International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies

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Résumé de l'article

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ON WHOSE AUTHORITY? A COLLABORATIVE SELF-STUDY INTO SERVICE-USER INVOLVEMENT AND SIMULATION-BASED LEARNING IN CHILD AND YOUTH CARE EDUCATION

Jasmine Ali, Kerry Boileau, Miranda Haskett, Shani Kipang, Denysha Marksman-Phillpotts, and Wolfgang Vachon

Abstract: This study offers a preliminary investigation into a simulation-based, service-user-involved teaching model within a post-secondary child and youth care program. Using the method of collaborative self-study, this research draws on the diverse perspectives of six co-researchers, documenting our experience of this model through the lenses of student, professor, youth trainer, and facilitator. This study uses praxis (the cycle of action and reflection) and dialogic learning (learning through dialogue) to unpack personal and professional questions of expertise, participation, professional development, and anti-oppressive practice.

Keywords: child and youth care, youth work, simulation-based learning, experiential learning, consumer involvement, user-involvement, expert by experience

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Note: Given the objectives of their research, the authors of this article have chosen not to include the customary biographies or to position their research in relation to their institutional affiliations or status. The reasons for this choice are further explored in the article itself.

Traditionally, processes of knowledge production in child and youth care and social service education — including research, teaching, training, and curriculum development — have been led, almost exclusively, by those considered to hold appropriate academic and professional qualifications. However, as frameworks of critical pedagogy have broadened, models of inclusion and participation now extend beyond traditional boundaries of academic and practitioner stakeholders. Particularly outside of North America, there are well-established movements towards forms of service-user involvement — direct participation of current or former service users in social service classroom-based training, assessment, and curriculum development (Duffy et al., 2017). This trend has also intersected with growing interest in simulation-based learning — an experiential learning approach involving students in enactments of "real-world" professional scenarios (Bogo et al., 2014; Logie et al., 2013). Within social work and social service education the most institutionalized use of simulation-based learning has involved standardized actors and scenarios developed by faculty and practitioner partners (Bogo et al., 2014). However, recent models have added new possibilities to this field.

One such model is the Toronto-based program, Acting Out (Liang et al., 2016; Vachon, 2011). This collaborative project has been maintained through a partnership between a post-secondary child and youth care program and a local arts-based community organization for marginalized and street-involved youth. Using popular-education and popular-theatre frameworks, Acting Out draws upon the expertise of "specialized youth trainers" (hereafter referred to as "trainers") — young people with current or previous direct experience as service users within youth social service systems including child welfare, shelters, group homes, and youth justice. With the support of a front-line youth worker acting as facilitator, these "system-wise" youth are trained to deliver pre-service and in-service workshops. Workshop scenarios are based on trainers' experiences of social services and developed using techniques drawn from playback theatre, improvisation, and storytelling.

Based on identified knowledge gaps in our field, the purpose of this study was to conduct preliminary research into a simulation-based, service-user-involved model within child and youth care education. Using the method of collaborative self-study (Louie et al., 2003), our goal was to draw on the perspectives of six co-researchers, who had each had direct experience in Acting Out either as youth trainer, facilitator, child and youth care student, or professor. Through these diverse voices and experiences, this paper explores the strengths and challenges faced by a unique model of child and youth care education, one of service-user involvement.

Background

Whose Knowledge Counts? The Role of Service Users in Child and Youth Care Education

While the framework of user-involvement has received relatively little interest in North America, it has been the focus of widespread attention in other regions, particularly the United Kingdom and Eastern Europe (Duffy et al., 2017; Robinson & Webber, 2013; Schön, 2016). Within the United

Kingdom, service-user involvement is not only an accepted mainstream component of the classroom experience but is legislated into the accreditation process of social work programs (Robinson & Webber, 2013; Schön, 2016).

Models of service-user involvement have taken various forms. These include more traditional roles, such as guest speakers who discuss personal testimonies and experiences (Agnew & Duffy, 2010), but also extends as far as participation in admissions processes (Schön, 2016), facilitating or co-facilitating student workshops or training (Brkić & Jugović, 2009), development of curriculum (Irvine et al., 2015; Robinson & Webber, 2013; Schön, 2016), and even student assessment (Duffy et al., 2013; Skoura-Kirk et al., 2013).

Across models and approaches, studies suggest that students generally have positive perceptions of service-user participation within their educational processes, including positive perceptions of learning experiences and opportunities (Anghel & Ramon, 2009; Moss, 2000; Skilton, 2011); perceptions of increased practical knowledge (Agnew & Duffy, 2010; Mackay et al., 2009); increase in student confidence, with self-perceptions of increased skill and self-awareness (Matka et al,, 2010); and perceptions of increased empathy towards the experiences and challenges of service users (Anghel & Ramon, 2009). Data on the experiences of service users also suggest largely constructive experiences, including an increase in confidence and practical skills (Matka et al., 2010) and feelings of being respected, valued, and contributing meaningfully to students' education (General Social Care Council, 2005; Moss, 2000). Though more limited, data from social work lecturers suggest they attribute value to service users' participation in student training (Anghel & Ramon, 2009) and perceive a user-involvement model to incorporate a beneficial "reality check" (Matka et al., 2010).

Learning by Doing: The Case for Simulation-Based Learning

Following professional fields such as nursing, medicine, and psychology, a growing number of social work and child and youth educators have explored simulated learning as a tool for more integrated learning (Bogo et al., 2012; Nimmagadda & Murphy, 2014; Wehbi, 2011). As Gaba (2007) described, simulation can be used "to replace or amplify real experiences with guided experiences, often immersive in nature, that evoke or replicate substantial aspects of the real world in a fully safe, instructive, and interactive fashion" (p. 126).

Within social service education, the use of role-play and other non-standardized simulation approaches have been historically popular, with their evidence base increasing in recent years. In studying the use of applied theatre approaches in teaching child and family practice skills, Leonard and colleagues (2016) found that exposing students to case scenarios drawn verbatim from sexual abuse survivors' testimonies had encouraging results in student self-reported perceptions of emotional skills development; students felt they had increased capacity for reflection and self-efficacy. In other reflective accounts, social work educators employing large-group simulations described positive feedback from students (Moss, 2000; Wehbi, 2011), encouraging responses indicating integration of the activity's lessons outside of the classroom (Wehbi, 2011), and perceptions from practice teachers of increased confidence (Moss, 2000).

In North America, simulation-based learning has taken a central seat in social work education through the development of the Objective Structured Clinical Evaluation (OSCE), a standardized tool that uses trained actors for simulation-based assessment of student competencies (Bogo et al., 2012). In this model, social work interventions are simulated through a standardized (script-based) approach, using scenarios developed by educators or in collaboration with practitioners in the field (Logie et al., 2013). This paper focuses on simulation-based learning, which uses actors (including current or former "service users") to enact situations that learners then engage with; we see it as distinct from role-play, in which students perform the role of the "other" or "client".

The Acting Out *Model*

Fusing the goals of simulation-based learning with the philosophy of popular education and critical youth work, the Toronto-based program Acting Out (Liang et al., 2016; Vachon, 2011) offers a unique pathway for experiential child and youth care education. Building on the health care model of "patient-trainers" — the use of actual patients in medical classroom simulations (Bokken et al., 2009) — the goal of this model is to expand the learning outcomes of child and youth care education by drawing on the experiential knowledge and expertise of system-involved young people.

The Acting Out model draws on applied theatre frameworks (Duffy & Vettraino, 2010; Kilker, 1980; Prendergast & Saxton, 2016), building on concepts of dialogic learning (learning through dialogue) and praxis (the learning cycle of action and reflection). Acting Out is based on the expertise of specialized youth trainers — young people with direct social service involvement who are trained in improvisation, theatre techniques, and feedback processes.

Potential trainers are contacted through various means, including physical outreach, recruitment flyers, professional networks, and personal networks among young people. All candidates need to have experience in child welfare, youth justice, immigration and refugee systems, residential care, mental health systems, or related youth-service sectors; they must also be willing to discuss to some extent what their time in these systems was like. Following these initial steps, group and individual auditions are held. These include improvisation activities, theatre games, scenarios from workshops, and conversations. Trainers and facilitators then make collective decisions on which candidates are best suited to fill trainer roles.

In contrast to standardized models of simulation-based learning — in which scenarios are generally developed by educators in collaboration with practitioners — scenarios in the Acting Out model are developed collaboratively among trainers and facilitators based on amalgamated personal experiences. When Acting Out visits college classrooms and social service, child welfare, and related agencies, current and future practitioners engage in simulations and receive feedback directly from trainers, peers, and facilitators (Liang et al., 2016; Vachon, 2011). As part of this structure, a consistent relationship has been maintained with a local public post-secondary institution. Two of the authors are faculty in this institution; one of these was also an Acting Out facilitator and instrumental in bringing the program into classes. Through this relationship, a series of Acting Out workshops was built into the first-year curriculum of a diploma course.

While research on this model is limited, initial reports suggest strong potential. For example, based on 189 student feedback forms and anecdotal reporting, Vachon (2011) reported that while many students found the scenarios and feedback process to be challenging and "intense" (p. 26), the results in terms of student's self-perception of value (4.9/5, p. 25) and effectiveness of learning format (4.7/5, p. 25) were extremely high, with unanimously positive results in favour of continuing the program for future semesters.

Our Research Project

This study is a collaborative project, based on the self-reflective research of the six co-authors. This paper documents the first-cycle findings of our ongoing action-research project, which has two central goals:

1. To draw on diverse perspectives in exploring the opportunities and challenges facing a service-user-involved, simulation-based learning model within child and youth care education.

2. To explore how the process of collaborative research and co-authorship can be used to inform broader questions around participation, power, and knowledge production in child and youth care education.

Through reflexive research on the Acting Out model, the current paper addresses our first research question. While not the focus of this paper, it is relevant to note that the next cycle of this action-research project will address our second "process-based" research question. By analysing our group's own collaborative research process (through meeting transcripts, analysis of personal reflections, and multidirectional interviewing) our hope is to gain new learnings about the ways in which power and participation function as part of the knowledge-creation and co-authorship process.

Researchers

This project was initiated as part of a PhD thesis. The founding member of our research group (a child and youth care professor and PhD student) was interested in the process of knowledge production in child and youth care education, and particularly in the impact of models such as Acting Out. With the goal of exploring these questions collaboratively, our research group was formed through informal recruitment and networking. As collaborators, none of us has received financial compensation for our participation in this project. We have come together through our own interest in participating in the larger conversations and academic discourse impacting our field — conversations which most of us were unlikely to be invited into.

Each member of our six person research group has had direct involvement with the Acting Out program. As outlined in Table 1, several of us have held multiple roles within or in relation to the program, and therefore have more than one position from which to analyse it.

Table 1. *Researcher Experience*

Researcher	Acting Out trainer	Acting Out facilitator	CYC student*	CYC professor
1	X	X		
2		X		
3			X	
4			X	
5				X
6		X		X

*Student at time of Acting Out Program, now graduated.

Methods

Collaborative Self-Study

This research project was completed using methods of collaborative self-study. Though almost every member of our group was unfamiliar with this methodology, we found it gave our group the tools we needed to gain useful insights from data we already had available — our own diverse experiences as educators and learners in child and youth care classrooms.

Collaborative self-study has become a popular research tool for teacher-educators but is minimally used outside the field of education. As Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) proposed, this methodology represents a trend away from "assumptions about legitimate knowledge and knowledge production" moving instead toward "broadening what counts as research" (p. 13). To this end, self-study borrows from research traditions such as narrative inquiry and action research, employing methods such as journalling, autobiography, peer-interviewing, and observation (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Fletcher & Casey, 2014). Acknowledging the benefits of peer interaction to the reflective process, the methods are most often engaged in collaboratively (Louie et al., 2003). Here, critical peer input is seen as a means to "provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20). Collaborators are selected based on their ability to provide diverse perspectives, preventing the researcher from becoming too "committed to a single interpretation, and thus open to 'the dangers of narcissism …' (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10)." (Louie et al., 2003, p. 161).

While collaborative self-study has gained popularity as a form of scholarship grounded in real-world issues and questions, it has also been critiqued. Within traditional academia, the most obvious criticisms surround the premises of "rigour" and "validity". As Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) described, researchers face the difficulty of "representing, presenting, legitimating, analyzing, and reporting one's own experience as data — and of doing so in honest, not self-serving, ways" (p.15). This connects, as the authors further cautioned, to the sometimes slippery slope between autobiographical narrative and the romantic "hero story" (p. 18). As a form of self-study, such self-

confirming autobiographical accounts offer little by way of new learnings or questions, as they fail to dive deeply into the complex challenges and flaws of our practice and teaching models. In contrast, self-study researchers are encouraged to embrace the intricacies of their practice and to tackle difficult questions, even though they may not be able to answer them. This more realistic and complete self-study creates new knowledge and learnings not only from our successes, but also from the "borders, limits, defects, and disabilities" of our practice (Lopate, 1995 in Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001 p. 19).

While collaborative self-study research is usually conducted by groups of professors, for our own project we felt our questions could best be answered by increasing the diversity of perspectives and "interpretations" (Louie et al., 2003) included. Thus, our group is made up not only of professors and educators (facilitators, and system-wise trainers) but also those who can speak to the impact of these teaching methods as learners. We understand that data from any one of these groups could be attained through more conventional research methods. However, in keeping with the underlying goals of the collaborative self-study methodology to create "challenge and change" (Coles & Knowles, 1996), our hope in this project was to start a new conversation from the ground up — one that both includes, and is guided by, diverse voices.

Our project involved biweekly audio-recorded group sessions. Within each session we explored a different question related to our experience of the Acting Out program. This generated discussion of key moments, memorable challenges, and successes. In several cases, and as discussed below in our findings, pivotal events or "moments" that were experienced by more than one member of the group were explored through multiple perspectives. In other cases, individual reflections were unpacked through multidirectional interviewing, with each member of the group having a chance to ask questions around points that interested us. Transcripts of these meetings were then reviewed by the group over the course of two full-day sessions. Through these sessions we identified our key themes and findings.

Composite Narrative

As a means of depicting data through stories, the composite narrative approach offers a way to explore the "embodied or contextual human qualities" (Wertz et al., 2011, p.1) of research data. As Wertz and colleagues (2011) described:

> This novel method is employed to re-present narrative data and findings from research through first-person accounts that blend the voices of the participants with those of the researcher, emphasizing the connectedness, the ''we'' among all participants, researchers, and listeners. These re-presentations allow readers to develop more embodied understandings of both the texture and structure of each of the phenomena and illustrate the use of the composite account as a way for researchers to better understand and convey the wholeness of the experience. (p.1)

For our unconventional research group, this approach offered a way to tell a story of our findings, in language outside of the traditional academic jargon that most of us find alienating, and at times inaccessible. Through exploring the interaction between our experiences and the nuances within them, we thought that this framework was best suited to the unique objectives and structure of the current research project.

Our group has also operated from the assumption that arts in general, and theatre in particular, can provide means of engagement — including for research — that other mediums cannot (Leavy, 2018; Prendergast & Saxton, 2016). This is not to prioritize simulation-based training over personal disclosure, or narrative over academic prose. However, given the roots of our group and the emphasis our research has placed on learning through dialogue, we decided it was most natural to present our findings in the form of a narrated script.

Using an active engagement process similar to the Acting Out program, we have translated the key themes and pivotal moments from our data into scripted scenes. As a group, we developed the context of and characters in each scene to reflect these themes. Our next stage involved supported improvisation. Using a version of "side coaching" (Spolin, 1999) two or more members improvised the scene while others called out keywords, drawn from our key themes, to help guide its direction. The recordings of these improvisations were then transcribed and developed into what became our final script. The scenes of this script have been divided according to themes. Each scene is presented in the Findings section, accompanied by discussion.

A Note on Power

The approach of this research project has been largely framed by Foucault's (1978; Mills, 1997) concept of "regimes of truth" — what knowledge is worth knowing within a given system, and who is given the power to decide that. We believe this question has important implications for models like Acting Out, and for the larger work and pedagogy of child and youth care. Considering this, we have been interested in using our own process as a way of exploring these questions, and in particular the nuanced ways in which power can impact and shape processes of knowledge production.

Given our research interests, ensuring diversity of social locations was a central factor in forming our group. Each member of our group could speak not only to different experiences of the Acting Out program, but also different intersections of marginalization and power — those connected to age, race, sexuality, gender, educational and employment status, and so on. Furthermore, though in our current capacities we have come together as colleagues, most of the previous relationships which originally brought us into each other's lives have been shaped by our power imbalances (youth–youth worker, professor–student, facilitator–trainer).

Given these power dynamics, we were aware of the increased ethical risks of our chosen methods. Individually and as a group, we have considered what we were willing to share in this process, and what we were not. As a way to give space to our individual voices and experiences, we have included in our discussion sections direct excerpts from our group dialogue. In doing so,

however, we have decided not to identify ourselves by name, but simply by the role, or perspective, from which we are sharing (trainer, student, professor, etc.).

In attempting to carve space for our experiences within an academic platform, we have also had to make difficult decisions about the overall language, structure, and content of our paper. We are well aware of the risks we have taken. We understand that in speaking to certain audiences we will probably lose others. We also understand that in attempting to speak as a collective "we", we have largely lost our own unique, natural voices (Willis, 2018) and have allowed those with certain forms of power (e.g., fluency in the language of academia) to largely shape our narrative. We have, in some ways, attempted to address this risk: In addition to incorporating our individual voices through direct excerpts, we have tried to find a balance in our "collective" voice between academic jargon and language that is clear and accessible. We have pushed to present our findings in a creative structure that feels connected and meaningful to us. Moreover, we have chosen not to categorize and divide ourselves according to our "rank" and institutional affiliations, understanding that without doing so, our contributions may appear less weighty to some.

Aside from these somewhat small efforts at resistance, we remain aware of the contradictions in our approach. We assumed that this process would be messy and problematic. However, our goal is not just to acknowledge the inevitable power dynamics and challenges of this group process. Ultimately, through the second cycle of our research, we are interested in unpacking and examining them in the hope of arriving at new learnings.

Findings

Scene 1

Two child and youth care students look for seats in a crowded classroom. Zahra looks towards the back of the room, but Dani pulls her to a seat in the second row. As another student, Vanessa, takes a seat next to them, the students notice a group of unfamiliar guests enter the room. Two of them look younger even than the students and seem out of place at the front of the classroom. One is over 6 feet tall with long pink and purple hair and a pierced septum. Another wears slacks and has locs covered by a baseball cap.

VANESSA: You see those guys that just came in? Those are the youth trainers from the Acting Out program. They're gonna do, like, role-plays with us or something.

ZAHRA: Shoot, is that today? Crap.

DANI: What? Are you nervous to go up?

ZAHRA: Obviously.

DANI: Seriously — why?

ZAHRA: I don't know. I just don't want to. What if I say something dumb?

DANI: Honestly, so what? Isn't that the point of going to school?? Isn't it better to make a mistake here than when it's your actual job?

ZAHRA: Yeah, but it's different. When you're actually *doing* it you don't have an audience.

DANI: Honestly, I don't really care if I mess up in front of you guys. I'd rather do it now than later.

ZAHRA: (*pauses*) OK … But, whatever, it doesn't really make it any easier …

VANESSA: Honestly I'm not even nervous I just don't really get the point. I didn't sign up for drama class. And I heard we each had to pay $30 for the semester to pay these guys.

DANI: Yeah, so?

VANESSA: I just don't really get that … I mean, I get the idea of paying for other trainings or even when we have guest speakers who are already working in the field, like when the woman came from Children's Aid. But why are we paying money for kids to teach us?

DANI: Are you serious?

VANESSA: Yeah, I am.

ZAHRA: Wow…

VANESSA: What?

DANI: How do you think you're gonna be good at your job if you don't listen to the youth you're working with?

VANESSA: Whatever. Obviously I listen to them. But this is different. This is school. And I'm paying to learn.

As Dani begins to respond, the students see their professor enter the classroom and approach the guests. He stops and smiles warmly, shaking hands with one of the guests, whom the students presume is the facilitator. He talks for several minutes to the same guest, then continues to his podium without greeting the other two.

Discussion

Addressing Performance Anxiety

As a model of learning, some of us have experienced challenges with simulation-based learning. From a student's perspective:

> [All I could think was] oh my God, I don't know what to say … panic, panic, panic … But also because everyone is looking at me. I know everyone in the class is having judgments … I know the teachers are having judgments. I know, probably the youth that were doing the scenarios were judging me, because that's what they were there for … to give criticisms and, and to give positive feedback and that kind of thing. So

> I knew they were judging me. And that stressed me out so much to the point where I couldn't even get to the point of being like, well, if this was a real scenario, what would I do? (Group session transcript, April 10, 2019)

Hearing about performance anxiety from students opened up many avenues in our conversation.We discussed the benefit of exploring different options for student participation. For example, while participation in Acting Out workshops has often been mandatory (all students in the class must participate in at least one simulation), an approach that has been recently explored is making particpation optional but attaching an incentive (e.g., 2% extra credit). As this option addresses the challenge for students who experience debilitating performance anxiety, we agreed that this is a structure that would be worth exploring further.

However, some of us in the group felt that the performance anxiety experienced in classroom simulations could be considered important preparation for the situations often experienced in the field when child and youth care practitioners have to make quick decisions or respond in front of an "audience" such as youth, colleagues, or the public. This reality was seen in the reflections of one of the graduates in describing their experiences as a practitioner since leaving the program:

> We're always the new guy, and we're always in really tough situations … Like, the kid I'm with now … my whole first week I was with him he would stand in the hallway and try to escape and scream and cry at the top of his lungs. And people would come out of classrooms and are staring at me, like, do you need help? Are you OK? And my ears are hot and sweaty and I have no idea what to do with this kid who's screaming. And I'm panicking because I know they're all watching me.… So it's the same idea right? Standing or sitting in front of your whole classroom of people, and they're all watching you as you're sweating and panicking. (Group session transcript, April 10, 2019)

As we know, high-pressure situations are an inevitable part of our work. Though little research has been done on performance anxiety among child and youth care practitioners, findings from other social service fields suggest that this is an important area for attention. For example, in studying the impact of anxiety on social work students, Baird (2016) suggested that "the concept of performance is important to consider to understand how social work students learn to perform as social workers and attend to the needs of individuals and communities, when impacted by anxiety" (p. 723). We also know that serious risks can exist when this pressure is not well handled in the field, including unnecessary escalations that too often lead to the criminalization of young people (Doucet & Pratt, 2018; Turpel-Lafond & Kendall, 2009). From this perspective, several members of our group felt that sheltering students from this high-pressure situation in the classroom may remove an important learning opportunity that is generally not provided outside of fieldwork.

A point on which there was agreement in the group was that more could be done to support students through this anxiety and provide strategies that could be transferred into the field. Echoing

other researchers (Baird, 2016; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011), we believe it would be useful to explore additional course content, such as guest workshops, class activities, and curriculum, that are focused on mindfulness and tools for processing anxiety and stress in high-pressure environments.

The Devaluing of Service-User Voices

One of the most discouraging outcomes of this research is how much commonality we saw in how service users' voices are minimized in multiple youth-serving and educational sectors. Such minimizing is done by students, professors, administrators, and practitioners. While these findings are not new (see Humphreys, 2005; Robinson &Webber, 2013; Schön, 2016), it was illuminating for us to compare our experiences of the ways in which "knowledge" and "experience" in our field continue to be organized along hierarchies of power. This occurs even in institutions and among practitioners that claim strong anti-oppressive and youth-centred philosophies of practice. In these cases, we have learned how large the gap can be between the rhetoric of an organization and the real, demonstrated ways in which young people's and service users' contributions are valued. This was conveyed by a former youth trainer in our group, who described their experience of transitioning into a facilitator's role, and working with certain professors who could not accept this shift in power:

> She would constantly undermine me, talk over me. I eventually refused to work in her class.… It was too painful to constantly be stepped on by this supposed "ally" in front of the class, who didn't believe that a young person could facilitate a class. (Notes from group conversation, January 27, 2020)

This bias against a service-user-involved teaching model was seen not only in classrooms, but also in the field. As a facilitator shared:

> When we first started and right to the end, we had people say, "We're not gonna hire young people to train our staff, right? Like, why would we do that?" And, "We're not gonna hire people who might be clients of ours." (Group session transcript, February 27, 2019)

As came up often in our group discussions, this resistance to seeing young people and service users as "educators" has had a direct impact on the sustainability of the Acting Out model and the ability to secure fair compensation for trainers. As shared by a former trainer, in describing the process of negotiating fair contracts with agencies and educational partners:

> It's like, no one's saying we're not doing good work. No one's saying that what we're doing isn't effective. No one's saying I don't see the point in this. Everybody sees the point. Just nobody wants to pay us for it. Or believes we deserve to be paid. (Group session transcript, March 13th, 2019)

These findings have important implications for service-user-involved teaching models. As researchers Brown and Young (2008) have suggested, the effectiveness of these models is dependent

on sustainable, equitable, funding structures. But these, in turn, would require a reappraisal of who, and what form of knowledge is "valuable" enough to be compensated.

Scene 2

The professor walks to the front of the room and introduces the group to the guests: Sam is the facilitator. She wears ripped jeans and has tattoos covering both arms. Cris, the one with the pink hair and pierced septum, is introduced as a trainer. Jamal, with the baseball cap, is the second trainer.

Sam introduces the Acting Out Model to the students. She explains that each scene is a compilation of real experiences, created by the young people who experienced them. The trainers will begin by acting out an "anti-model" — a scene during which the worker utilizes oppressive, dismissive, and ineffective approaches. After the anti-model, students will have an opportunity to critique the scene and discuss alternative strategies, which can then be enacted by a student doing a second take on the same scene.

The first scene is introduced to the students: A resident of a group home (played by Jamal) sits at a table across from their child and youth care practitioner (CYCP; played by Cris). The young person has lost privileges for missing curfew and will not be able to visit their mother on the weekend. The facilitator explains that the first run of the scene will be an example of the anti-model. Sam invites the students to watch the scene, consider what is oppressive, dismissive, and ineffective, and think about how they might engage differently with Jamal's character.

JAMAL [trainer, playing group home resident]: This is so fucked up. You know it wasn't even my fault, I told you I missed the bus!

CRIS [trainer, playing CYCP]: Hey, watch it. Don't talk to me like that. You need to calm down.

JAMAL: Like what?

CRIS: You know what I'm talking about. Don't swear at me. I'm not going to talk to you if that's how you're going to talk.

JAMAL: What the fuck … seriously?? Who cares if I'm swearing? Is that all you care about? I haven't even talked to my mom in two weeks. Do you even care?

CRIS: Look, of course I care. I wouldn't be here if I didn't. But you know there's nothing I can do. It's not my fault you missed curfew. And if you swear at me again you're gonna need to leave this office.

JAMAL: You guys are all the same. You don't care [*covers eyes with hands and sits silently, as if covering tears*]. This is bullshit.

CRIS: That's it, you need to leave. We can talk about this when you're ready to treat me with some respect.

JAMAL: What? Why?

CRIS: You know why. For swearing at me.

JAMAL: I didn't swear.

CRIS: You just did, you said "bull-s".

JAMAL: *HOLY*. Even when I try it doesn't matter. Whatever. Fuck this!

The facilitator walks to the front of the room and announces: END SCENE.

The facilitator then asks the group what they thought about the scene. How did the staff do? Was there anything they thought was effective? Anything that wasn't effective? Anything they would do differently? After hearing from the students, the facilitator then asks for a volunteer to replay the scene in the role of the group home staff.

After a few seconds of anxious silence and friendly prodding from the facilitator, Dani's hand slowly raises. She walks to the front of the room and takes a seat across from Jamal. As soon as she sits down, her heart starts to race. In her head, she knows that the scene she's about to act out isn't "real", but it seems like her body doesn't know. Somehow, it does seem real. Her heart still racing, she suddenly feels herself beginning to sweat. She looks nervously at the facilitator, who announces: SCENE.

Playing the role of the CYCP, Dani acts out the scene with Jamal. She tries her best to convey empathy and attentiveness and use creative problem-solving to address the situation with the group home resident by arranging for them to use the staff phone to call their mother.

When the scene is finished, the facilitator (Sam) walks to the front of the room. She explains to the group that the next activity will involve a debrief of the scene. First, she asks Dani, the student, what she thought went well.

DANI: (*laughing nervously*) Honestly, I don't even know! I was a little nervous so I don't know if I did anything right!

SAM: (*also laughing*) Well, I think you did *a lot* right! But I want to hear from you — what worked for you, what seemed to be effective?

DANI: Well, I was trying really hard not to escalate the situation. I didn't really think it was worth getting mad about the swearing considering *why* he was mad. If that was me, I know that would probably make me so frustrated if I was trying to open up to someone and they kept telling me to watch my language. And I wanted him to understand that I took him seriously and that I understood what he was going through … So … yeah …

SAM: OK, great. Was there anything that you would change?

DANI: I don't know. I wish I could have come up with a better solution or a way for him to see his mom. Maybe I should have made an exception this time, since he hasn't seen his mom in two weeks? I dunno. I just feel kind of bad that in the end I didn't really fix the problem I just sort of offered a little tidbit to make it not quite so messed up.

SAM: Hmm (*nodding*). OK, great. Let's hear from Jamal. Jamal, what do you think went well?

JAMAL: Honestly, I think you did great. I felt valuable and recognized when you looked me in the eyes the whole time you were talking to me. Like, I appreciated how you weren't looking at the clock or looking at the door like you needed to escape or something. That was really calming and I felt trust which encouraged me to open up to you more. And yeah, I also like that you didn't bother addressing the swearing. Oh, right (*looks at Sam, and smiles*), right, "feeling words" … I felt … relieved when you didn't address the swearing. Since I wasn't really swearing *at* you, I was more venting, I think you made the right choice by just ignoring it, at least in the moment, 'cuz that would have really put me over the top. I guess I felt heard, not just listened to.

And I like that … um, I felt supported when you didn't just cop out by saying there's "nothing you can do" 'cuz usually there is *something* that a worker can do, even if it's really small. And yeah … this isn't really one of those situations that you can magically fix, and I think it's good that you acknowledged that. Unfortunately, a lot of the rules in group homes suck and are stupid but you can't go around changing them every time someone gets screwed or else you'd probably get fired. There wasn't really any way I was going to walk out of that room totally happy. But I like the idea you came up with for me to use the staff phone … it was a good mid-way. And that made me feel like you genuinely cared … Um, I felt care … So yeah … that was really great.

SAM: OK, great! Jamal, was there anything that you think Dani could have done differently?

JAMAL: Well … one thing you said a lot of is, "I know how you feel" and "I understand". I was kinda triggered by that. I started to feel angry, or maybe not quite angry, but like, annoyed. A lot of workers say that when they really have no idea how you feel. Like, they've never lived in a group home or been a prisoner in their own home so I don't like when they say that. You don't need to know how I feel to care that I feel it. In the future I'd like you to find different words, and try not to make assumptions about how you think I feel, you know?

DANI: (*nodding thoughtfully*) Yeah, absolutely. I guess I've never really thought about it that way before. But … now that I think about it, I did say that a lot, I don't even know why … and yeah, that totally makes sense.

JAMAL: And … I don't think it was the best idea to promise me that there wouldn't be a problem when I tried to use the staff phone. 'Cuz I know how group homes work: even if you make a note for the other staff, people might still miss it. And then it's me that's gonna get in trouble if a staff person doesn't believe me. So yeah … I think it's good that you thought ahead to communicate with the other staff, but instead of promising me that there won't be a problem I would suggest just telling me what to do if there *is* a problem. Like, tell me where the note is or something, so I can tell the other staff where to find it if they don't believe me. That would have made me feel better … um, safer … (*pause*) … Yeah, I think that's all … You did really good!

SAM: OK, great! Thanks Jamal (*turns to class*). Are there any other thoughts about this scene?

Student in second row raises hand. Sam smiles and nods to go ahead.

STUDENT: I think she did well. You could tell she really cared and was trying to help. And she didn't get mad or anything. Like, I *really* didn't like in the anti-model how the worker kept telling him to "calm down". I know when whenever someone says that to me when I'm mad it basically makes me want to punch them in the face or something!

SAM (*laughs and nods in agreement. After taking a few other student comments, she looks to the professor*): Anything you'd like to add?

PROFESSOR: No, I don't think so. Dani, you did a good job navigating this one. I really like how you made use of questions. That was one of the tools we talked about last week, it was great to see you using it.

Discussion

The Benefits of Experiential Learning

Consistent with the literature (Bogo et al., 2012; Nimmagadda & Murphy, 2014; Wehbi, 2011) our findings suggest that learning through simulations can help students connect with content in ways that other teaching methods cannot. Student, trainer, and facilitator perspectives from our group described this in ways that were often visceral. For example, a facilitator described their experience in the workshops in the following way:

> I learned both from myself and other people that even when you know something's a simulation, and you've walked into it, knowing "this is all fake" — your *body* doesn't always know. And your body will have physical responses to this fake situation.… It feels very real, even when you know it's gonna end in three minutes. (Group session transcript, Feb.27, 2019)

Based on our experiences and observations we have seen that experiential learning (learning by doing) is an effective way of learning and teaching. We also believe that this embodied connection, and the link between "textbook content" and "real-world practice" is an important learning strategy that could be used more in child and youth care and social service education. Students in post-secondary classrooms spend much of their time sitting, listening, and engaging with textbooks. What we have seen as learners and educators is that approaches that provide opportunities to engage hands-on are an important and essential complement to the curriculum. As shared from a student perspective:

> I know, in the program, we went through many different things: we did PowerPoints, we did textbooks, we did the Acting Out. And I think the Acting Out provoked the most thought for me, because it was so hands-on. I think if we had just had the teachers sit there and talk "at" us about the scenarios, then I wouldn't have gone as deep into thought about it, as introspective as I did. So for me, that was one of the most important things. (Group session transcript, Feb. 27, 2019)

Elsewhere, we heard from a professor about their experience of seeing their first Acting Out workshop. In describing their emotional response to the scene — a young black girl being teased on the schoolyard for her natural hair, while the teacher looks on — they shared:

> And I think the moment was just so powerful, because it felt so real to me in a way that most of the curriculum doesn't.… And so, seeing that moment played out in front of me and in front of the students, and giving them the chance to think about it and hear directly from those who can speak to the impact of those types of moments, and then having the chance to reflect and strategize before they encounter those scenarios in real life. It was just, I don't know … I can't describe it.… (Group session transcript, Feb. 27, 2019)

The Re-Positioning of Expertise

We have discussed the resistance this program has faced in positioning young people and service users alongside other educators. However, our findings also suggested the often transformative impact of this positioning. Through our various experiences with this model, we have seen ways in which the traditional hierarchies of knowledge and experience can be turned on their heads. Through this model, system-involved young people take a role in the classroom not simply as guests to tell stories of their "bad lives" for the "edutainment" of students, but as paid educators with a specific skill set. The form of expertise they bring is positioned alongside other forms valued in our programs (including what is often referred to as "front-line" experience — as though doing child and youth care is akin to fighting war). In this way, young people's contributions become more than just an interesting "add-on" or exploitation of their stories.

We have heard the impact this re-positioning can have, both for learners and trainers. From a former trainer's perspective:

> Another big thing I learned was that I was smart enough and capable enough to go to post-secondary school. I never thought I could go to college, let alone university. I didn't know anybody who had gone to college or university. It just wasn't around me. I had never even stepped foot in one before. And it wasn't until the first day we had the workshops and I walked into a college and I was just like, oh, that's it? Like, it was a huge, mystical space for me. But now I'm like — *this*? I can do this. I could sit there and learn these things. So it was really empowering, because it was like, I can do this. I am smart enough. I'm smart enough to stand here in front of them, so I'm definitely smart enough to sit there and learn from other folks. So that felt really good. (Group session transcript; February 27, 2019)

While our study has documented some of the struggles and bias that youth trainers in this model face, realizations such as those above demonstrated for us why these struggles are valuable. This is something most of us in the group have learned through our own unique experiences as educators and learners while trying to find a footing in homogeneous learning spaces, and coping with

"imposter syndrome", our voices seeming likely to be devalued and the legitimacy of our presence seeming to be continually in question. What we have also learned, however, is that the very act of occupying these spaces can in itself be a form of resistance.

From our observations, the Acting Out model offers this potential for resistance by its very structure. In its ability to create opportunities for those who have traditionally been outsiders in these environments to carve space for themselves within them — and thus create an opportunity to re-vision themselves and their knowledge — we believe there is significant transformative potential.

Scene 3

The trainers come to their last simulation of the day, and Sam introduces the scene: a young person, meeting with their school CYCP, is questioning their sexual identity.

After the anti-model is acted out — in which the CYCP exhibits a clearly heteronormative approach, bordering on homophobic — Sam solicits feedback from the students, then asks for a volunteer to play the scene a second time.

Vanessa volunteers, then walks to the front of the room and takes a seat across from Cris.

As Cris (playing the role of the student) begins to share, Vanessa responds confidently and seems intent to convey an attentive, helpful approach. At one point, Cris tells Vanessa that they are worried about how their father would react if they brought a girl home. They disclose that their father is sometimes so rigid in his beliefs that he "scares" them. In response, Vanessa tells Cris that "you should be proud of who you are". "It's 2019!" she says. "Things have changed! You should never have to hide who you are!"

When the scene finishes, Vanessa is smiling. She tells the facilitator that she believes she did well and tried her best. Then the facilitator asks for Cris's feedback. After providing some positive feedback on tone of voice and use of empathetic language, Cris pauses. Then, looking matter of factly at Vanessa, they say, "I'm sorry, but you still have a lot to learn." Vanessa looks shocked and seems immediately on the verge of tears. Sam, the facilitator, glances at the professor. This particular instructor has told Sam in the past that he doesn't like to see students "pushed too hard". Aware of the professor's stern gaze and the emotional state of the student, Sam makes eye contact with Cris, as if to send a message that they should "take it easy".

Cris continues with the feedback: "I think you need to think more about safety", they tell the student. "I know you're trying to be helpful, but you know, you could get a kid killed with what you said. Not everyone has the luxury of being themselves all the time or having parents who accept them for who they are. Trust me."

Cris looks ready to continue the feedback, but Sam can see that the professor is becoming upset. Gesturing to Cris, Sam adds a few brief comments to wrap up the feedback process, then thanks the student. Vanessa quickly returns to her seat, looking angry and flustered.

After the workshop finishes, Sam and the two trainers walk to a nearby coffee shop to debrief. Sam jumps in:

SAM: So, what did you guys think of how it went today?

CRIS: Mmm … I think the first scene went really good.

JAMAL: Yeah, me too.

SAM: Yeah I liked that one too. Jamal, your whole "sandwich" feedback, and use of feeling words was awesome … (*pauses*) What did you guys think about the last scene?

CRIS: OK, to be honest? … I thought you were way too easy on the girl who did that scene.… I just thought she was really unhelpful and patronizing. And there was no mention of safety. I just kind of felt like you gave her a pat on the head and told her she did a good job. But she didn't … Like, *at all*.

SAM: Yeah, that was a tough one.… I agree, I really could have handled that better.… *(pauses)* You know this prof, right? He's always worried about us upsetting his students.… I guess that was in my head and it made me drop the ball.… You know what I mean?

CRIS: Yeah. But seriously, I don't think we're here to make friends. It's not our responsibility to make sure they don't cry or feel bad. I mean, do you know how many workers have made *me* cry?

JAMAL: And if they want to get paid to do this work shouldn't they start learning now that doing it well is hard?

SAM: Yeah, I hear you.… But we want them to learn too, right? I think it's kind of like a balancing act … you know, challenging them but not pushing so hard that they shut down.

JAMAL: Yeah, I guess.… But I agree with Cris. I still think we let that girl off way too easy. And what kind of message does that send? That it's OK to put kids at risk as long as they *mean* well?

SAM: I agree. I'm sorry guys, I messed up on this one.…

CRIS: It's OK. I know, it happens.…

SAM: Yeah.… (*pauses thoughtfully*) But OK … luckily we're going back next week … what if we revisit the scene then?

CRIS: Yeah, I think we need to. But we could just do, like a good model. No anti-model. Like, what we would have liked our ideal CYCP to do.

SAM: That's great. OK, let's do that at rehearsal this week. Think about our ideal response, and we'll explore that. Anything else?

The group continues to debrief, talking about what worked, their feelings, areas for improvement, and how they will address these sorts of moments in the future.

Discussion

Learning from Mistakes and Dialogue

One theme that was consistent in our discussions — and that we all agreed was one of the most important learnings from our self-study — was the role that mistakes and challenges play in our work. Whether as students, instructors, trainers, or facilitators, each of us shared stories of times when we had messed up or encountered a situation in our work that we were not initially equipped to handle effectively. In some cases, we learned through our group dialogue of times we had messed up when doing Acting Out workshops or trainings. In one session, a former student shared their memory of a workshop that they did not feel was effectively facilitated. In this workshop — in which a trainer played a student questioning their sexual identity, and a classmate played the role of the school guidance counsellor — the student felt that their classmate was not sufficiently challenged on an approach which was felt to be patronizing and potentially dangerous (not acknowledging safety issues around disclosure, etc.). As they shared with our group:

> As a queer person, who was in school and looking for guidance … in my head, I was like, maybe this should have been explored a little differently. The feedback was like … yeah, maybe you could have done this … but you did good otherwise. I also found empathy for [the student], who was clearly terrified of the simulation. And so then I was like, OK, maybe nobody else is thinking about it in the way I was thinking about it … so I didn't say anything. But I definitely thought it should have been addressed. That they should have been challenged more, in a sense. (Group session transcript, March 27, 2019)

Reflections such as those above offered us meaningful opportunities to evaluate our practice and our roles in contributing to anti-oppressive learning spaces. This, in turn, connected to discussions around the impact of constructive dialogue in confronting limitations and mistakes.

We found it interesting how often shame is associated with mistakes or lack of knowledge, even in learning spaces. As we have seen, students are often afraid to make mistakes in the classroom, or to ask questions, or to admit their own knowledge gaps or ignorance. As seen in the student experience shared above, this shame can also extend to the mistakes of others. In this way, publicly sharing a concern or highlighting the mistakes of someone else (a peer or an educator) is often seen as a form of "calling out" — that is, a way to challenge or undermine them. We believe this framing can create an environment in which critical, constructive dialogue can become seen as a form of combat. It can also minimize the perspectives and observations students are willing to share, for fear of being seen as "disruptive". In this way, many students learn to hand over control of their learning to the professor, with the assumption that the professor's own perspective, knowledge, and feedback can sufficiently inform their practice. As a student shared:

> I guess I just always put the onus on the instructor. And I think maybe that's wrong of me … I don't know … But I sit there and say, well, it's not my job. My job is to learn. And their job is to teach … [So] I'm going to stay here and let the bullshit go by and hope that they deal with it. (Group session transcript, March 27, 2019)

Reflections such as this reveal real dangers in our learning spaces. When students undermine their own perspectives or wisdom or choose to remain silent rather than contributing to the learning and growth of others, we lose the valuable opportunities that a group learning space offers.

Based on our findings, we believe there is value in learning models that are built around diverse sources of knowledge and feedback. We also believe there is value in learning models that are premised on the inevitability of mistakes and continual learning. Many of the reflections in our group touched on this. From multiple roles, it was found that a significant strength in the Acting Out model was the central role given to the collaborative feedback and debrief process. This was the case even when the process was challenging or did not go as planned. We understand that for some educators, the unpredictability of such an "open" process may be a deterrent. While this is understandable, we have found through our own experiences that accepting and then making use of this unpredictability in our classrooms seems better suited to preparing students for the realities of real-world engagement. This position is supported by educational theorists such as Boler (1999), who argued that embracing "discomfort" in our classrooms, and disrupting the need for constant predictability, can model for students the tools of imaginative, adaptable work.

Closing Thoughts

In documenting the first findings of this experimental research process, we are aware that this paper offers more questions than answers. However, we believe that these questions — around our understanding of experiential learning, professional development, expertise, and anti-oppressive practice — have implications for our own work and the future directions of child and youth care education.

Overall, our findings suggest that a simulation-based, service-user-involved pedagogy has the potential to inform professional development in unique ways. Though the scope of our research has been small, we have seen the impact this framework of learning can have for educators and learners. We have learned the sense of connection it can create — the opportunity to see a reflection of our own experiences in learning spaces that we know are otherwise prone to disconnection and homogeneity (Henry et al., 2017). We have heard from students about the benefits of simulations for active learning; they expressed an appreciation of the hands-on engagement and real-time feedback. This strengthens the case that is made consistently by educators in social service fields for more experiential learning in our classrooms (Bogo et al., 2012; Nimmagadda & Murphy, 2014; Wehbi, 2011). And we have heard the ways in which a model such as this can turn perceptions of knowledge and power on their head, challenging notions of what is worth learning and who is fit to teach. Particularly in North America, where service-user-involved educational models continue to be overlooked (Duffy et al., 2017), we believe the findings presented in this paper offer important avenues for future inquiry.

More research is needed to examine the large-scale impact of simulation-based learning and service-user involvement in child and youth care education. Our study has also revealed important

questions around these approaches, some of which surround structure, content, and teaching strategies. These include: What role should the "audience of peers" play in simulation-based learning? How can child and youth care students be better supported (through curriculum or teaching approaches) in managing anxiety in high-pressure situations? And how do educators find balance between "support" and "challenge" in the feedback process?

We believe further exploration is also needed into the current frameworks of child and youth care education. More research is needed to see the ways in which our professional mandate of anti-oppressive, collaborative practice aligns with what, and how, we are teaching in the classroom. This would open the door to questions including: How does our curriculum support dialogue-based learning? How do our professional ethics align with the ways different knowledges are integrated into our content? Whom do we consider worthy of being "educators" in our classrooms, and who is simply allowed to be "guests" in the learning process? And lastly: How does resource allocation (who we are willing to pay, and who we believe is worth being paid) fit into this equation?

We hope that more of our colleagues will take an interest in these questions and their implications. But we also believe that to continue effectively in this direction — to seek more innovative and inclusive methods in our classrooms — will require a willingness to revisit our own professional frameworks. It requires us to examine the underlying "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1979) — what counts as worth knowing and who is given power to decide — that continue to shape our practice and our pedagogy. If we can continue to explore these questions, we may be better equipped to build on new approaches that could lead to both practical learning and systemic change.

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