THIS BOOK EXPLORED THE TENSIONS, CONNECTIONS, CONTINUITIES AND CONTRADICTIONS of teaching youth work in higher education. It does not intend to create a common vision or voice but to allow the multiplicity of visions to be heard. Similarly, while we intend that the book has some authority, presenting a multitude of perspectives in pedagogical thinking based on thorough research and tested approaches, it is not authoritative, nor does it intend to be. However, we hope that the book can serve as a point of reflection for one's own work and 'illuminate' practice.

CENTRALLY EXPLORED IS THE TENSION OF TEACHING YOUTH WORK, WHICH IS INHERENTLY spontaneous, organic, democratic and barrier breaking, and offers a counter to more formal education that has often failed young people in universities, which are formal, rule bound, elitist and with distinct hierarchies that often reinforce multiple hegemonies. Other tensions include that of defining and locating youth work, the contested terrain of teaching it, and its curriculum. We explore the degree to which youth work and youth work education has and should change as societal and governmental views and polices change. We see youth work as an ever-evolving practice, rooted in a dynamic, dialectical view of knowledge creation, and praxis that entails reflection upon the world and a commitment to act at its injustices.
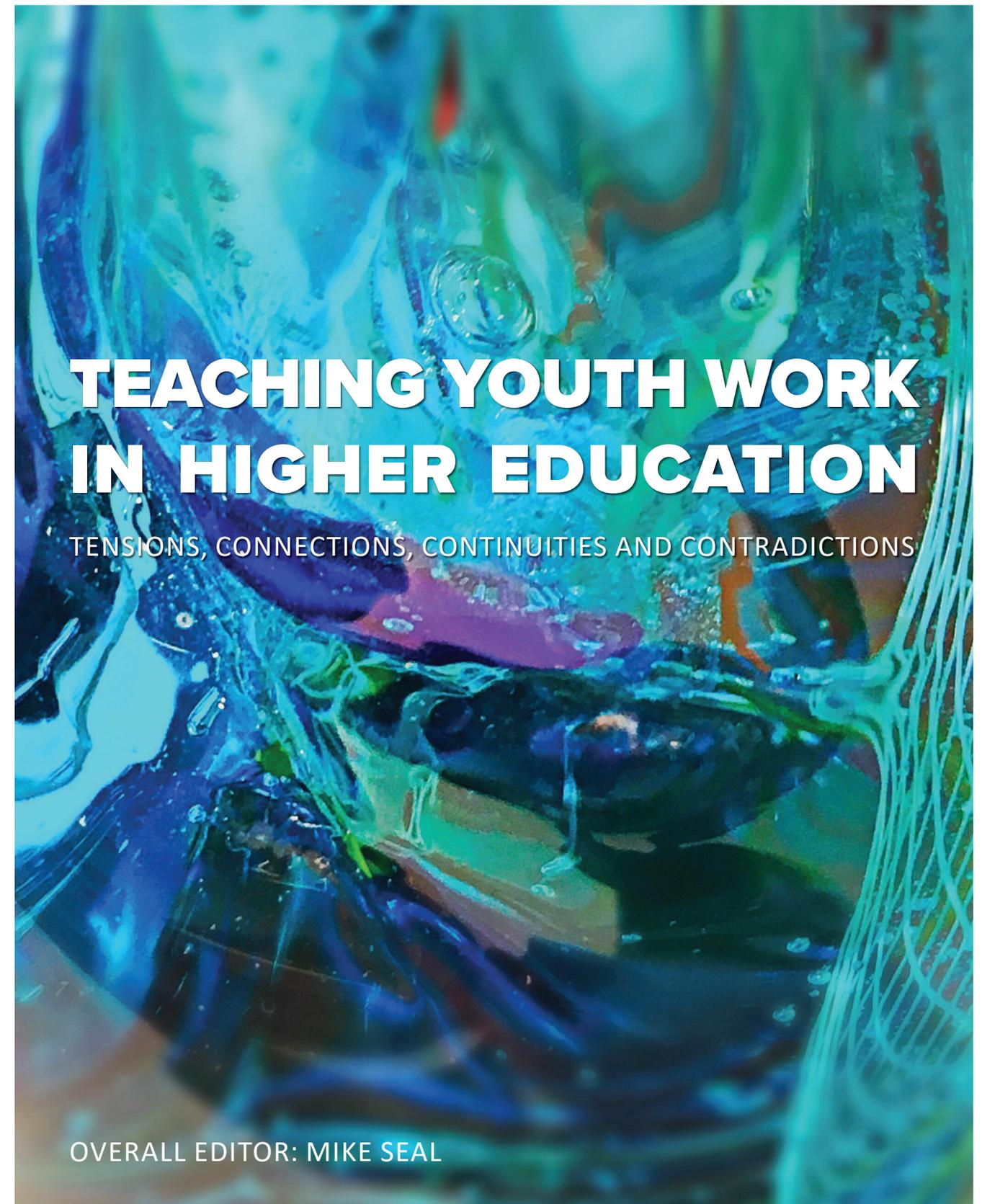
FINDING COMMON TERMINOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK WAS AT TIMES DIFFICULT. The contested centricity of critical pedagogy, while central in the UK, its Marxist roots and associations make it tainted in post-Soviet countries. In turn concepts such as social inclusion and exclusion and integration have different negative associations in the UK. In common we found a commitment to social justice, social change, and to taking an approach rooted in young people's experiential understandings of the world. Another thread running through this book is the importance of community and collectivism, contrasted with the individual and individualism underpinned by a belief that the individual flourishes best through the collective, but that the collective should not be sovereign over the individual.

AGAIN CONTESTED, DEVELOPING CULTURALLY COMPETENT YOUTH WORK WAS ONE OF THE central planks of many countries' educational approaches. In common was that youth work educators should enable youth workers to continue privileging the tapping into and building on indigenous ways of knowing, and enabling communities and young people to explore, articulate and have legitimised their understanding of their own cultures. We also conclude that rather than a focus on curriculum, we should perhaps move from privileging what we think youth and community work practitioners should know, to what practitioners should be: pedagogical practitioners.

TEACHING YOUTH WORK IN HIGHER EDUCATION

TENSIONS, CONNECTIONS, CONTINUITIES AND CONTRADICTIONS

OVERALL EDITOR: MIKE SEAL

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TARTU 2019

With the support of the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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11 "LEARNING DOES NOT RESIDE IN A PLACE CALLED COMFORTABLE": EXPLORING IDENTITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL GROUP WORK

David Woodger, Naomi Thompson and Jean Anastasio

This chapter has been updated and adapted from by a previous article Woodger D and Anastacio J 'Groupwork Training for Social Justice' published in Groupwork Vol. 23(2), 2013.

Introduction

This chapter explores the process of experiential group work that is central to the youth and community work programme at Goldsmiths. Whilst experiential group work has been pushed out of professional practice programmes more widely over recent decades, Goldsmiths has maintained it as a central focus. The emphasis on social justice within the programme's curriculum, and the importance of the student group learning from and with each other underpins the teaching methods across the programme.

Dialogue, interaction and sharing experiences lie at the heart of training reflective practitioners who can work successfully with groups and individuals, promote social justice, empowering themselves through exploring their own experiences of oppression and power. This enables them to critically engage and intervene effectively with institutions and be active agents of change.

The method draws substantially on Freire's work on critical dialogue as well as on models of reflective practice and empowerment. Scholars of the experiential group process in youth and community work training such as Klein (1961), Turkie (1995) and Woodger and Anastacio (2013) have been at the forefront of the Goldsmiths programme over the last fifty years. This approach values *collective* learning over *individual* - and the *process* of learning over its *product,* representing a challenge to the dominant culture in Higher Education.

The Goldsmiths programme

The BA Applied Social Science, Community Development and Youth Work has been running for fifty years and has continuously attracted a diverse student group from a range of ethnic, religious, age and

social backgrounds. It has been a gateway to higher education at Goldsmiths for many students from groups that are under-represented in universities. According to data recently gathered for the annual returns submitted to the National Youth Agency (who professionally validate the BA programme), 83% of students on the programme are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. This compares with around 18% of university students in the UK being from BAME backgrounds (HEA, 2012). The data gathered for the annual returns also shows that 64% of students on the programme are mature students (aged 21 and over). This also far exceeds the numbers of mature students at university more widely where the age profile of students is steadily becoming younger (Universities UK, 2015).

The importance of the group reflection underpins the teaching methods across the programme. In particular, students are encouraged to share their experiences, reflect on their own and others' perspectives and to challenge each other where necessary. Experiential group work allows our students, through exploring their own experiences of oppression and power, to reflect on power structures and institutional oppression more widely.

The 'group work training meeting' is the weekly manifestation of the experiential group work model. It occupies a central position in the course across the three-year programme, and the content is significantly driven by the students. Community and youth work is concerned with social justice. Exclusion and its related issues feature as a prominent theme in working with young people and communities. Addressing structures which limit inclusion are key in developing effective community and youth work. Factors relating to exclusion at an intra-group level are central to discussion and debate in the experiential group work element of our students' training.

The philosophy of the groupwork is based on a few simple principles; students should learn to analyse their own practice and experience and to use this analysis as a base from which to create their own 'working theories'. They should also be self-monitoring, enabling them to respond creatively to the complexity and uncertainties inherent in the work. The priorities are to train workers who question traditional power relationships and oppression in relation to gender, sexuality, class, race and disability, and enhance their ability to build on the positive human qualities that people have.

The learning agenda will be different for each student, depending on their individual experience, perspective and identity, the extent to which they are willing to engage with others. An awareness of, and the ability to articulate, how this impacts on their interactions with others plays a major role in the student's capacity to benefit from the experiential learning process. Josephine Klein (1961), the Goldsmiths programme's founder, reminds us that it is in the family group that we first learn to value ourselves and expectations of satisfaction from group membership derives to a large extent from this primacy of family in the individual's experience.

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The group work process

Over the years, we have observed a number of phases to the experiential group work process that students tend to move through. These are outlined below.
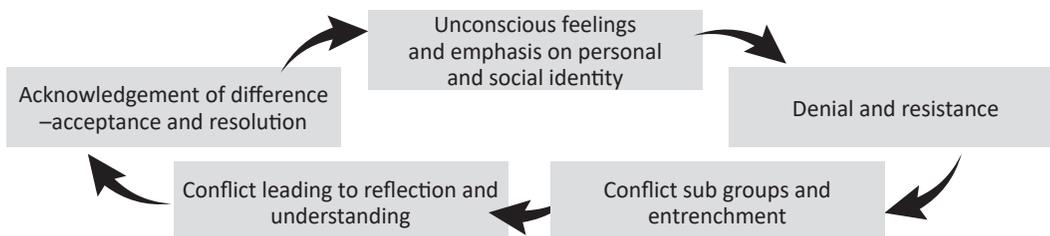
Becoming more conscious of personal and social identity

The explicit emphasis on personal and social identity is often new to students. The private consi-derations about identity and our relationship to others are brought into the public arena, and are made conscious through group discussion. Initially students may find this threatening as external social attitudes and power dimensions between students become recognised. The group becomes understood as a microcosm of society in which power and oppression are at play and can be examined through dialogue which reflects critically on inherent power relationships within the group and the ways in which individual's impact on each other within it. The phenomenon of the past being cons-tantly revived in the present, with the tendency to repeat past patterns of relating to others (often as a result of past experiences) will result in stereotyping.

This creates a challenging and dynamic process of development in the group and will affect change in students and tutors alike. Integral to the groupwork process are reflections of students' personal beliefs, assumptions and knowledge. The aim is for students to share their 'espoused theories' relating to specific events or interactions so that they can discover, with the support of others in the group, how they are responding to a given situation and also how this impacts on their professional practice. This enables the students to begin to identify their own personal and situational knowledge and understandings so that they can question, respond and develop their experiential knowledge and theory. This then provides for the possibility of reflection of how this might be applied in practice and further reflection from testing it out.

Denial and resistance

Some students may be combative, many tend to want a homogenised group which denies difference; a form of 'pseudo socialisation' (Agazarian & Peters 1981) takes place. Cries of 'I don't see myself as different', or 'isn't it racist to keep talking about black and white?' or 'why are you creating problems which aren't there?' are often heard during this phase. Group facilitators bring to the students' attention their observations about how these differences may manifest in the group's behaviour in the early stages of the group, such as where people sit, use of language, and friendship sub-groups within the larger group. Most importantly, we name these differences. Anxiety is moderated to a certain degree by the open acknowledgement that this is what is taking place.

It is not surprising that defences emerge. Strong defences against hurt and anger often mean that students are resistant to declaring their true feelings. There can be for some a continuing denial that differences exist within the group, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. The group members remain cautious of exposure and conflict and denial is an intense emotional defence against the acknowledgement of pain, distress, and fear. It is natural to want to resist reliving painful experiences, particularly in a culturally diverse group. For some the group maybe experienced as a hostile place. The group is large and ends itself more to socio-cultural reflections than to an intimate interpersonal engagement (de Mare 1975; Turkie 1995). It is exactly this characteristic of the large group which provides a 'bridge between ourselves and our socio-cultural environment' (de Mare et al. 1990). Essentially, the group becomes a microcosm of society. Because intimacy is not possible in larger groups, not only do sub groups form, but also the tendency to line up and divide in cultural or sub-cultural ways become currency for the group. Muslims students, Black students or male/female gay sub-groupings within the larger group are not at this stage seen negatively by tutors, but rather as a means to dialogue later in the group's lifecycle.

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Conflict, subgroups and entrenchment

The group is not immune to the conflicts and prejudices that exist in the wider society. Sometimes students find the power relationships between students difficult to grasp, particularly where they need to reflect on their own dominance or power. Black group members are likely become conscious of various forms of racism. Having established a level of power and strength in the whole group they are more likely to give free expression to deeply felt lifelong experiences of hurt and anger which they previously resisted in the earlier life of the group. Sometimes stronger alliances may form based on religion, national identity or sexual orientation and these subgroups can become very entrenched. Centrally important to informing groupwork are Paulo Freire's (1970) ideas on internalised individual oppression, shaped by social, economic and political processes and the ability of students to influence developments in their own lives and professional practice

Reflecting and understanding

The group will begin to mature and make real progress only when its members can acknowledge and articulate the negative feelings they hold. Lesbian or gay members of the group for example will know from their experience in the wider world that many people are heterosexist or have homophobic feelings. The benefit of this stage is that to openly engage in discussion with others about our feelings, behaviours and actions is to begin to come to terms with the hurt to ourselves and others. The same applies to other negative feelings we hold for whole groups or communities of people. A form of warfare – undeniably painful – will ensue on various fronts throughout this phase of the group's life. Invariably and perhaps paradoxically, a greater level of contact, respect, and understanding becomes evident between the various warring sub-groups. Of course, this will only happen because students show a willingness to question the negative, stereotypic views they hold and be open to personal movement and change.

It is very difficult for practitioners to be aware of their own cultural assumptions and values, which they unconsciously bring to their practice and impose on the people they are working with. Freire termed this 'cultural invasion'. Alongside this, that many people in marginalised communities have been silenced from their own experiences as well as having tendencies to rely on 'experts' to make decisions. Thus, it is all the more important that practitioners are able to recognise their own 'taken for granted' assumptions and address this sense of powerlessness in themselves where it exists.

Accepting difference and finding resolutions

The deep and challenging level of interaction characterised by conflict bears directly on this phase in which a degree of transformation can frequently be expected. Importantly, group members will know from experience that the group can contain difficult feelings and that it can survive the hostility. Open conflict based on attitudes and values can lead to greater levels of understanding and respect for others. Students are therefore motivated towards personal movement and change, and should by this stage in their training have reached a level of emotional maturity which enables them to hold and accept differences with integrity.

The large group offers opportunities to collaborate with others. Often these 'others' may have been previously avoided, for fear of conflict or because of other real or imagined fears and anxieties. This collaboration with its resultant dialogue and debate, even when frustrating, moves us towards a re-examination of our personal selves and identity. Students enter the process with their familiar and socially created notions of what makes us different. A development of identity takes place as students

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struggle to find answers to difficult questions, often posed from within the group itself. Students are encouraged to work through the discomfort that arises when issues of race, sexuality or gender are discussed. Focusing on these uncomfortable feelings and encouraging students to explore them often leads to a re-examination of their experiences and the development of their identities. It enables students to become familiar with asking themselves the same questions and thereby becoming at ease with themselves in new ways. It may also bring them back to the first stage in the cycle as they become conscious of previously hidden aspects of their identity.

The process of establishing stronger identities then allows for a willingness to let go of these identities, which presents possibilities and incentives to explore past conditioning and enable new aspects of identities to emerge. As students learn, appreciate and value more about themselves, this enables them to learn, appreciate and value more about others. As the process continues barriers are significantly reduced. The facilitators are active in assisting the group to pay continual attention to the differences and perceived factors that might maintain separateness from others.

Identity and social justice

How students develop both their own sense of identity and their awareness of social justice and inequality emerges throughout their experience of group work. We would argue that a stronger sense of their own personal identity and how different aspects of this intersect leads to a greater understanding of social justice, oppression and power more widely. Those who are able to connect to their own experiences of racism, sexism and other inequalities and who have been able to process that experience in the group, are able to work with diverse communities and individuals effectively in establishing transformative approaches.

Below are two pertinent examples from student group work essays (used with their permission) of how their personal reflections led to a greater understanding of sexism and racism.

Student 1 – reflections on gender

Through group work I realised that human revelation and internal transformation can not only bring about personal change but social change as well. I have also come to terms with the fact that… development and growth does not always reside in a place called comfortable… I had the opportunity to challenge another member of the group when he made the statement that "he gave me the power" in a piece of work that had previously been conducted… The comment presented me with the opportunity to speak out against what I felt was an oppressive statement. The comment of me being given power demonstrated that without a man relieving himself of his power a woman could not have obtained this within her own right. Throughout my life everything that I have achieved has been without the input from a man, the first kind of support, love and empowerment I was meant to receive from a man, being my father, I never experienced, hence why it was even more difficult for me to understand the point that he was trying to make. I then realised despite feeling irritated due to occurrences in my personal life that I was making a righteous argument as that comment represented a wider structural inequality. As a woman, I am subject to individual bias which is often displayed in a derogatory way. Although I am aware that it may have been his unconscious speaking and unintentional bias, in order to assess whether this was harmful or not the impact of the behaviour must be looked at rather than the intent.

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Student 2 – reflections on race

*I have been asked either directly or indirectly to pay very close attention to the image I portray, and what that image represents. This became apparent the first time the colour of my skin became a topic of conversation after an offhand comment by someone calling me a 'stereotypical white girl' during a group work session. Initially, I was defensive and nervous at the request to notice my whiteness. I began to worry that others saw me as inherently racist... I have since recognised that this worry was unfounded, and believing that all the people of colour in the room shared this singular belief was a form of stereotyping and I was reacting with presumptive fear... I've never been 'white'. I have never needed to notice that I am white, because the colour of my skin has never called into question my character, abilities or worth... I knew enough about the concept of white privilege and power to understand that it did apply to me politically, I just could not see how it applied to me personally. Aside from being white, I'm not in any position of power. I've been abused and harassed for being a woman, underestimated and disbelieved for being disabled, bullied and shunted for being queer, pitied and ignored for being poor. I would repeat to myself, 'I don't have any power, why is it my problem to fix?' I would bring out my list of oppression and check each box that applied, hoping there were enough ticks to give me a shield in the conversation. However, the power I have since recognised I have as a white person is exercised through confronting and addressing racism wherever possible. I have been guilty of not using this power to save my own skin. My second shift at a new job had me walking home crying, because I didn't stand up to the customer joyfully shouting, 'Thank god there's no n*****s in here!'... Everyone had laughed, including my co-workers, and I stood there, shocked and disgusted, but said nothing. I was being selfish; I didn't want to lose my job, or risk ending professional relationships with my colleagues and customers before they'd even began, I also worried about my own safety. I imagine almost every white person has a story similar, of a time they let it slide, ignored it and moved on with their life. The normalisation of racism may as well be the acceptance and endorsement of racism. I was part of that, and I don't want to be again.*

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The Higher Education Context – challenges to group work

The Higher Education context has, over time, become increasingly individualistic. Assessment, in particular, has become highly individualistic with the dominant grading and classification of degrees requiring individual marks and outputs. Punitive procedures and harsh guidance around plagiarism enforce this individualism in universities. Such a focus on learning as an individualistic process clearly conflicts with the group work approach outlined above. The language of higher education today also very much focuses on tangible outcomes such as essays with individualistic marks, the focus on achieving the sought after qualification or 'piece of paper', and measurable graduate career outcomes. Quantitative measures of 'teaching quality' only exacerbate this individualism further.

However, whilst this discourse focuses on the outcomes or products of education, the form of learning that is encouraged on the BA Applied Social Science, Community Development and Youth Work is more concerned with the *process or experience* of learning than its outcome. Experiential learning and reflective practice underpin youth and community work training and are focused on education as a *process* rather than a *product* and on learning in action or experience rather than

separate from it (Jeffs and Smith, 2005; Seal and Frost, 2014). From this philosophy of learning, the most significant outcomes might be changes to ourselves, to our ways of thinking and acting, not the hard outcomes of the degree classification or the 'piece of paper'.

Conclusion

Overall, this chapter champions the value of group work that enables students to embrace new, uncomfortable and challenging experiences. This form of learning meets a substantial amount of resistance within the HE context where students are increasingly viewed as customers and education as a product rather than a process. For us, the large group aims to create what de Mare et all [1991] call a ' socio cultural environment '.....in a way that the small group cannot do'.

It provides a space and a freedom for students to explore without the tyranny of structure or the limits and constraints of organisations, to examine race, gender and other dynamics, opening students up to their own thinking and personal positions/beliefs and understandings and engages them in challenging conditioned understandings. These understandings are embedded in our psyche; the large group provides a process of deconstructing these deeply held beliefs and of becoming more aware of ourselves –in terms of thinking, the nature of change and who we are.

The group is a fluid structure that encourages democratic leadership where everyone has a contribution and develops insight into being about change and how we can see each other differently. Students develop an insight into internal resistance as a result of oppositional positions, in other words the struggle to engage with our own deeper reflection rather than the easy externalisation of the problem.

The context within which community and youth work takes place is constantly shifting. Changes in Government policy and declining resources means that those who work in the social change arena need to have leadership skills, a developed awareness of themselves and the ability to work in ways that are collaborative, creative and inclusive. Working for social change necessitates a rather more sophisticated analysis of inequality and injustice. We would argue that it is through the experiential group that students learn to analyse the quality of their relationships with others and the impact they have on others in the group and in professional contexts.

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