



Coming Out of the Classroom: Role Play as a Practical Tool for Practice Learning



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There will be no requirement for public demonstrations of role-play skills in this workshop!

Workshop Aims

To explore the learning and development opportunities available through role play:

- In the class room
- In student (& staff) supervision
- In student groups

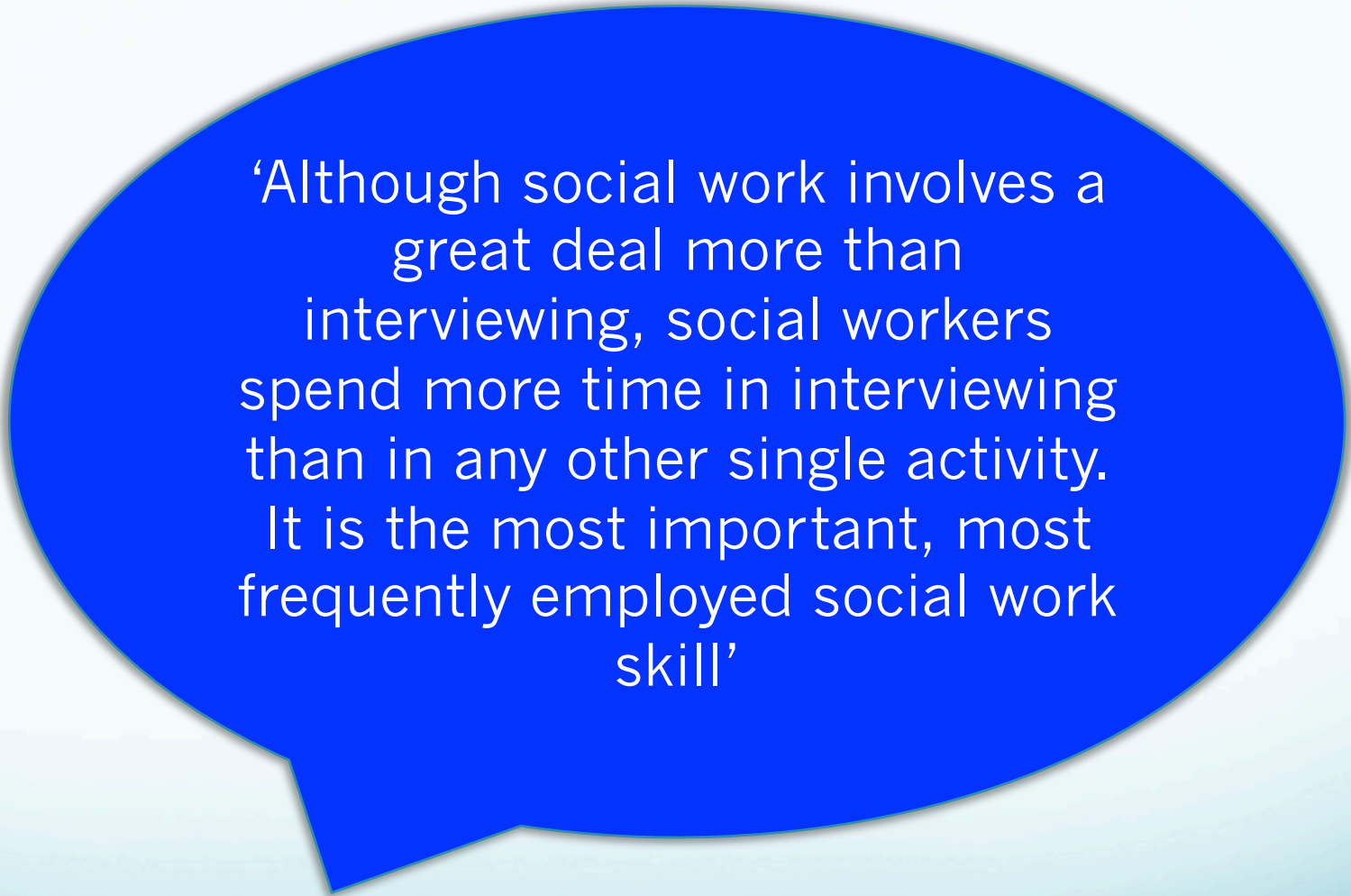
Theory & Practice of SW Module

- Aims to provide students with an understanding of assessment processes and how theory enables them to make informed choices about appropriate methods of intervention.
- It aims also to assist students to identify and develop the range of skills necessary for effective practice.
- Assesses student readiness for practice placement through a recorded role played interview & accompanying written assignment

The SW Interview

‘A conversation with a purpose that is designed to meet a ‘specific and usually predetermined purpose’

(Barker, 2003 p227 cited in Trevithick, 2012 p185)



‘Although social work involves a great deal more than interviewing, social workers spend more time in interviewing than in any other single activity. It is the most important, most frequently employed social work skill’

(Kadushin & Kadushin, 1997 p3
cited in Trevithick, 2012 p185)

Interviewing Skills:

Trevithick (2012, p186)

- Foundation Skills
- Questioning
- Confirming What has been Said and Heard
- Probing Deeper
- Drawing the Contact to a Close

Role Played Interviews



Role Play: why do it?

- Widely recognised as a method for acquiring knowledge, skills and values of social work practice
- Based on the belief that “.....simulation is an operating model of a real system (which) can replicate to some degree the behaviour of the real system over time”

(Barton in Flaherty, 1983 cited in Hargreaves & Hadlow, 1997)

How does it work?

In the Service User role:

- You have the opportunity to take on something of what it might feel like to be in a service user's shoes (empathy) and to reflect on this.
- Getting your message across, being listened to or not, being patronised, not feeling in control, feeling valued and that your views matter etc.
- This can have an emotional impact & you can learn from this.

In the SW Interviewer role:

- You have the opportunity to practice communication and interview skills and to experience what it feels like to (e.g.)
- Introduce yourself & explain your professional role; ask questions about sensitive issues; think on your feet and respond to what the service user is communicating to you (through verbal or non verbal means) etc.

Ground-rules for role play

- Learning requires practice so the acquisition of skills requires a group ethos in which making 'mistakes' is acceptable. The group needs to commit to support the learning of whoever is practicing their SW skills. Whether undertaking service user role or observer role and giving feed back this should be interviewer centred.

- Service user role players should never be impossible to help and should respond positively to useful strategies from the interviewer.
- Role playing is not about acting- it is about experiencing imaginatively by identifying with the service user's social situation. Attempting to act out characters based on stereotyped notions is unhelpful.

- Feedback should be given in a constructive way; if an observer gives feedback in a negative or clumsy way, others should help the person to reframe it.
- At the end of the role play, the group should take responsibility for ensuring that role players safely return to their own identity. This is particularly important when there is a strong emotional component.

Role Played Interview Assessment

- Students allocated a RP partner
- Two case scenarios (One plays service user one plays SW)
- Students see scenarios ahead of the assessment & are encouraged to prepare but not rehearse
- Role played interviews are video recorded
- Students prepare a written assignment reflecting upon skills demonstrated and developing an initial assessment
- Must pass both elements to pass module & proceed to placement

Assessed Role Played Interview Example



Effectiveness of Role Play

- Although, undoubtedly a valuable tool for skills practice, role-play between students has limitations. Some struggle to get beyond the unreality of the scenarios they are asked to submerge themselves into, both in the roles of service user and social worker.
- Wilson & Kelly (2010) found that students identified role-play as a strength of preparation for practice teaching whilst also identifying the artificial nature of role-play as a weakness

Effectiveness of Role Play

- **Internal Inconsistency** e.g. when a student in service user role introduces new and contradictory information.
- **External Inconsistency** e.g. when the student in social worker role lacks accurate information about law, policy or procedure
- **Interactive consistency** e.g. when existing role relationships such as being friends, impact on the reality of the role-play.

Naylor and Finger (as cited in Faherty, 1983)
Framework for Analyzing Effectiveness



unity.wordpress.stir.ac.uk

Role Played Interview Workshop



- Skills development before students undertake practice placement
- Scenarios based on Unity members' real life experiences
- Careful preparation & debriefing

- Ethical considerations
- Importance of careful preparation in order to protect Unity members and students
- Time to debrief afterwards
- Positive evaluation by students and Unity members
- More details in:
Hitchin, S (2016) Role-Played Interviews with Service Users in Preparation for Social Work Practice: exploring students' and service users' experience of co-produced workshops, *Journal of Social Work Education* (forthcoming)



Student Views

‘I really enjoyed it. I felt that the interview with the Unity member felt almost like I was in practice as it was their real problems which allowed me to feel empathy’.

‘ Role-play is not as terrifying as everyone thinks; I can do this!’

Student placement reflections on role play

- Role play helped them feel more prepared for direct observations of their practice on first placement
- Helped in managing anxieties about direct observations
- Enhanced confidence in engaging directly with service users and carers
- Developed understanding of importance of empathy
- Enabled self-reflection on skills and values
- Developed skills in receiving and giving feedback

Use of Role Play in Supervision

- Draws on Practice Educator's existing skills
- No additional training/resource implications
- No additional time commitment

Techniques to Address Specific Learning Needs

- Rehearsal
- Revision
- Reversal
- 1:1
- Student Groups

Rehearsal

- Practice of core skills (as in Uni)
- Rehearsing aspects of a meeting they are planning
- Preparation for direct observation
- Building confidence when student appears nervous
- Practicing how to present information at a multidisciplinary meeting
- Practice responding to questions about a piece of practice in preparation for a hearing/case conference
- Opportunity for PE to gauge readiness

Revision

Addressing learning points from practice experience such as:

- Student getting stuck in a meeting with a service user
- Working with angry/resistant people
- Experience of being challenged by another professional
- Struggling to articulate their assessment recommendation in a multidisciplinary meeting
- Issues identified in D/O or Reflective Journal

Reversal

- 1) PE taking on Service User role & student taking on SW role (Rehearsal & Revision)
 - 2) Student taking on Service User role & PE taking on SW role
- Demonstrating different techniques
 - Helping student to experience how different approaches might feel
 - Modeling good practice
 - Helping student to develop empathy



Don't call it role
play;
just do it!

Small Group Exercise



Reference List

- Hargreaves, R. and Hadlow, J. (1997) Role-Play in Social Work Education: Process and Framework for a Constructive and Focused Approach, *Social Work Education*, 16, 3, pp. 61-73
- Hitchin, S (2016) Role-Played Interviews with Service Users in Preparation for Social Work Practice: exploring students' and service users' experience of co-produced workshops, *Journal of Social Work Education* (Forthcoming/Available Online) at <http://hdl.handle.net/1893/24510>
- Trevithick, P. (2012) *Social Work Skills: a practice handbook 3rd Edition*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.