of the need to support young people and students if the content of the session evokes emotional responses
<p>What students thought about it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Surprised me. Service users tend to prefer their social worker who is not 'textbook' –prefer a human." • "I think there should be more of these kind of sessions as it is very intimidating to meet service users and you're never prepared of what to say, and practicing helps." • "Absolutely brilliant. Made me realise or re-realise why I want to be a social worker as academia has been first and foremost in my thoughts recently, am I capable etc. But today's exercise just reinstalled my beliefs and expectations for my future." • "Much prefer this – more helpful than case studies on paper. This is much better preparation for the real world." • "This refreshed me and was a very clever idea to do this. It reinforced to me that I was on the right course, and felt passionate to start working with these clients..."
<p>Key messages</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This session provides an excellent ending to the 1st semester of teaching in which students are introduced to social work roles, tasks and values • This approach embeds the voice of service users in the overall structure of the course and the students and young

	<p>people meet repeatedly in different teaching sessions over the four years of the degree</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The session is fun and we all gain fresh insights each time we run it
Related documents or links	<p>A voice of reason webpage: http://www.rgu.ac.uk/social/networks/page.cfm?pge=46085 Jeremy Millar Profile: http://www.rgu.ac.uk/social/aboutus/page.cfm?pge=26365</p>
Any other comments	<p>The unstinting commitment and enthusiasm of the young people has made all this possible. In the last year six out of the 10 members of the Group have undertaken major life transitions and maintained their work with the Group</p>

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