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“One Step Beyond” Unity members’ experiences of developing and delivering a skills practice workshop



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- Hitchin, S (2016) Role-Played Interviews with Service Users in Preparation for Social Work Practice: exploring students’ and service users’ experience of co-produced workshops, *Journal of Social Work Education*, 35 (8) pp. 970-981



Key points:

- The skills practice (role play) workshop with students is an example of how service user involvement in social work education has evolved from a primary focus on sharing personal testimonies to active participation in student skill development.
- This type of engagement with students is significantly more demanding of people than traditional forms of involvement, such as sharing personal stories, but, with appropriate preparation and support, such an experience can be beneficial to both students’ learning and service users’ self esteem and personal development.
- It underlines the importance of investment in service user involvement to achieve an appropriate context for such projects to develop.

Workshop Aims

To explore important factors in developing & delivering a skills practice workshop:

- Co-production
- Managing emotions
- Giving feedback to students



There will be no requirement for public demonstrations of role-play skills in this workshop!

Theory & Practice of SW Module

- Aims to provide students with an understanding of assessment processes and how theory enables them to make informed choices about appropriate methods of intervention.
- It aims also to assist students to identify and develop the range of skills necessary for effective communication & engagement.
- Assesses student readiness for practice placement through a recorded simulated interview & accompanying written assignment

'Although social work involves a great deal more than interviewing, social workers spend more time in interviewing than in any other single activity. It is the most important, most frequently employed social work skill'

(Kadushin & Kadushin, 1997 p3
cited in Trevithick, 2012 p185)

Interviewing Skills:

Trevithick (2012, p186)

For example:

- Planning and preparing
- Creating a rapport
- Empathy
- Different ways of asking questions
- Active listening
- Clarifying and summarising
- Using silence
- Drawing the Contact to a Close

Skills Practice Interviews



Skills practice: why do it?

- Widely recognised as a method for acquiring knowledge, skills and values of social work practice
- Based on the belief that ".....simulation is an operating model of a real system (which) can replicate to some degree the behaviour of the real system over time"

(Barton in Flaherty, 1983 cited in Hargreaves & Hadlow, 1997)

How does it work?

In the Service User role:

- Students have the opportunity to take on something of what it might feel like to be in a service user's shoes (empathy) and to reflect on this.
- Getting your message across, being listened to or not, being patronised, not feeling in control, feeling valued and that your views matter etc.
- This can have an emotional impact & you can learn from this.

In the SW Interviewer role:

- Students have the opportunity to practice communication and interview skills and to experience what it feels like to (e.g.)
- Introduce yourself & explain your professional role; ask questions about sensitive issues; think on your feet and respond to what the service user is communicating to you (through verbal or non verbal means) etc.

Ground-rules for skills practice

- Supportive environment where it is ok to make mistakes
- Person in service user role should be responsive to helpful strategies
- Not about acting- it is about experiencing imaginatively by identifying with the service user's social situation.
- Feedback should be given in a constructive way
- Group need to be aware of potential emotional impact

Effectiveness of student-student skills practice

- Although, undoubtedly a valuable tool for skills practice, role-play between students has limitations. Some struggle to get beyond the unreality of the scenarios they are asked to submerge themselves into, both in the roles of service user and social worker.
- Wilson & Kelly (2010) found that students identified role-play as a strength of preparation for practice teaching whilst also identifying the artificial nature of role-play as a weakness

Effectiveness of skills practice

- **Internal Inconsistency** e.g. when a student in service user role introduces new and contradictory information.
- **External Inconsistency** e.g. when the student in social worker role lacks accurate information about law, policy or procedure
- **Interactive Inconsistency** e.g. when existing role relationships such as being friends, impact on the reality of the role-play.

Naylor and Finger (as cited in Faherty, 1983)
Framework for Analyzing Effectiveness



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Interview Skills Workshop



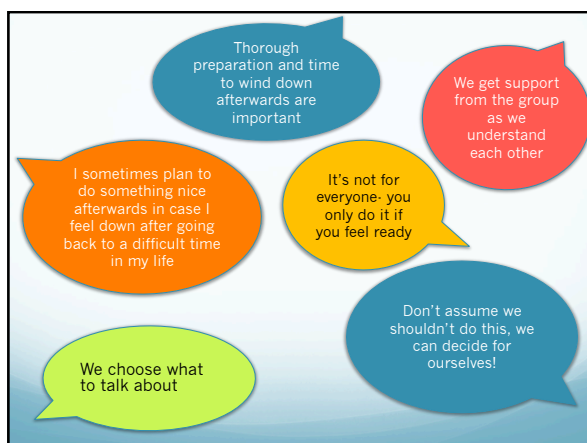
- Skills development before students undertake practice placement.
- Scenarios based on Unity members' real life experiences.
- Students work in triads (one interviewing, two observing). Rotate around different Unity members.

How did we develop the workshop?



- Process consistent with core principles of co-production: *Reciprocity, Equality, Accessibility and Diversity* (SCIE, 2013)
- Unity members opted in
- Planning meetings
- Group decision to use real experiences
- Careful selection of issue & development of referral info to be given to students
- Opportunities to try out role play

How do Unity members cope with the emotional component?



The importance of giving feedback to students



Student Views

'Role-play is not as terrifying as everyone thinks; I can do this!'

'I really enjoyed it. I felt that the interview with the Unity member felt almost like I was in practice as it was their real problems which allowed me to feel empathy'.

'Why can't we always do skills practice with Unity members? It is so much better than with other students.'

Student placement reflections on skills practice

- Helped students feel more prepared for direct observations of their practice on first placement
- Helped in managing anxieties about direct observations
- Enhanced confidence in engaging directly with service users and carers
- Developed understanding of importance of empathy
- Enabled self-reflection on skills and values
- Developed skills in receiving and giving feedback

Any Questions?



Thank you for coming to our workshop



Reference List

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