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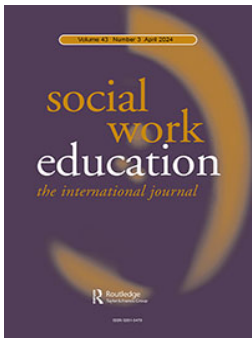
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# Challenging the narrative: social work students' views on the impact of service user and carer-led pedagogy to knowledge and practice

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**To cite this article:** Eleni Skoura-Kirk (10 Jun 2024): Challenging the narrative: social work students' views on the impact of service user and carer-led pedagogy to knowledge and practice, *Social Work Education*, DOI: [10.1080/02615479.2024.2351434](https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2024.2351434)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2024.2351434>




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# Challenging the narrative: social work students' views on the impact of service user and carer-led pedagogy to knowledge and practice

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## ABSTRACT

Service user and carer involvement is firmly established as an integral part of social work education in the UK, with a growing body of evidence demonstrating its beneficial effects on student learning. Calls have been made to further develop its theoretical base and evaluate its impact on students' future practice. This article contributes to these aims, by following a cohort of undergraduate UK-based social work students. Using a focus group, the research elicited the views of the students on how classroom-based learning by people with lived experience affected their learning and practice pre-qualification. The findings are underpinned by the theme of 'challenging the narrative'. They assert the powerful effect service user narratives have on bringing issues 'to life' and challenging stereotypes, as well as affecting students' practice. However, challenging the narrative also linked to students' reflections on what counts as 'legitimate' and reliable knowledge and a disconnection between University-based learning and messages received in practice. The paper argues for an ongoing critical evaluation of the impact of pedagogy led by people with lived experience, with the dual aims of identifying what benefits student learning, as well as critically dissecting power, authority and knowledge.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 December 2023

Accepted 29 April 2024

## KEYWORDS

Service user involvement; legitimacy; social work education; pedagogy; focus group; coproduction

## Introduction

Despite the grave impact of austerity regarding achievements in service user and carer involvement (Beresford, 2019; Reith-Hall, 2020), there is acknowledgment that one area where positive developments persist are in professional and occupational training, not only within the UK context but also internationally (McLaughlin et al., 2016; Beresford, 2019). Learning from those with lived experience is widely accepted as a beneficial and highly valued pedagogical activity (Robinson & Webber, 2013). Nevertheless, the diverse and heterogeneous nature of such involvement in terms of its theoretical base, aims and implementation methods makes evaluating its effectiveness particularly challenging (Laging & Heidenreich, 2019; Beresford, 2019; Reith-Hall, 2020). In the UK, meaningful

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service user involvement and co-production at all levels of social work education is a firm requirement for the approval of social work educational programmes (Department of Health, 2002; QAA Subject Benchmark Statement Social Work, 2019; Social Work England, 2021). However, the language used in these documents mainly relates to ‘what’ should be done, rather than the ‘how’ or ‘why’ (Irvine et al., 2015). Similarly, there is not clear or consistent articulation of what ‘meaningful’ means (Burns & McGinn, 2020; Farrow, 2014; Robinson & Webber, 2013). This echoes a wider tendency to under-theorize ‘feel-good’ ideas such as service user involvement (Beresford, 2019; Hatton, 2017), leading to a less critical engagement with its broader political and ideological dimensions, affecting the focus and depth of attempts to evaluate its effectiveness.

Whether service user and carer involvement in social work education is ‘meaningful’ and ‘effective’ requires a critical examination and clearer articulation of its aims. Laging and Heidenreich (2019) make a useful distinction between the educational and empowerment dimensions of such involvement. From an educational perspective, successful service user involvement results in improvement of students’ skills and knowledge, whereas from an empowerment perspective, it signals improved and wide-ranging participation of those with lived experience. Theoretically, these aims are founded upon postmodern and critical social theory ideas, challenging traditional power hierarchies in education and professional realms, pushing for increased participation and self-advocacy for groups whose voices and experiential knowledge have traditionally been ignored or delegitimised (Powell & Khan, 2012). Such aims are also powerfully captured in research that examines what motivates those with lived experience to get involved in social work education. Schön (2016) reports on mental health service users and carers being motivated by two main drivers: knowledge contribution and reducing stigma. They stressed their desire to share their experiential knowledge as an ‘untapped resource’ and for it to be valued (often having had the experience of it being dismissed as anecdotal in professional and educational contexts; Fox, 2022). Making a difference (Fox, 2022; McKeown & Jones, 2014), affecting students’ values (Duffy & Hayes, 2012), making oppression visible (Baldwin and Sadd, 2006) are all reasons mentioned for getting involved. The relational quality of partnership work is also central; recognizing existing power inequalities is an important first step allowing for meaningful relationships to be developed based on respect and valuing of service users’ perspectives (Baldwin & Sadd, 2006; Kaszynski et al., 2019). Ultimately, the goals of service user and carer involvement in social work education should not only be confined to individual change and gains (be it for students and/or service users) but aiming at macro-level social change (McKeown et al., 2014). Levy et al. (2016) stress the need for an outcomes-based approach to service user and carer involvement that not only explores its impact on student learning but addresses fundamental questions around knowledge creation and the long-term impact to practice. As Hatton (2017, p. 160) states, such involvement should release:

people’s political imagination so that they can envision an alternative experience, a different way of experiencing and delivering welfare and social work services.

## Service user and carer involvement in social work education: the evidence base

This paper aims to explore the impact service user and carer involvement has regarding those dual aims: the micro level of individual learner and expert by experience gains, alongside the potential longer term practice outcomes and pedagogical approaches to knowledge creation. It builds on the growing body of research that points to beneficial outcomes in professional reflective knowledge and skills and deeper awareness of anti-oppressive practice and social justice (Agnew & Duffy, 2010; Cabiati & Raineri, 2016; Cabiati et al., 2022; Driessens et al., 2016; Duffy & Hayes, 2012; Duffy, Das & Davidson, 2013; Geregová & Frišaufová 2020; Hitchin, 2016; Hughes, 2017; Irvine et al., 2015; Lucas & Thomas, 2021; MacSporran, 2015; MacDermott & Harkin-MacDermott, 2020; Skilton, 2011; Skoura-Kirk et al., 2021; Skoura-Kirk, 2023). In addition, research data acknowledge the need to strengthen the evidence base regarding its impact, especially relating to future practice and long-term benefits for service users and carers (Burns & McGinn, 2020; Robinson & Webber, 2013).

Some studies capture students' intention to practice differently after expert by experience input (Anghel & Ramon, 2009; Driessens et al., 2016; Hughes, 2017; MacSporran, 2015; Skoura-Kirk, 2023). Where studies focused on whether such intentions materialized once students entered the profession, individual accounts point to impactful learning that affected attitudes and practice, especially linked to emotionally impactful stories (Burrows, 2011; Hughes, 2017; Irvine et al., 2015; Tanner et al., 2017).

The emerging evidence-base in evaluating practice impact mainly adopts a pre- and post-qualifying approach (or exclusively post-qualifying). What we do not know enough about is the impact service user and carer involvement has in the 'in-between' space of pre-qualifying social work education and in particular the space between service user-led classroom learning and any practice applications during placements. Exploring such impact whilst students are still studying, can provide valuable insights regarding pedagogical interventions, their effectiveness, what can be 'tweaked' and adapted to ensure that the aims of service user and carer involvement, as expressed above, are best served.

The paper will be exploring two main areas:

- Students' perceptions of the effectiveness and impact service user and carer involvement had on their learning.
- Students' views on how such learning affected their practice during their placements.

## Methodology

The research presented in this paper is based on data collected via a focus group. This data was generated as part of wider research study, focusing on service user and carer involvement in social work education and the impact on students' learning (Skoura-Kirk, 2023). One undergraduate social work student cohort was followed during their second and third years of social work pre-qualifying study at a University in the UK. During the Autumn term of their second year of study (before their first placement) the student cohort attended a module focusing on service user and carer lived experiences, where key learning objectives centered around deeper understanding of power and oppression,

challenging stigma and ultimately promote social work practice founded on partnership and empowerment principles. The module was planned together by the author (who served as module leader) and the members of the Experts by Experience group of the University, a well-established group with members' experiences relating to mental health, substance misuse, physical disability, caring responsibilities, domestic abuse. Further partnerships were established with local agencies, allowing for personal experiences of child protection and homelessness to be shared in the classroom. Even though the predominant form of involvement was that of sharing personal narratives, expert by experience involvement in the module was broader (including seminar facilitation and assessment). This was in recognition of the complex educational role undertaken by experts by experience (Skoura-Kirk et al., 2013) and efforts to embed involvement that reached higher levels of the ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969).

The focus group took place during the third year of the students' study (more than a year after the completion of the module). At that stage in their studies, the students had completed both their placements and were near qualification. The aims of the focus group were to gain the views of students on service user and carer involvement in the module: what had worked well and what could be improved, what impact expert-by-experience input had on their learning and how any such learning affected their practice during their two placements.

The time and venue were publicized by the researcher via a group e-mail to the student cohort, providing the date/time and venue, stating the research study aims and topics that the focus group would address. The focus group was organized to take place at a time when students were already on campus, so that taking part did not incur extra travel costs for them, making participation more accessible and inclusive. A University classroom was used as a venue, providing a familiar and private space for the discussion. The focus group was held outside formal teaching time, ensuring that it was clearly set as a distinct research activity based on voluntary participation. Ten students took part in the focus group (out of a cohort of 40 students), which lasted just over an hour. All the students were female. The researcher arranged the seating to be in a circle, allowing for all present to have a clear view of each other, promoting inclusion and communication. The discussion was audio-recorded via an app on an iPad- this was downloaded immediately as password-protected computer files and the original recording was deleted straight after. The audio files were transcribed and again saved as secure computer files. Participants' names were replaced by alphabet letters (A, B, C etc.) to ensure that words could not be traced back to individual students. Where a student name was part of a quote, this was deleted for anonymity purposes.

Ethical approval was granted by the University's Faculty Research Ethical Committee. The confidential nature of the discussion and anonymity of the data collected was central to the ethical considerations of the research. This related both to the researcher's handling of the data, and the participants' responsibility to keep information shared during the focus group private. A key area of ethical concern related to the relationship and power discrepancy between the researcher (who was also the module leader and at the time, a lecturer across the students' learning) and the student participants. Potential power inequalities and adverse outcomes for students were partly mitigated by the retrospective nature of the focus group reflections (i.e. focusing on a module that had been completed over

a year ago). Moreover, participation to the focus group was voluntary and all participants had provided informed consent. The researcher was aware of further ethical issues, relating to recognized challenges during a focus group, namely that some voices can dominate, and others silenced. As an experienced social work educator, she made conscious efforts to facilitate the discussion in ways that allowed everyone to express their opinions (using pauses, probing questions, and allowing space toward the end for ‘any other points’). As the topic related to an educational experience, it was anticipated that there was limited exposure to sensitive or distressing topics; however, it was equally recognized that discussing or critiquing input by people with lived experience had to operate within research and professional ethical codes and abiding by social work values (for example, challenging discriminatory and oppressive language).

Using a focus group approach was deemed to be most appropriate for this stage of the research project, as the group reflective space would encourage individual and shared perspectives and ‘unpacking’ service user-led module pedagogic experiences. Given the stage that these students were, it could also allow for the group to compare and contrast learning achieved in the classroom and during placement experiences. Benefits of the focus group approach for this research relate to wider principles of student engagement and feedback, allowing for evaluative comments to not only be collected but also to be acted upon.

The analysis of the data followed a thematic analysis approach, undertaken by the researcher. The audio recordings were listened to numerous times and the bulk of the analysis was based on the transcribed material. The transcriptions were read multiple times, and the researcher identified some key themes in the students’ discussions. The analysis was guided by the two key research questions; the themes were largely derived by the focus group data, rather than based on preexisting categories.

The analysis did not seek to find uniformity of opinion (Sim, 1998) but mainly to capture reflections and the ways in which students were ‘making sense’ of the module and service user input. As such, the theoretical perspective informing the research and analysis is of social constructivism. Also, the approach is tightly woven with the need to use research to produce tangible outcomes and improvements regarding the effectiveness of an intervention.

## Findings

The focus group generated a thought-provoking discussion, sparking off memories of particular sessions and fruitful disagreement over the impact and effectiveness of the service user-led classroom sessions, as well as how these affected the practice of the students during their placements. Three main themes captured the issues discussed: a) Impact on learning, b) effect on practice and c) implications for social work pedagogy. A common thread running through the identified themes related to ‘challenging the narrative’: gaining new insights, being challenged in their beliefs but also expressing discomfort with the subjective nature of service user narratives, whilst grappling with the disjuncture between classroom-based learning and messages received from the placement.



## Impact on learning

### *Service user narrative brings issues to life*

Even though the involvement of the people with lived experience took many forms during the programme, the students' discussion focused primarily on the sharing of personal stories in the classroom. The students agreed that listening to an individual's story is powerful and brings issues and practice 'to life'. This echoes findings from other research, outlining how such narratives bridge the gap between theory and practice and promote the centrality of service user voices:

... when you have a personal narrative, I think it brings the story to life a little bit. Because we can all sit here with case studies and reason it on a piece of paper, but it doesn't mean anything to me, cause in my head it still is a story and I don't think it's real but until I hear someone talking about their own personal life, that's where I kind of have that emotional connection.

learning them on the module, it doesn't always bring up thoughts and feelings from your personal life but listening to a service user discussing it, that young lady really affected me personally and made me identify issues that maybe that I've got to deal with.

### *'Concrete' vs outdated/incorrect*

Even though there was positive feedback relating to the effectiveness of service user and carer narratives in the classroom, the group engaged in a critical discussion of some sessions and an uneasiness regarding the validity and legitimacy of the story shared. This was particularly pronounced where a student's own personal and/or previous professional experience intersected with the focus area of the service user narrative, raising some questions around the false dichotomy of an 'us and them' between the student group and service users.

For one student, a session on domestic abuse felt outdated:

it's not how it is currently so it just ... I get that her narrative and her story was still, you know, really interesting and I got something from that, but I just didn't get like the information [...] which I got from other service users.

Similar points were raised by another student, regarding a different session:

some of the things she was talking about, actually, in my experience were wrong [...] I was challenging that in my head all the time and I felt that, if there were people in the room that don't have the experience that I have, that was the wrong message to be putting across.

This was contrasted with a session led by a young carer:

I felt the young lady [...] had a very clear perspective on what she could have thought could be better erm, about services, what would have worked for her. Whereas the other lady didn't have that experience with her, it was just her own experience rather than an interaction with social services.



### ***Too subjective/individual perspective***

Another dimension of what bestowed or indeed undermined legitimacy of the service user narrative as a learning tool related to how generalizable it potentially was, or whether it presented one purely subjective point of view. For some students in the group, this was a weakness:

if [you have] your experience of domestic abuse and then if [...] you get the perspective of the service user that comes in, you shouldn't take it on face value that that is the experience, it could actually give you the wrong impression. Especially if you're new to social work and working with people.

if we see case studies in a book, in most cases we get comparisons so we can look at a comparison. If we get one person that comes in from one area, we have to be aware that we don't just accept what we're listening to.

### **Effects on practice**

The learning facilitated by people with lived experience during academic modules affected the students' practice during their practice placements in a variety of ways: some students demonstrated a raised awareness of values and ensuring anti-oppressive approaches, whereas discussions also pointed to a more critical approach to the applicability of what one is taught at University to the realities of frontline work.

### ***Use of language***

One of the main effects to students' practice related to the use of language and how this can undermine social work values:

I remember going in on the first day of this placement and going into like a handover meeting and everyone referring to the Room 1, Room 2, Room 3 and I thought: I am never, ever, ever going to get into that mode of referring to them as room numbers [...] I did it the other day because the unit's completely full and I just couldn't remember this person's name off the top of my head and I referred to them for the room and I could feel myself inside thinking: What have I just done?

Use of professional/academic language during a visit was also recognized as potentially ill-fitting the needs of the service user:

if I was in the living room having that conversation with her, I wouldn't have used the word attachment, it was because there were all these professionals and one of them was the health visitor so I automatically slipped into that professional [...] language and, you know, but that wasn't person-centred and I was very aware of that [...] I see the power of language from the service users' perspective

Increased recognition of the power of language was not only connected to potentially dehumanizing or alienating terminology, but also to using words offering recognition and empowerment to individuals who are traditionally dismissed as a problem population. The following student quote captures this when referring to the impact of a classroom testimony of an individual with substance misuse issues:

She said something that just really struck for me [...] she went to court and the judge said that ‘I believe in you, I believe in you, I see something in you’, yeah and I just remember that, going: oh my god, you know, I’ve been thinking quite negative thoughts [...] and I think that will stick with me, you know, for a long time. And I’ve thought about that a few times and when I’ve maybe kind of – this sounds odd-but when I’ve not believed people and then I’ve kind of remembered about, remembered her words.

### ***Challenging stereotypes***

The experience of having people with lived experience in the classroom challenged students’ own preconceptions around service users and helped them to address this during their placements:

I tend not to stereotype as much now. Coz, like, having the different service users, I had a different perception in my mind than when I saw them, which was completely different. So now when I go on a visit or I read a case file, I don’t technically stick to that; I’m more open minded.

... on my placement [...] I was more open to experience a person as they are.

### ***Awareness and assessment of risk***

Practice impact also related to raised awareness and assessment of risk. On the one hand, students became more acutely aware of the risk their professional presence and intervention can pose for a service user. This was sparked off by a classroom session where difficult issues were shared:

My concern and I think one of the things we have to learn and that we can only learn on placement and these kinds of interactions, is about us as a risk to somebody else? That, you know, we go in, we talk about these really emotive things and we open up these big, like, cans of worms and then it’s about how we contain that [...] it’s so personal to her and it’s gonna hurt her from what we’re saying. We don’t want to hurt someone.

On the other hand, assessment and management of risk were further explored as elements of questioning the legitimacy of the service user story. This links to the points raised above around some classroom narratives being perceived as ‘outdated’ or ‘too subjective’; in the placement realm, this was further linked to potentially unreliable testimonies, that might obscure safeguarding concerns:

when I go out now and I’m talking to someone, I, I’m, in the back of my mind I do actually question is this for real? Is this really their experience? Are there things that are causing them to say this in this way? Are there added issues to do like with mental health? Is there abuse? So, it’s about questioning the narrative, taking it on board but actually thinking: I can’t accept it all, I just, I need other information.

### ***Disjuncture between classroom and placement learning***

A particularly challenging dimension of the students’ reflection on service user-led classroom teaching and practice, related to the apparent disjuncture between the

messages received during university-based learning (especially led by people with lived experience) and expectations at placement:

after that lecture I went back that week and, in my supervision, I got told that I'd made a too close a relationship with a family that I was working with and I just sat there in amazement thinking: How am I being told that I've made too close a relationship when these people obviously have a capacity to change?

I think that when we look at like Rogers, unconditional positive regard, transparency, erm, empathy, erm, non-judgemental approaches [...] and the [placement supervisor said] I always tell everyone not to trust a word that the parent says [...] And my mouth literally just hung open. She said, you know, I always teach people you don't believe a word people say – and these were her exact words - you don't believe a word they say until they prove you that it's true.

### **Implications for social work pedagogy**

As the students were reflecting on their learning and its impact on their practice a year later, they were able to make suggestions as to how the service user-led learning could have been further developed:

#### ***Focusing on skills and theory***

Students felt that they would have benefitted further from service user-led activities that provided more guidance on and practice of professional skills.

I think we could use service user kind of involvement much more to practise those conversations, bit more like skills-type things where you can actually get some feedback. I mean, things like you know, the language that we use, the terminology, our body language.

For others, a format of combining personal stories with theoretical content would have provided a more rounded and informative learning experience, potentially addressing some of the issues around the validity of the personal narrative as the given 'truth':

everyone's individual stories, they were individual to them but, without that theory that linked into the individual service user, during the lecture, you couldn't maybe apply it into a broader spectrum.

This does raise questions as to what type of knowledge is considered legitimate, and the potential discomfort of engaging with the subjective- especially when that is critical of the prevailing professional discourse.

#### ***Incorporating service user-led learning earlier in the programme***

The emotional impact of personal narratives is well documented in the relevant literature. This was touched upon by the students when they were reflecting on the emotionally demanding nature of frontline practice and the toll it can take if certain situations are faced on placement for the first time:

I think they need to be earlier [...] Just because I, I've had a year one [student] come into my placement and obviously they haven't had that experience with the service user modules.

Took her into a session [...] it was a very hard, hardcore session but it completely broke her down [...] because she'd just had no experience behind apart from the theories that you have within the year. [...] it was emotionally, a cause of emotional turmoil for her.

I think it just needs to be a bit earlier on so that people can start building their emotional resilience earlier and learning how to do that right from year one [...] it's a lot safer to do it within a classroom environment.

### ***Link to supervision- 'safe spaces' to process service user-led learning***

The students all agreed that the experience of the focus group had helped them to reflect on the previous year and their learning and were keen for spaces like these to be more integral to classroom learning. They stressed the benefits of reflecting with others, as this could challenge their own beliefs and preconceptions, as well as prepare them for the supervisory experience on placement.

... you actually get other people's opinions. Cause I think as a person you get stuck in your own opinion.

Sometimes you ask for our feedback at the end of the lecture [...] but I think sometimes I shut down by then but actually, when you asked this morning I really noticed the difference in that because what I'd done, I'd gone away, I'd thought about I'd kind of so I really wanted to talk about it but I think if you'd asked at the end of yesterday's lecture, when the thought process was still going on, I don't think I'd have had a lot to give.

## **Discussion**

The findings confirm the powerful impact the narratives and pedagogical input by people with lived experience have on students' learning. There is congruence with previous research that stresses the affective footprint that hearing someone's personal story has in bringing abstract ideas to life, challenging stereotypes and students' own values, as well as influence students' practice during their practice placements (Burrows, 2011; Hughes, 2017; Irvine et al., 2015; Tanner et al., 2017). There is a growing evidence-base that co-creating knowledge and pedagogy with people with lived experience continues to challenge hierarchies, to sensitize social work students to the power of language and start to bridge the gap between theory and its application. The focus group in this study also provided some firm recommendations on how to improve and adapt service user-led teaching to maximize the learning impact and by extension the effect on subsequent practice of social work students. The importance of exposing students early on in their studies to such pedagogical input was asserted through the findings of this study, especially as it can provide opportunities for further developing, testing and adapting learning approaches prior to qualification.

Nevertheless, the findings also gave rise to some critical perspectives that require further reflection. The central theme of 'challenging the narrative' was not one-dimensional in the participants' words; students were partly questioning the legitimacy of some narratives, branding them as potentially outdated or too subjective. They were challenging whether the theoretical and value-based narratives taught in the classroom

were a good fit for the practice arena, given the contradictory messages received there. They started to challenge their own narratives and roles, potentially capturing an awakening to their own professional power and the potential to cause harm, however unintentional that might be.

Underpinning this move toward ‘challenging the narrative’ are ideas of power, authority and legitimacy. The earlier consideration of the wider theoretical and evidence-based context of service user and carer involvement in social work education led us to consider the importance of critically exploring the ‘why’ of such involvement (Irvine et al., 2015), as well as focus on the more fundamental questions of knowledge creation and macro-level impact (Levy et al., 2016). This study’s findings make us alert to the active role of students as critical ‘consumers’ of experiential pedagogy and introduces potentially uncomfortable questions regarding their take on the legitimacy of the personal narrative as a source of concrete and ‘valuable’ knowledge. Moreover, in some cases, placement experience can exacerbate this, by going as far as promoting a questioning approach to the truthfulness of the service user story. This causes tensions with the articulated value and theory base of social work, such as promoting non-judgmental approaches, respect, working in partnership and empowerment. It also contradicts and potentially undermines the expressed motivation of people who get involved in social work education to have a voice, to challenge the sense of their narratives being dismissed or undermined (Fox, 2022).

We need to approach this sensitively. On the one hand, it is important to maintain a critical approach to service user and carer involvement in social work education and further develop the evidence base of its impact and effectiveness. This requires the opening of spaces for students to express their critical points and be active participants in creating the pedagogical approaches and experiences that benefit their learning and future practice. However, we also need to remain committed to the critical application of the social work value base as the foundation for the profession’s pedagogy and knowledge growth. Principles of empowerment, social justice, inclusivity and emancipation are not only relevant to practice, but run through the educational approaches that help shape the future workforce. A first step in this is to mindfully create critical learning exchanges that are founded on raised awareness of power dynamics and the potential for recreating disempowering experiences by having service user voices and carers’ voices undermined or at worst dismissed. In practical terms, this could take various forms. There could be increased and targeted preparation activities prior to sessions led by people with lived experience, such as theory teaching and critical exploration of key concepts such as power, oppression and knowledge. This could be accompanied by more interactive seminar work on exploring students’ own values, assumptions about what it means to be a ‘service user’ (Skoura-Kirk, 2023), alongside reflecting on personal experiences and knowledge.

On a wider context, and as others have argued (Beresford, 2019, Hatton, 2017), we need to turn our gaze to an exploration and development of the pedagogical theory of service user and carer involvement in social work education. This paper argues that one starting point is a focus on power and how it is enacted in social work education; in particular, we require a critical examination of the notions of ‘legitimacy’ and ‘authority’ when it comes to dominant narratives and the knowledge-base of social work. The uneasiness with the subjective nature of experiential narratives needs to be

further explored with learners, by making visible the inevitably subjective nature of knowledge and how such constructions affect dynamics between stakeholder groups, cultural and national iterations of the profession, as well as established hierarchies of what counts as reliable knowledge. Pedagogical approaches to facilitate this could combine dedicated teaching sessions prior to students commencing their placements, as well as 'recall' days when undertaking practice learning in placement settings. Such sessions need to be designed and delivered in partnership with people with lived experience and social work practitioners, bringing together the perspectives of key stakeholders and in some cases allowing for the diversity of approaches and ethical tensions to become visible (for example, compromising the double messages students receive around recognizing experiential expertise, whilst questioning its validity when in practice).

Moreover, inviting students to reflect on their own experiences of power (or powerlessness) can potentially wield fruitful insights on how such personal and professional reference points can be sensitively explored within the classroom environment when faced with personal lived experience as a learning resource. More co-produced and service user-led educational activities and research can open such explorations, clearly placing those with lived experience as co-educators, rather than 'visitors' who share their story. Such a drive is facing ongoing challenges due to limited funding and wider austerity pressures; however, a firm commitment to collaborative and innovative service user-led pedagogy and a strengthening of a critical active role for social work students as reflective learners can continue to 'challenge narratives' in ways that -as Hatton (2017) states- can release alternative political imaginations of welfare provision.

## Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the students who participated in this research by sharing their reflections and the experts by experience educators for their invaluable contributions to the module and overall social work education of the cohort.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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