Edited by Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns and Sandra Sinfield

COLLABORATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A New Ecology of Practice

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Diana J. Pritchard, Helen Connolly, Amanda Egbe, Mohamed Saeudy, Paul Rowinski, James Bishop, Tamara Ashley and Nicholas Worsfold make a case for *Cross-disciplinary Collaborations for Sustainable Futures, and a Vital and Relevant Academic Community*. In their case study they outline their boundary crossing project where they pooled their interest in ethical education for sustainable futures to bring together multi-disciplinary teams from within and outwith the university to create mass 'learn-in' events to explore contemporary issues through multiple lenses for 'real' social and academic outcomes. Not only did their project break academic isolation, it seeded management buy-in to transform practice for the long term.

Writing Retreats in Social Work: A Disruptive Approach to Facilitating Practice Learning

Kevin Brazant and Dee Tracey

- This case study describes a co-designed writing retreat designed to support students with the synthesis of theory and practice through writing.
- It models decentring power by switching from transmission to a dialogic pedagogy.
- It offers a six-step model to develop metacognition, critical thinking and analysis as part of assessment practices.
- Promoted in the chapter are free writing and peer review to co-create meaning.
- We recommend writing retreats to develop writing and written discourse.

Introduction: Collaborating to Support the Learning of Social Work Students

This chapter presents a case study of a collaboratively designed writing retreat intervention seeking to support critical and creative capacities among Social Work students on a practice learning module. The goal is to develop students as actors with agency within 'the dominant framework of higher education' (Bellinger & Kagawa, 2012). The authors are aware of the wider challenges to UK Social Work education, its constraints, financial and cultural, and the impact on teaching practices in HE (Maclachlan, 2007) where the pressure can be to 'teach to the test' rather than in ways that are liberatory and empowering for the student. To combat some of these points, a joint collaboration was formed between a learning developer (academic mentor) and a qualified Social Work practitioner (subject tutor) with the purpose of supporting the authentic learning and development of Social Work students.

This case study also addresses the dichotomy of teaching for an employment environment of increased regulation and targets based on political imperatives, yet still requires Social Workers to have creativity and problem-solving skills (Jordan & Jordan, 2000). Adopting a dialogic, social constructionist methodology, the authors circumvent didactic, transmissive and monologic teaching approaches (Stewart & McClure, 2013) – reframing learning as dialogic, disruptive, engaging and collaborative, with positive implications for interdisciplinary learning and teaching practice.

Our Contested Context

Social Work programmes across universities are designed in a similar manner, with a blend of academic theoretical learning alongside practical work placements. In academic terms, the first element of learning is classroom based with the primary focus being based upon the learning (the development) of Social Work skills, knowledge, values, theories and methods. This forms the 'grounding' basis for the student's preparation to enter their Social Work practice placements. In designing our project, we thought about 'how' to fully prepare a student for the reality of Social Work practice when the programme is set within an academic HE structure which does not always fit with the realism of the profession, with the university processes at times being limited and not always matching the professional standards and expectations.

Critical Social Work

When considering preparation for the Social Work role, critical reflection and analysis are harnessed for the development of Social Workers, whether qualified or unqualified. This is recognized as of significant importance when linking theory to practice: for qualified Social Workers it is an essential tool for critical decision making (Thompson, 2018). Mantell and Scragg (2018) and other academics recognize the importance of high-quality Social Work education in developing future-qualified Social Work practitioners. Foremost for a profession which is seen as highly charged, reflective practice can help to integrate theoretical learning into practice, giving the student the tools, capacities and platform to be 'ready for practice'.

Social Work England is the regulatory body for Social Work along with another prominent body, the British Association of Social Work (BASW). In the UK, they recognize that

> critical reflection encourages social workers to examine their approach, judgements, decisions and interventions [and acknowledges that] when applying critical reflection, thinking and analysis it helps social workers formulate a treatment plan or intervention for working with a client.
>
> (Social Work England, 2020)

Therefore, it is essential for students to begin to understand and use the process of critical reflection and analysis as early as possible in their careers, recognizing the importance that it holds, especially to ensure unbiased, anti-discrimination, anti-oppression and anti-racist practice (Tedam, 2021). Based on this importance, we designed our project and teaching sessions to prepare students for their placement and to articulate the experiences of their placements in the form of a practice case study assignment, using techniques for critical reflection and dialogue.

What We Did

The role of the educator is to facilitate the learning process by designing sessions that will help students learn and discover, to wrestle with ideas and 'emergent' knowledge. This was the main aim for this project – to not limit the student in their creativity, but to let them explore and find answers, whilst reflecting on their previous life skills and knowledge. A number of theorists and psychologists, such as Bruner, Dewey and Ausubel, held the view that the purpose of education is not to just impart knowledge, but instead to facilitate thinking and problem-solving skills which can then be transferred to a range of situations. With students using their own past experiences and prior knowledge as part of their learning, this approach sits well with the demographics of Social Work students that attend our programme and who come with life skills, prior experience and can relate these experiences to their current learning (Bates, 2019).

As part of active, collaborative learning, 'Dialogic Pedagogy' (Alexander, 2010) shifts the emphasis from the transmission of knowledge by the lecturer to the achievement of learning by the students, through creating conducive learning environments. Our curriculum design approach to these practice learning sessions was to create dialogic instances throughout the writing retreat, using six strategies as follows:

1. Students engaged in a free writing activity upon a case study assignment to stimulate ideas and reflections and to take ownership of their learning. The task was to identify a family or client group with whom they worked and explore the reasons for the choice and how this met the assessment brief.
2. In smaller groups students annotated the assessment criteria, familiarizing themselves with assignment expectations, exploring these with peers and strategizing on how they will meet learning objectives and outcomes.
3. They then produced a draft reflective case study and a subsequent plan to address any gaps in current knowledge.
4. Then they engaged in a peer-sharing exercise of their (draft) case studies harnessing critical thinking by questioning and assessing the work of their peers as a preface to the self-appraisal of their own work.
5. Using a bespoke toolkit of resources and worksheets to assess criticality in their Practice Study, they built on their reflections and were encouraged to share further tips with peers to bolster their learning strategies.
6. Using a writing retreat style activity, they drafted their actual practice study and gained further feedback from their peers through peer appraisal.

Throughout, students were encouraged to collaborate, cooperate and discuss their learning, their processes, their thinking and their draft work. These processes enacted and modelled learning as the collaborative co-construction of knowledge.

Discussion

This approach was cognisant of the interplay of power (Bakhtin, 1999; Stewart & McClure, 2013) disrupting the monologic discourse of traditional forms of teaching. As illustrated above, the learning developer and practice lead planned and scaffolded the retreat but stepped back from intervening in the dialogic solution of problems; instead, activities were constructed to provoke solutions from and between peers. The facilitation of learning was modelled by a flexible and compassionate style by both lecturer and learning development practitioner, creating a conducive learning environment for social learning (Gilbert 2017; Rogers & Freiberg 1994). Given the emancipatory ideas found in Social Work, we sought to frame a discourse in the retreat space that inspired real action in the world as part of student placements, with their overall experiences articulated through their practice case study assignment (Shor & Freire, 1987).

From a constructionist perspective we sought to model an interpretivist epistemology that co-constructs knowledge and took opportunities to mediate understanding of the curriculum and task at hand between novice, able learners and academics (Vygotsky, 1962). Based on the feedback from students they all agreed unanimously that the thing of greatest value to them was to share their placement experiences with their peers and being given the time to think about their chosen clients for the purposes of their practice study assignment as illustrated below:

> I have learned how to use the feedback of my colleagues to think about my practice and to use this constructive criticism to also form part of my own self-analysis and critique.

> The small group discussions amongst my peers was very helpful to learn about different approaches to knowledge and to apply this to my practice study.

> I had written my practice study but after listening to my peers and lecturers through this workshop I will go back and restructure as I think my work appears more descriptive than critical and I believe this would enhance my grade for this assignment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, with a learning developer and discipline academic undertaking this joint venture, we brought together the 'academic' element of the learning and the practical experience of Social Work learning, whilst integrating learning strategies (developing

metacognitive dispositions and study skills) within the collaborative study space. We were able to devise and design a six-step scaffolded framework and use tools to co-teach, meaning that we were able to cooperate to bring a more fulfilling enrichment to the student learning. Our co-delivery used both of the author's skills, disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge sets to enhance student learning.

Group work is often fraught with tensions and conflict between students. However, we believe we created space for a collaborative community of practice to emerge that united the students in their endeavours and obviated the normal tensions of (inauthentic) group work. Given the positive feedback from the project, we believe this presents a cogent case for the further development of scaffolded, cooperative, writing retreats as part of assessment preparation, overtly acknowledging peer appraisal as part of this process. Not only did this develop critical thinking as intended but fostered student learning communities and self-efficacy.

Collaboration for Academic Literacies Development and Enriched Inter-professional Relationships

Quentin Allan, Robyn McWilliams and Sue Raleigh

- This case study outlines a collaborative academic literacies development project in a biological sciences setting.
- The key argument is that such development requires close collaboration between faculty lecturers and learning advisors.
- The project promotes a staged approach to interactive engagement with exemplar texts.
- Collaborations between discipline and literacy staff for student development also provide rich professional development, and writing opportunities.
- A next step would be to work with students as partners in future literacies development projects.

Introduction

In this chapter, we argue that academic literacies' development in a university environment ideally involves close collaboration between faculty lecturers (FLs) who are subject experts in their discipline and learning advisors (LAs) whose expertise in applied linguistics informs their academic writing guidance. This chapter has been co-authored by two LA colleagues and one FL. The subject context in this case is biological sciences with a focus on human anatomy and physiology; the linguistic guidance is informed by the 'genre approach', as outlined by foundational writers in the field of educational linguistics (Martin & Rothery, 1993; Swales, 1990). This