

Topic n.1 Prospects, methodology, research and innovatory practice in social work education

Proposal of Symposium

Title: **Innovation in Involving Service Users and Students in Social Work Education Research**

Language used: English

Abstract summary

This Symposium will offer four updated presentations which together provide a rich and in-depth critical and innovative framework demonstrating and analyzing the involvement of service users and students in S.W. education and related research projects. Creating the first ever Italian expert by experience group that contributes to the training of S.W. students is focused upon in Allegri's presentation. Ramon focuses on engaging service users as co-researchers in a comparative project on evaluating students' views of the contribution of service users in Israel and the UK. Moshe Grodofsky's project illustrates the issues entailed in engaging students alongside service users in tackling debt difficulties in an Israeli community facing diverse challenges. Engaging foreign students alongside practitioners and service users living in total institutions is challenge outlined in a innovative project led by Rafaelic. We will also focus on methodological aspects to a more emancipatory approach.

Key words: involvement of service users in social work education, social work education research, comparative dimension; co-researchers.

Abstract

This symposium will offer four updated presentations which together provide a rich and in-depth critical and innovative framework demonstrating and analyzing the involvement of service users and students in social work education and related research projects.

During the last decade, we have seen an increased development of exploring ways of such involvement across Europe. The contact with service users as experts by experience, and as change agents in their communities, has the potential to generate considerable benefits for the students by improving their understanding and appreciation of the strengths of service users, reducing the perception of service users as having only weaknesses and difficult to resolve problems.

Creating the first ever Italian expert by experience group that contributes to the training of social work students is focused upon in the presentation of **Elena Allegri**. She demonstrates the learning process from a UK specific example of such systematic involvement, leading to joint work developed by the Italian experts by experience and social work lecturers and delivered to the students on the Piedmont Orientale University social work course.

Shulamit Ramon focuses on engaging service users as co-researchers in a comparative project on evaluating students' views of the contribution of service users to their social work education in Israel and the UK. Involvement in research highlights the ability of service users to acquire some specific research skills and to contribute from their knowledge perspective to formulate research questions and to the data analysis. By now we have examples of such involvement by young people, adults of working age, and older people, with different types of social care issues.

Merav Moshe Grodofsky's project illustrates the issues entailed in engaging students alongside service users in tackling debt difficulties in an Israeli community facing diverse challenges. This joint venture enables students to appreciate the impact of debts on individuals, families and communities and to learn about the problem solving abilities of service users. It thus enhances the

students' problem solving capacity, while contributing to the community's strategies and to individual social care clients. Engaging foreign students alongside practitioners and service users living in total institutions is challenge outlined in the innovative project led by **Andreja Rafaelic**. In this project, Slovene students, already used to a degree of de-institutionalisation in their own country, spend their fieldwork placement in a Serbian institution engaging residents in getting back to ordinary living. Using a variety of methods, this project enhances the understanding and skills of the students in supporting residents of long term institutions during the process of resettlement, as well as making a tangible contribution to the life of their communities.

All of the presenters will also focus on the methodological aspects of their projects, as well as focus on the lessons learned from these projects to the development of a more emancipatory approach to social work education, and of the challenges this raises.

Key words: involvement of service users in social work education, social work education research, comparative dimension; co-researchers.

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Part of the symposium on Innovation in Involving Service Users and Students in Social Work Education, led by Elena Allegri and Shulamit Ramon

Topic 1 Prospects, methodology, research and innovatory practice in social work education

Title: Service user and carer involvement in social work education: lessons from an innovative experience at University of Piemonte Orientale, Asti, Italy.

This paper presents a case study of a Italian educational innovation in a social work degree course. Following the experience of the Social Work Department of University of Hertfordshire (UK) within an Erasmus Teaching Exchange Programme, the Social Work degree course of the University of Piemonte Orientale, Alessandria and Asti, Italy, has introduced systematic involvement of service users and carers in the training of a new undergraduate degree as from September 2013. The group "Diversa-Mente Esperti" consists of fifteen service users and carers with different life stories in the fields of addiction, domestic violence, mental health, migration, physical disability and social reintegration. Two senior lectures of Social Work, a university tutor, and a young social worker participate too in supporting capacity. Moreover, some of the group members participated as trainers in three workshops, one for each year of the course, within the vocational training activities of the Degree. The conceptual and value base, the structure, staffing, and main activities will be outlined; as well as the main achievements and barriers. Mindful of the danger of slipping into tokenistic involvement, the project has included a research evaluation which explored the views of all project stakeholders, thus establishing the project as an evidence-based educational innovation. The evaluation included a questionnaire with closed and open questions for students, users and teachers participants. The initial response of all stakeholders to introducing this type of involvement has been positive. The findings highlight the value of service users' involvement in the qualifying social work degree, of the evaluation, and the steps needed for the cultural change required for such an involvement to become more comprehensive and embedded in the degree course.

(298 w.)

Key words: involvement of service users in social work education, social work education research, evaluation to service users involvement, community social work.

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Topic n.1 Prospects, methodology, research and innovatory practice in social work education

Part of the symposium on Innovation in Involving Service Users and Students in Social Work Education, led by Elena Allegri and Shulamit Ramon

Title: Key Issues in working with service users as co-researchers in social work research

Co-researchers are people who use health and social care who usually do not have research experience or formal knowledge. The aims of engaging them as co-researchers include valuing their experiential knowledge and wishing to include their perspective from the very beginning, meeting social work values of social inclusion and empowerment, enriching knowledge relevant to social work, upskilling the co-researchers, enhancing the credibility of the specific research project among the project's participants who are also service users of health and social care.

This paper will look at examples of research which has involved service users as co-researchers in which the authors have been engaged. In particular we will look at a comparative study in Anglia Ruskin University (UK) and in Tel Hai college (Israel) concerning the views of social work students on involving service users in their training to become qualified social workers, where older people were engaged as co-researchers (Gutman and Ramon, 2016).

Such an involvement requires investment in commitment and time, in order to handle the issues that it entails in terms of :

- 1.Avoiding tokenism
- 2.How best to recruit co-researchers , while meeting ethical requirements;
- 3.How best to prepare them for their role within limited budgets and time
- 4.Understanding and responding to likely barriers and opportunities for recruitment and for working together
- 5.Research designs which facilitate such an engagement
- 6.Application to comparative research
- 7.How best to support all researchers involved in the project.

Examples of responses to these issues, and analysis of their effectiveness and value, will be offered.

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Key words: co-researchers, involvement of service users in research, social work education research, research design, comparative dimension, barriers and facilitators to service users involvement.

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Part of the symposium on Innovation in Involving Service Users and Students in Social Work Education, led by Elena Allegri and Shulamit Ramon

Title: Social Work Students and Service Users Research the Experiences of Service Users Living in Debt

The presentation will discuss the process and findings of a joint student and service user guided research. During the 2015-2016 academic year seven senior students and service users researched experiences of services users living in financial debt as part of a research seminar in the School of Social Work at Sapir College in Israel . The decision to research the topic was based upon the lived experiences of the service users as well as that of some of the students. Moreover, the issue of financial debt had been identified as one that affected many service users who came for assistance at the rights-based community practice center established by the School of Social Work in the local community. Both service users and students constructed the interview schedule together with some of the lecturers; both groups were trained to lead the interviews and participate in the data analysis. Twelve community residents living in financial debt were interviewed through semi-structured in depth interviews. Interview analysis revealed five major themes: those living in financial debt pay exorbitant rates on their debt - sometimes amounting to 200% interest; bureaucratic processes instituted by the system hinder the ability of debtors to remain employed. These processes include also suspended licenses, letters to employers regarding the debtor and frozen bank accounts. The third theme addressed inaccessibility to information; the fourth, inability to live with dignity and finally the fifth theme addressed the behavior of the collectors towards the debtor.

Research results and recommendations were forwarded to the Israeli Government Ombudsman . The research team is awaiting his response. Currently the rights-based community practice center is expanding the research to include additional service users in debt.

(292 words)

Key words: service users, students, joined participatory action research, impact of financial debt, rights-based community centre.

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Part of the symposium on Innovation in Involving Service Users and Students in Social Work Education, led by Elena Allegri and Shulamit Ramon

Title: Practice placement of Slovene social work students in Serbia: Developing the knowledge of deinstitutionalisation

Serbia is a country that started the journey of deinstitutionalisation in mental health just three years ago. An international expert group was engaged to support the process at the national level but there was very poor support and no funding for the institutions in transition from institutional to community based care. Therefore a group of Slovene students and academics formed to support a pilot institution, Čurug, in its transformation.

The group's work was based on the strong belief that each such project should follow the ethical principles of co-production in terms of users' involvement, always improving and advocating better life conditions for service users. The group organised a four weeks project as their practice placement involving students, academics and staff from the institution. Regretfully, the users were not involved from the very beginning of the planning, but they became involved in planning activities, changes in the institution and staff training. As a result of this collaborative work more democratic relationship developed between users and institution staff, a formation of assemblies in all the units was established, the barb wire around the institution was removed, the users were allowed to go out freely outside of the institution, and 19 users were resettled in the community.

This practice placement has demonstrated the value of co-production created by users, students, academics and professionals in enabling the development of both methods of social work as well as of conceptual frameworks of social work based on users participation and empowerment.

Furthermore, this cross-cultural experiment between Slovene and Serbs participants illustrates the universality of the deinstitutionalisation process and the value of cross-national solidarity in social work.

(284 words)

Key words: deinstitutionalization, co-production, cross-cultural collaboration, service users, students, academics

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