

South East London (Social Work) Teaching Partnership

The Experiences of Social Workers who Teach Social Work Students in the Classroom

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Abstract

Government-sponsored social work teaching partnerships commenced in England in 2015. A principal aim of the partnership initiative (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015) was to improve the quality of teaching on pre and post-qualifying social work training programmes. This could be achieved by strengthening links between higher education institutions (HEIs) and employers of social workers, with associations generally forming within the same geographical area. The pilot phase of the initiative funded four teaching partnerships in England, one of which was the South East London Teaching Partnership (SELTP). A key element of the SELTP work programme focused on inviting practising social workers from three south east London local authorities to come into the classroom at Goldsmiths, University of London, to teach social work students on undergraduate and postgraduate social work degrees. Social workers who taught at Goldsmiths were designated the title 'teaching consultants'. Focus groups were conducted with teaching consultants to understand their experience of teaching at Goldsmiths and to investigate whether this experience affected them or their social work practice. The aim of this paper is to present findings from these focus groups, which were conducted in 2015-2017. The paper suggests that social work teaching partnerships can affect social workers, social work students, universities, local authority employers, communities and service users in positive ways, some of which are surprising and unexpected.

Summary of Findings

1. Social workers decide to become teaching consultants for various reasons. For some social workers there is a self-oriented motivation to teach social work students, fuelled by a desire to expand their skill set and job opportunities. Other social workers are driven by an altruistic concern to make a positive contribution to the social work profession, the next generation of social workers, their local authority employers and community. It is likely that a mixture of self-oriented and altruistic reasons influence social workers to undertake the teaching consultant role.
2. Becoming a teaching consultant was generally a positive experience for social workers interviewed in the focus groups. Social workers usually liked the experience of teaching in the classroom, as working with students was largely a positive encounter. Being appreciated by social work students helps to underpin the positive experience of teaching. Social workers enjoyed talking about what they do. Social workers enjoyed interacting with and receiving enthusiasm and positive feedback from students in the classroom.
3. Student enthusiasm in the classroom to hear about social work practice helps social workers to rekindle their own enthusiasm for social work practice.
4. Meeting with academics in advance of teaching and attending teacher-training sessions can help teaching consultants to plan and prepare their teaching. The teaching experience was also challenging for some social workers for a range of

reasons including inadequate preparation time with the lecturer, uncertainty about their role and the attention of students when they are focused on assignments with imminent deadlines.

5. Teaching consultants employed a range of pedagogical approaches to engage social work students. Some of these were traditional (e.g. delivering a lecture with the aid of PowerPoint); others were more creative and imaginative (e.g. using a form of 'speed-dating' to explore how to undertake a Section 47 investigation using case study materials; Socratic Q & A approach; teaching consultants engaging in role-play with groups of students).
6. Social workers reflect on their initial experiences of teaching to improve subsequent teaching encounters with students in the classroom.
7. There is a range of positive consequences arising from social workers teaching in the classroom. Social work students get to meet social workers and learn how they practice. Social work students value practice knowledge.
8. Social workers also learn *from* teaching in the classroom. Social workers who teach make temporal and spacial connections between the teaching space of the university, the time when they were social work students, their day-to-day working environment, their careers and future social work practice.
9. Tangible practice benefits from teaching include reflecting on practice decisions, adopting a different approach to supervision, supporting social work students on placement more effectively, interacting with service users in a different way, and seeing other professionals differently.
10. The consequences for local authority social work practice may also be influenced by the position and power of the teaching consultant/social worker within the local authority.
11. The impact of teaching on social work managers may lead to social work teams changing their practice, interacting with other teams in different ways and may lead to new community initiatives.
12. Teaching consultants act as ambassadors and have the potential to showcase their local authority employers in a positive light. The presence of social workers in the classroom may nudge students to be more receptive to working after qualification for particular local authorities.

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Introduction

This paper presents findings from focus group interviews with social workers working in three south east London local authorities, who taught social work students at Goldsmiths, University of London. The opportunity to teach at Goldsmiths arose when Goldsmiths and the local authorities successfully competed for state funding to form a university-social work employer teaching partnership. Funding was provided through the social work teaching partnership initiative (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015). Goldsmiths, University of London, Southwark Council, Lewisham Council and the Royal Borough of Greenwich came together to form the South East London Teaching Partnership (SELTP).

Driving the teaching partnership initiative was the view that the quality of social work education could be improved if universities and local authorities worked more closely together to deliver social work education in the classroom. While the primary policy intention was to improve social work teaching, this paper concerns itself with examining the experiences of social workers who taught in the classroom and the effects of these experiences on their professional identity and their wider social work practice. By considering wider social work practice, the benefits of the teaching partnership initiative for local authorities, service users and communities can also be explored. The paper begins by introducing a number of educational theories, which are useful to consider as they may offer a theoretical justification for the involvement of practising social workers in the student social worker classroom. The paper then reviews the policy context for the teaching partnership initiative before introducing the reader to the South East London Teaching Partnership. The paper then considers the research approach taken before introducing and reflecting on findings from focus group interviews with social workers who taught at Goldsmiths.

Practice Knowledge and Practitioners in the Classroom

HEI professional training programmes have been criticised for their insufficient relevance. Entwistle (2005, p.72) contends that too much focus on programme learning outcomes results in less attention being paid to the holistic or distinctive features of professions, leading to restricted curriculum content and assessment styles. Entwistle (2009, p.20) tells us what students want to learn who want to join a profession. He suggests that students want to make connections between the content of a subject and its value to their future careers: 'where students have a clear vocational goal, it forms an important driving force in studying, leading them to look for immediate relevance in their courses' (p.20). In addition to the view about the need to align training programmes with later practice requirements, there is a view that professional education should be about ensuring that professions and professionals are respectively evolving and becoming more productive. Whether these aspirations are located within an enlightenment or neo-managerial vision of the social world, educational theorists have increasingly been challenged to detect key features of professional training programmes. The argument can be framed as follows: by identifying key features of what students need to learn in order for them to practice competently, professions and educators will reap rewards. Professions can generate the knowledge and evidence to distinguish themselves from other professions. Educators should aspire to searching for the 'holy grail' or the essence of a profession, leading them to zoom in on what is essential for students to learn.

Educationalists have proposed a range of theories to explain what it is that a professional training programme needs to do. For example, a body of knowledge has emerged which suggests that ‘threshold concepts’ are present in disciplines and professions; these concepts constitute a form of knowledge which is difficult and essential for students to acquire in order to understand the essential nature of a profession or discipline. Threshold concepts’ key proposition is that “there are certain concepts, or certain learning experiences, which resemble passing through a portal, from which a new perspective opens up, allowing things formerly not perceived to come into view” (Land et al., 2010, p. ix). Going through the portal enables students to experience new ways of understanding the essential elements of a discipline or a profession. What constitutes a threshold concept has been considered in social work education (Foote, 2013). Martin & Hollows (2016) suggest the presence of two significant threshold concepts in social work education: students need to learn how to integrate theory and practice and students need to develop the capacity to critically reflect. Educationalists have also developed the concept of signature pedagogy (Shulman, 2005) to highlight forms of learning and teaching which are representative of discipline-specific professional training programmes. Signature pedagogies are not only concerned with the best ways of imparting knowledge within particular professions as there is also a recognition that students become socialised into a disciplinary field. Larrison & Wynne (2013) suggest that a signature pedagogy in social work has three coalescing features: the pedagogy must help students to think and perform like social workers; it must assist students to develop their professional selves; and forms of teaching and learning should be offered to socialise students into the profession. The socialisation of students into a profession resonates with Lave & Wenger’s (1991) idea of professional students undertaking a journey to enter a community of practice. Smith (2009) highlights three elements of a community of practice. First, there is a common domain of interest or competence among practitioners. Second, a community exists where members have opportunities to undertake activities, discuss work and share information - opportunities which facilitate learning. Third, there is a practice element, with practitioners drawing on a well of experience, tacit knowledge, particular tools of the trade and ways of working.

These educational theories imply that professional students need to acquire practice knowledge and that practitioners play a significant role in facilitating students to think like a practitioner. History and professional regulation tell us that social workers play a key role in framing and transmitting practice knowledge to social work students during practice placements. While the practice placement space is seen as the typical location in which practitioners teach social work students, the social work teaching partnership initiative expands the educational input of practitioners into the classroom. We recognise from other professional training programmes such as Forensic Science that students welcome lecturing input from practitioners currently practising in the classroom, recognising their contribution to be ‘important, engaging and interesting’ (Gentelli, 2015, p.7). However, we know relatively little about the potential benefits accruing from practising social workers teaching social work students in the classroom, especially any ancillary rewards which may arise after practitioners return to their everyday working lives.

Social Work Teaching Partnerships

Whether the motivation to act is driven by political ideology (McNicoll, 2016) and/or by a concern about the quality of social work education (Narey, 2014), recent years have witnessed a ‘period of unparalleled change’ (Forrester, 2016) in English social work education. A number of social work training initiatives have been introduced in England, one being social work teaching partnerships in 2015. The teaching partnership initiative lends itself to analysis in terms of rational policymaking (Pople & Leighninger, 2004), where policy drivers can be identified. From a functionalist perspective, one obvious consideration is the state’s own justification for the partnership initiative. An interesting point from which to understand the state’s positioning and justification for the initiative is to examine the government-requested evaluation of the four pilot teaching partnerships (Berry-Lound et al., 2016), where a particular historiography is offered to explain the introduction of the policy. The state narrative framing the historiography is familiar within policy formation cycles; put simply, there is a social problem that needs fixing. Or more specifically, there is a problem affecting social work practice and the state needs to fix this problem.

Berry-Lound et al. (2016) map out the narrative. In the wake of perceptions that the quality of social work provision was not always satisfactory or relevant, concerns were raised that similar shortcomings were present in social work education (e.g. Narey (2014); Croisdale-Appleby (2014)). Following the publication of these reports, Berry-Lound et al. (2016) suggest that the state responded to this policy concern by developing a programme to improve the quality of social work education. Berry-Lound et al. (2016) state that one of the ‘key drivers’ for the Social Work Teaching Partnership (SWTP) programme was the objective of enhancing partnership arrangements between HEIs and employer to produce more effective social workers. The university-local authority partnerships would lead to the students becoming better prepared for practice. Berry-Lound et al. (2016) note that raising the quality of social work education, training and practice is a central aim of social work policy.

In general terms, the narrative suggests that a problem existed in social work education in HEIs. State involvement was necessary to fix this problem in order to improve the quality of social work graduates and thereafter social work practice. In other words, the issue of policy concern is located primarily within the HEI: social work education was insufficiently relevant to respond to today’s social work practice requirements. This policy narrative can of course be criticised from at least two perspectives. First, the quality of social work practice may be affected by persistent cuts in the size of the Welfare State, where austerity measures in other public sector services place additional pressures on social work agencies and their personnel. Second, the nature of social work today means that social workers frequently encounter ‘wicked problems’ (Devaney & Spratt, 2009) where their input can result in diminution of crises within people’s lives rather than serving to expand their capabilities.

South East London Teaching Partnership (SELTP)

Secured through a competitive bid for State funding, the South East London Teaching Partnership (SELTP) was one of four pilot social work teaching partnerships established in 2015. The members of this partnership are Southwark Council, Lewisham Council, the Royal Borough of Greenwich and Goldsmiths, University of

London. A primary aim of SELTP is to strengthen university-employer collaboration and establish a south east London Centre of Excellence in social work practice, education and research. One of SELTP's objectives is to develop innovative approaches to improve the quality of social work education and Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Part of this innovation resulted in experienced social work practitioners and managers from the three local authorities working as 'teaching consultants' on the BA and MA Social Work Degree Programmes at Goldsmiths. Working alongside social work lecturers, these experienced social workers helped students to relate social work knowledge to everyday social work practice situations.

Module and workshop evaluations of the teaching consultant initiative indicate that social work students at Goldsmiths valued tremendously the presence of practising social workers in the classroom. Students like social workers sharing stories about practice knowledge that are both up-to-date and informed by legislation, policy and local procedures. Students value practitioners answering practical questions such as 'how would you do this' in social work practice. However, SELTP was also interested in understanding the experience of social workers who taught in the classroom and the impact of these experiences on social workers and on practice.

Methodology

Practising social workers who taught at Goldsmiths were designated the role of teaching consultant. Teaching consultants from the three local authority partners in SELTP were invited to participate in four focus groups between 2015 and 2017. Teaching consultants had undertaken teaching at Goldsmiths, University of London, by the time of their focus group interview. Focus group participants were recruited by the Director of SELTP, using a form of purposive sampling, suggesting that findings from this research should be treated with caution. Ethical permission to conduct the research was granted by the Research Ethics Committee, Goldsmiths, University of London. Given that South London is a relatively small professional social work space with strong social networks, there was a risk that people's identities might become recognised, even if pseudonyms were used. Therefore, slightly altered versions of research participants' stories were generated by changing traits such as gender, age, ethnic background and the nature of the social work team/service to eliminate the risk of identification. Respondents were reassured that the research was being conducted independently of SELTP, thereby reducing the potential for conflicts of interest or partiality. Focus group sizes varied from 6 to 14 people.

Stewart and Shamdasani (2014, p.47-48) identified a number of strengths and weaknesses of focus groups over individual interviews. They report that the advantages of focus groups are that they can stimulate conversation and spontaneity, foster the emergence of new topics and offer a sense of security to respondents. However, they also report that it may be difficult to generalise findings to a wider population because of non-probability sampling practices and because the responses from group members may not be independent of one another. Bias may also be present because of the domination of opinionated members. On the other hand, focus groups also make it easier for a researcher to gather data more quickly and efficiently. The first focus group was run as a pilot to form an impression of experiences and reflections of teaching consultants. The final focus group included questions to

understand whether the experiences of social work managers were different to those of social workers who performed the teaching consultant role. Focus group interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were analysed using thematic and narrative analysis, keeping the research aim and objectives in mind.

Findings

1. Why Do Social Workers Want To Become Teaching Consultants?

Social workers are motivated to become teaching consultants for different reasons. First, a self-oriented motivation, linked to the teaching consultant's own professional development, may be present. The teaching consultant role provides social workers with an opportunity to try out new skills, perhaps opening up future career opportunities. Second, a more outward-looking motivation exists among teaching consultants. Social workers are motivated to influence the professional development of social work students, to contribute to the local authority in which they work or to enhance the development of the social work profession. Third, some social workers are motivated by a combination of self-oriented and outward-looking reasons.

Self-oriented Motivation

In terms of self-directed motivation some social workers, such as Alan, are motivated to become teaching consultants because it provides an opportunity to develop their capabilities, perhaps opening up new job horizons. For example, Alan spoke about how the teaching consultant role extended his professional identity and gave him the confidence to think about his own future. He said

'Something about my identity as a professional as well, being involved in this thing, a teaching consultant... it's part of my identity in my, you know, in my job which helped you know do my own job...it's been, been really good'.

(Alan, Social Worker)

Altruistic Reasons

Social workers expressed a number of reasons for wanting to become teaching consultants, which had less to do with career progression and more to do with contributing to their profession, social work practice and community or the professional development of social work students.

For some social workers they were motivated to take up the teaching consultant role by a sense of developing the social work profession.

'We're professionals and that social work is a profession and I've always been quite passionate about the kind of professionalising and [as] someone of the profession and so it feels like having these links, making these links stronger both for us and for the students, like for us so that we are linked in, that we have a connection with university and that we, you can have that learning aspect and that teaching and that kind of I guess like an element of prestige'.

Source: (Beatrice, social worker)

As regards teaching social work students, some teaching consultants do not see this role solely in terms of imparting their knowledge and experience. They position themselves as 'stakeholders', shaping the development of new practitioners. Some social workers, with more social work experience or working at a management level, make connections between moulding social work students for future practice and improving the lives of service users. Razia, a social work manager, offers this broader systemic perspective; she demonstrates how her input ultimately benefits the service user. She says

'I feel like we're the stakeholders actually, you know, in terms of clients that we work with, safeguarding - when you're involved in this process right through to student level you have to be considering when you're working with students, them working with families you're working with and how they'd be received and so you're, you're actively thinking about shaping, helping them to shape their skills and strategise you know even at this level because obviously you don't want them to trip up and you want to be able to be guiding them along the, the academics here so I think that in terms of client work we're acting, I think, as the you know kind of stakeholders in terms of you know because they're going to be, these students are going to be released onto vulnerable clients and so if you're able to you know I feel there's some kind of accountability in that for clients'.

(Razia, Social Work Manager)

For former managers such as Alex who have witnessed poor quality social work, the teaching consultant experience provides them with an opportunity to make an impact on the quality of future social work practice. Alex stated

'So I do see the impact because for me in my experience I will always sometimes be frustrated when I was in a management position at the quality of social work so I am now looking at how I could contribute to improving that as well so I have a voice to make changes really whether to the curriculum or just in being part of, of the sessions that we share with lecturers'.

Source: (Alex, Former Social Work Team Manager)

For somebody like Alex who is moving towards the end of her career, the teaching consultant experience provides an opportunity to share her wisdom in a different kind of setting.

'I mean you build up years of an experience and skill this forum is a different way in which you can share those experiences with students, so that for me was really good because you know I'm at a point in my career where I feel I've worked enough so that I can now share those experiences with inexperienced staff as well as students and that for me is, is valuable'.

Source: (Alex, Former Social Work Team Manager)

For other social workers, their own inadequate experience of social work training remains with them. For example, one teaching consultant looking back at his student days, remembered the frustration he experienced about a child protection module being too research-oriented. He wanted to learn more about the practice know-how, and this is what he offered students as a teaching consultant.

'Also seeing the link between theory and practice so being quite frustrated in my own MA about [it being] very research heavy and not a lot of links with how to do it, not remembering how much teaching child protection at all and then coming into a, a cohort where they feel like they're in a similar position and they want to know how to do it'.

Source: (Peter, social worker)

Many teaching consultants are motivated to teach again. Some teaching consultants such as Maria want further opportunities to teach because they perceive personal, professional and team benefits.

Interviewer: Would you become a teaching consultant again?

Maria: I'm definitely going to say yes. I've learned so much about not just how to do things and realise you know I'm quite passionate about teaching and I would be passionate about the job, I'm kind of like, you know, just kind of hold on to this and I'm passionate about teaching but I've learned about myself as well about how my confidence is increased and how I still enjoy learning for myself and learning how to give that information to somebody but also going off and finding out this information to lecture, giving that you said the right information so yeah definitely for those reasons and I think and it gives me when I go back to my team and I can talk to the other social workers, this is what I found out, this is something new and I can kind of spread it around other people and share it with them as well so that we're all kept up to speed really, new stuff is happening or what other students are learning and so its increased my position in how I feel in the team but also how my practice is, my own professional development is just being brought together a bit more.

(Maria, Social Worker)

2. Reflections on the Teaching Consultant Experience

General Reflections

Becoming a teaching consultant was generally felt to be a positive experience for social workers interviewed in the focus groups. Teaching social work students in the university was a different work experience to what happens in their day-to-day working lives. The teaching experience can also trigger memories of their own time as students and reminded some social workers of how much they enjoyed spending time in an educational environment. Not surprisingly, those social workers who volunteered to become teaching consultants were keen to make the opportunity work. Teaching consultants generally liked the experience as encounters with students were largely positive, as students wanted to learn. Being appreciated by social work students helped to fortify the positive experience of teaching.

'...the enthusiasm from the group and their willingness to learn and their participation, you know I found it quite, quite powerful experiences really coz I thought that wow these are a group of young, well not young actually, they're just a group of students who want to learn and they're keen to learn. I think some of my anxieties at the beginning was around when you walk into a room and there's like two people there or you walk into a room and half of them are kind of bored, disinterested, how will I manage that? Thinking about the planning of the sessions that I did but I didn't experience that luckily'.

Source: (Angel, Social Worker)

'Not just you know what it looks like [in] theory but how do you do it and strategies and really hungry for those kind of things and then giving case examples and they were just like sponges really, just saturating everything so you felt that it was really valued'.

Source: (Mark, Social Worker)

'I've got two colleagues that also on the same team, we all do this and we have some really interesting conversations ourselves. All of us say how just it's just given us so much more enthusiasm and all three of us you know and then when we talk about it at, we try and talk about it in the wider team'.

Source: (Nana, Social Worker)

A sense of pride emerges for some social workers as a result of being endorsed by their line manager to apply for the role of teaching consultant and receiving an invitation to teach at Goldsmiths.

'It makes us go away and feel kind of invigorated and because we've you know it's nice to be able to say you're a teaching consultant at Goldsmiths and to get that kind of direct feedback as how well the students responding to what you were saying'.

Source: (Deborah, social worker)

The University – A Place to find some Space to Think About Social Work Practice

Student enthusiasm is not only responsible for social workers feeling positive about teaching. The significance of the space in which teaching consultants interact with students also plays its part. Coming to work in a university offers teaching consultants an alternative workspace to their day-to-day working environment. Getting away from the social work office and coming to Goldsmiths enabled social workers to find some time to pause and reflect. The teaching partnership offers social workers a different kind of temporal-spatial location in which to reflect upon their work. By coming into a different workspace, social workers highlighted the 'refreshing' aspect of working in a university environment, enabling them to make comparisons with their day-to-day working lives.

'I really enjoyed coming to it, it just feels like it's a breath of fresh air and I think because in your day to day work it just feels like it's become more and more busy and in our team it's, it's just, you just don't have time to stop and think'.

Source: (Monika, Social Worker)

Eimear (below) describes a kind of liminal space in which social workers and social work students interact. While both parties are interested in discussing the same subject matter, both are also coming from different perspectives: students are keen to understand how to perform certain tasks; teaching consultants are able to discuss how they have undertaken these tasks. However, the experiences of both parties cannot be understood solely in terms of students embarking on a journey to join a community of social work practice. Additionally, Eimear, by acknowledging the differences and similarities between higher education and social work spaces is highlighting the benefits of teaching consultants re-joining a community of higher education practice where participants are provided with time and space to enquire and to learn. Put simply, when social worker and social work students come together in the university environment, communities of higher education and social work practice are coalescing.

'Having a forum to, you know, grapple in a way with it as well, having not really had the space to necessarily to do that in that way over the time [in] practice like these guys[students] being in an academic environment again, the first time in several years and realising how refreshing that can be and that kind of appetite for learning that I once had and the students have and just it's a different, it's a very different environment to practice, and yet at the same time it's the same because they're learning the same thing that you're doing but yet it's so different and it's, I think there's something refreshing about kind of coming across that boundary'.

Possibly more uniquely, the distinctive character of Goldsmiths offers social workers a culturally rich and stimulating environment in which to spend some time.

'I love coming here [to Goldsmiths], listening to students. You don't mix with these in your regular life. You come to work, you go home, you have your friends, you socialise in that kind of area. You come here; they were protesting about something, I don't know what that was all about, it was interesting, they were performing something; I just like being in university to be honest. I enjoyed the experience. It was just kind of nice'.

Source: (Alexis, social worker)

But comparisons are not only made between the university and the teaching consultant's everyday social work practice environment. What can also be evoked by the teaching consultant experience are memories of the social worker's own experience of being a student as well as a realisation of the importance of education and ideas to inform social work practice. At a temporal level, the role of the teaching consultant affords social workers with an opportunity to reconnect to a previous time

when they were social work students. For some the teaching consultant experience evoked a positive memory of education and learning.

'I really enjoyed coming back into - remembering what it was like in education because I've been a social worker for a while now and it was, it was really nice coming [to Goldsmiths]'.

Source: (Immadara, Social Worker)

'being in an academic environment again, the first time in several years and realising how refreshing that can be and that kind of appetite for learning that I once had and the students have and yeah, just it's a different, it's a very different environment to practice'.

Source: (Jespera, Social Worker)

For some social workers, the chance to teach at a university provided them with insight into what happens on a social work training programme and led them to change their attitude towards academia.

'I, we didn't really have a huge amount of respect for social work education just based on my own experience of doing my degree, not that it was a negative experience, I just found that it was so not equipping me for the job that I was wanting to do or ended up doing that I've always had that slight negative like you know what's the place of it and does it really, it doesn't really do anyone justice, a lot of justice in terms of like how much is learnt and how relevant it is and I think that being here I didn't come to this university by the way, (laughs) being here now has changed that to feel positive about the academic side of social work erm which is nice because you can't, you don't, it's so important, it's just so important'.

(Source: Fred, social worker)

3. The Classroom

The invaluable contribution which teaching consultants bring to the classroom is their up-to-date practice knowledge and experience. Teaching consultants provide an opportunity to address the 'how do you do it' type of question which students ask in the classroom. If this is done in a supportive and open way, it helps students to reflect on

'their anxieties and, you know, concerns and aspirations and passions and motivations'.

Source: (Bob, social worker)

Preparing and Planning to become a Teaching Consultant

Participants described a range of activities that need to take place to facilitate the teaching consultant experience to run reasonably smoothly. For many social workers

this was their first experience of teaching. Standing up in front of a group of students for the first time is not an easy thing to do. It is no surprise that when teaching consultants and academics met or communicated together beforehand, the teaching experience was likely to run more smoothly. Furthermore, having a training session on how to teach students was also welcomed.

'I was getting anxious and she was helping me to think about different ways of delivering the teaching so like I used media and PowerPoint and stuff, but it's because I had those conversations and then I remember with - we did, we did this exercise around working out structure for your lesson, like you had to plan around the cases and we had to work out the times so that was really good as well so by the time I got to actually do, it I felt okay... and I felt quite comfortable so I think it was for me preparation and the academic meeting with me, making that time because I didn't have a relationship with her, I didn't know who she was and I was worried about it so that helped me a lot'.

(Source: Miriam, social worker)

How Do Students Learn?

Teaching consultants use a range of pedagogical approaches in the classroom. Not surprisingly, they employ traditional teaching methods like other teachers (e.g. using PowerPoint during solo teaching or joint teaching with a lecturer in front of a classroom of students). Teaching consultants draw on their own day-to-day work experiences to shape ways in which they help students to learn. For example, acknowledging the up-to-date practice knowledge which teaching consultants bring to the classroom enables lecturers and teaching consultants to structure joint teaching sessions, where there is a need to impart theoretical and practical knowledge. Marjorie talked about how the lecturer and herself divided up the teaching tasks:

'...What was interesting was that I could focus on the practical aspect of social work while she focused on the theory aspect so I could bring something live to the session and from my understanding the students really appreciated that because it was real, because I could bring real experiences of cases that were live and that were current'.

Source: (Marjorie, Social Worker)

Case Studies and Examples from their own Practice

Teaching consultants also employ non-traditional teaching approaches, some shaped by the pedagogical philosophy in Goldsmiths social work department, some informed by their own creativity and previous teaching experience. Irrespective of the type of teaching approach employed, the 'added value' which teaching consultants bring to the classroom is their willingness to introduce perceptions, representations and reflections on their day-to-day work experiences (*'I think it's something to do with practice wisdom that you bring in terms of live cases'*). Students are keen to understand how social workers approach different case scenarios. Teaching consultants can bring anonymised cases to describe to students how they undertake their work. When teaching consultants draw on their own practice, they can help

students to connect theories to practice. By sharing their practice, teaching consultants also open the eyes of students to the working culture and environment in which they operate. Students respond positively to hearing stories about how teaching consultants engage with service users.

'Students were really excited to see real case examples because I brought a load of that to the discussions, to the session and actually brought in some examples into what they were learning and they had a lot of questions as to you know what it is we do and how, they wanted to know a lot about how you actually do it so I was able to give some practice examples, which brought the theory to life for them'.

Source: (Alexandra, social worker)

However, as with any lecturer-student encounter, the level of interaction between teaching consultants and social work students can become more nuanced and complex. Some teaching consultants can be proactive and pose questions to students, helping the latter to reflect on social work approaches they would employ to address perceived challenges within social work case studies. The following reflection by Betty reveals a creative and engaged form of teaching and learning, where a social work case study within a module study unit is used as a platform to explore a range of perceptions and possibilities.

'I went to a couple of [case study] presentations as well and you see, you can't see, not the gaps, but the I suppose it is really in a way the gaps that they experience so you can give them a hypothesis and say have you thought about this, produces loads of questions about practice, what would you do in this scenario, saying that - they were so interested in what would really happen, they've got something on paper and they've done a presentation and they would just then ask many more questions about what would you do in that situation? What if this happened instead? What do you think? And it's really, you know you can see the keenness and really that's what I really enjoyed as well seeing students being really keen'.

Source: (Betty, Social Worker)

Case study materials can also be used to discuss the limitations of what social workers can do.

'I think also sometimes being able to say well do you know what I'm not sure what I would do and maybe manage expectations around well sometimes we need to think really, really carefully and we don't know everything, erm we might never know everything and I think that's helpful'.

Source: (Peter, Social Worker)

Role Playing

Social work students at Goldsmiths are encouraged to role play different people in a social work case study. The teaching partnership opens up new possibilities around role playing. Specifically, teaching consultants can role play how they would perform the role of the social worker, in some ways offering a form of social learning encounter with social work students. Alfreda saw this opportunity as a way to teach by example in the classroom, opening up new ways for students to think about and try out practice

'When I was doing the sessions around mental capacity and that and it was really helpful, we did actually some role plays, well I brought a couple of role plays but then I was actually asked to role play oneself so that, in a way that was quite, so it was almost sort of teaching by example in the room'.

Source: (Alfreda, Social Worker)

Role play can also be executed in creative ways. One teaching consultant, for example, devised a role play which involved a form of 'speed-dating' which involved a series of two student social workers coming together to try out different theoretical approaches to undertaking a section 47 investigation (Children Act, 1989). In his reflection, he emphasised how students learn by doing activities and noted the longer-term effects of his teaching.

'I think the majority of the class that I took they were really eager to get out there and so it felt that having a practitioner describing live cases was for them more of a relief in terms of making a bit more closer particularly because not everyone learns in the same way in terms of theory and a lot of people learn by doing erm and just an example I suppose I mean we did a lot of role playing and we did a, two sessions where we modelled a section 47 investigation in a speed dating kind of way so you literally had 2 social workers coming in kind of focused on a particular model such as task centred or psychodynamics, being observed and then having a bit of feedback and going, it was very much timed in a way that you would, in reality you know you go and you have a snapshot and you go out and I think they really found that really useful and really struggled with and really brought to kind of mind for them just what practice would look like and I think for a lot of them it was a shock and so I really saw learning in that, I really saw learning and I can still see that learning because I meet some of them on the train coming and they're like yeah you know this is, this is how it is and so you really see the transition progress which I think is really valuable'.

(Source: Tim, Social Work Team Manager)

Challenging Experiences of Teaching

Insufficient planning and preparation time with the lecturer in advance of teaching lead to problems in organising and delivering materials in the classroom.

'No, we didn't trade, we didn't meet up so then the lecturer lectured and I kind of listened in and then did the sort of case studies and presentation and possibly at the

case studies need to be discussed with me beforehand because of things in there that I wasn't so sure about'.

(Source: Adam, social worker)

But even with planning & preparation, teaching can remain a challenging experience for some teaching consultants. Partly this may be explained by the nature and philosophy of the social work teaching approach at Goldsmiths. For example, active and self-directed learning in small student groups is a pedagogic approach used in the study units in the social work programmes at Goldsmiths. For some teaching consultants it can be tricky to locate their teaching role in relation to this pedagogic approach. On the one hand, this pedagogic approach encourages students to be creative, open-minded and imaginative in their encounters with case study materials. On the other hand, the teaching consultant informed by her experience and familiarity with professional roles, procedures, deadlines, organisational culture and risk thresholds may offer a more conclusive sense of how a local authority would expect her to address the presenting issues within a particular case study. This can lead to some teaching consultants experiencing a sense of awkwardness and uncertainty, a reaction not too dissimilar with social work students trying to negotiate a way forward in the early days of placement. Perhaps this tension can be understood if we accept that a culture of learning and a culture of practice do not always align. While social work students are learning to become part of a community of social work practice, perhaps teaching consultants are also learning to become part of a community of social work teaching practice.

'I didn't really know how my role would work in that group and again that's not through not being told, it's just through not, through being inside of this environment for so long and it's like obviously it was a creative way of learning, it wasn't like preparing something and sharing some information or doing some kind of brief presentation or something like that. It was kind of being part of a group where they were doing group work and I was just really conscious not to lead but then as in not to like guide them too much but then also to make a positive contribution and I felt really like pressure I put on myself, like I must make a positive contribution to this group but not give them the answers and like and it's really hard because when you've got a group of people and there's no obvious leader you know it's that dynamic is quite tricky to know like how do you fit in'.

(Source: Mary, Social Worker)

Partly the challenging experience can be due to factors beyond the teaching consultant's domain. But of interest is how can a teaching consultant respond to difficult situations not of their own making. Teaching consultants – probably like all teachers – fear alienating or boring students or working with students who are tired or disengaged. One teaching consultant talked about the difficulty of engaging students on a Friday afternoon when they wanted to go home. What she revealed was an intuitive sense of connecting with the students in a creative and unplanned way. By reflecting on the needs of students, she was able to continue with the class, overcoming a potentially upsetting experience for her.

'I had a session Friday before last and it was on a Friday afternoon and they were all very tired and they'd just been given some feedback about their draft dissertations so they were probably either, either elated or really like oh my God you know I'm going to hang myself (laughs in the background) do you know what I mean so they all turned up like oh we got to do this now so I just acknowledged it coz I knew that's what, I was told that's what had happened so I acknowledged it and said how do you want to do this and maybe we could finish a little bit earlier, it's up to you because I could see that it wasn't going to work and I would never have thought about that before that's not how but it's taught me how to now work with students, adult students to find out where they're at and how best I can get them to understand you know what I'm doing there but also working with them as well and so I've learned how to do that and that's a real, lots of learning curves for me'.

Source: (Ruka, social worker)

Teaching for the Second Time – The Benefits of Reflection

Social workers who had taught in both the first and second years of the programme were interviewed in the final focus group. What was striking from their accounts was how they had reflected on some of the challenges encountered during their first year of teaching in order to identify and implement strategies to overcome these challenges during their second year of teaching. Some teaching consultants want to have more control and input over how they spend their time in the classroom. Greater input could be in terms of the time they spent teaching, the teaching materials they devised and used, and the pedagogical methods they employed in the classroom. When teaching encounters with students went well in their second year of teaching, teaching consultants expressed growing confidence in their own ability to teach. Offered here is a detailed reflection from Angela, who compares her experience of teaching over two years. From her account, one reads her growing confidence, her capacity to reflect on what could be improved and her passionate teaching personality shining through.

'In my first year I was sort of like a rabbit in a set of headlights at the beginning because I wasn't too sure about what I was supposed to be doing, how to present anything. And then especially with the knowledge and skills statement, trying to give back to students who had not had their first placement and I'm thinking that's too much information, they wouldn't understand that. So then I thought this year I'm going to adjust that, I'm going to change it. I'm going to get slightly different slides uploaded because this is going to be more geared for the BAs [undergraduate social work students], but the MAs were very different, they asked a lot more questions. They wanted to know a lot more in-depth about practice. I'm quite passionate about social policy, where things came from. One of the teachings I was doing was around physical disabilities so I started to talk about where the movement came from and how it started because it felt right to revisit that, because I felt so passionate about the services which are available now, and compare it and so the students would have a better idea of looking at different policies now, so I managed to link that in, and so this year I have been able to do more dovetailing with the lecturer that I'm doing the joint lecturing with and so we have a conversation about the lecture. And then we have a checklist about what I need to put in there, not just in practice, of maybe extra things that I can slip in, to make it more interesting not only for the students, but for

me to be quite honest because I like revisiting all this stuff again. I'm quite passionate about certain subjects as well and I wanted to get that across. With the knowledge and skills statement pitching it right with the students - I check it out with them now. Have you ever been on placement yet? So in my mind, I know which way to go with it. In my first year I didn't have a clue how to do that. I'm managing to get the lessons a bit clearer and the workshops make more sense as well for me now when I do that. I go around and support the students, and I get them to look at different things. I pick up the newspaper and I must remember to tell them that. It's become so real for me now. I just won't turn up. I will have all the stuff which I've read and seen and I want to give it to them as additional pieces of work for them to look at or read'.

Source: (Angela, Social Worker)

'The second year I feel more confident around what the students have to do, therefore how best to complement that, how can I bring my experience to help the students. And I think you gain confidence'.

Source: (Miriam, Social Worker)

4. The Impact of Social Workers Teaching in the Classroom

This section examines the consequences of social workers teaching in the classroom. It considers the effects of this experience on social work students, teaching consultants, the colleagues and employers of teaching consultants, and service users.

Perceived Impact on Students

Social work students have reflected positively on their interactions with teaching consultants during end of module, year and programme student surveys. While the specific feedback of students gathered from other surveys is not included in this report, students have commented on the practice know-how of teaching consultants: social workers talk about their work experiences in the classroom, explaining what they do and how they interact with service users and other professionals. Social workers teaching in the classroom offer a rationale and context for their social work practice. Teaching consultants in focus groups reflected on the impact that their presence in the classroom had on social work students. Not surprisingly, what distinguishes them from the lecturer is the type of knowledge they bring to the classroom. For example, Joan who worked with a Goldsmiths academic discussed how they undertook different roles in the classroom and highlighted what she saw were the benefits for students, particularly in the form of practice knowledge she was able to discuss.

'We were able to plan it and she [i.e. the academic] was coming from a very kind of political theoretical and again I guess it was kind of ...bringing that into reality, I think helped to make it not seem like just a, a separate add-on to the course'.

Source: (Joan, Social Worker)

Similarly, Evelyn also highlighted the impact of students hearing about social workers' day-to-day experiences. The presence of teaching consultants in the

classroom may lead to increased student engagement and inquisitiveness about how social workers work with particular service users. It can also lead to students speculating about what to do if the circumstances with service users change.

'I know students talked about, oh gosh, it was really good to hear, you know, what you were saying Evelyn, the nuggets of your experiences and I think they quite liked that my experience with the students, they quite liked hearing about live cases and what would you do if and have you ever had the experience about this or you know really curious questions about what it's like, which I think was quite good'.

Source: (Evelyn, Social Worker)

At the same time, the communication of practice knowledge to social work students must be carefully scaffolded. Teaching consultants may have a lot of social work practice experience, but few have extensive lecturing experience. The following comment from Jeremiah is interesting, as it reveals a potential risk if social workers receive inadequate teaching induction. Specifically, experienced practitioners need to remember that they are working with students; failure to do so runs the risk of undermining students' confidence. While Jeremiah admits that social work students could have explored a case study in a more critical manner, he also later recognises that students need time to develop their capacity to think critically, a viewpoint already accepted by the social work lecturer.

'I just found myself as I was watching it thinking well actually in reality in practice I would recommend you actually think about it like this or if I was doing this, in a case I've had like this I would sort of challenge you to think of it in this way erm or you might find that in reality it doesn't quite work like that and things like that erm work like which was kind of in contrast to their lecturer who was really, really, really, really impressed and I kind of I think I'd forgotten that they, it was their first attempt, their first year'.

Source: (Jeremiah, social worker)

Impact of the Teaching Consultant Experience on Social Workers

The teaching consultant experience impacts on social workers in a number of different and surprising ways. First of all, the experience is generally a positive and enjoyable one for social workers. They are engaging with an audience motivated to listen and understand their experience and knowledge of practice. Teaching and interacting with students can rekindle social workers' enthusiasm for social work, develop their professional capabilities and remind them of the value of social work education. The teaching consultant experience can enable social workers to reflect on and improve their social work practice.

Positive Encounters with Students and Rekindling Enthusiasm for Social Work

Teaching consultants' experience of teaching led to some social workers renewing their enthusiasm for social work practice. Specifically, the keenness shown by students to learn about social work practice helped social workers to rekindle their own enthusiasm for social work practice. This was a perspective repeated across the focus groups. For example, teaching consultants stated

'Students were actually very enthusiastic which I found really helped me to get some you know enthusiasm back generally'.

'Being encouraged by the calibre of the students'.

'I came away from the sessions feeling kind of you know like more enthusiasm about my job'.

'You were doing something that was really quite useful and that their feedback was very encouraging'.

'What do you get back? Some of it is about being re-energised. It's about the remembering, remembering why social work in the first place, so some of it is about that'.

'The enthusiasm you get from them kind of reinvigorates you'.

'We're still doing our jobs and actually maybe more effectively or better or more enthusiasm because we have this opportunity to come and have a different identity'.

(Views of a number of teaching consultants)

The positive reaction became embodied for some teaching consultants, a state of being perceived by colleagues on return to their social work teams.

'I just think it's helped; it's really given me enthusiasm back, which I think then is noticed in the team as well. I mean my social work staff said to me whenever I came back that I looked fresher and I seemed more, I seemed different'.

Source: (Malcolm, Team Manager)

Developing Professional Capabilities

The teaching consultant experience can help social workers to identify strengths and gaps in their knowledge. Social workers can take stock of the practice knowledge they have accumulated over the years. Teaching students can also reveal gaps in knowledge which need plugging.

'I kind of, it's encouraged me because I sort of found out that I do know some things, that I've absorbed along the years, sort of challenged me as well to go and look up things that I felt maybe I was a bit dodgy on'.

Source: (Mark, social worker)

The teaching consultant experience gave social workers an opportunity to identify unknown skills and learn new ones.

I really enjoyed it, I think it gave me a kind of a, a newness to my existing role and kind of added a different skill set which you know realising that I'm quite a good teacher...I really, really enjoyed the whole process and I learned an awful lot. I learned how to actually deliver something to a group of people which I had never done before. I learned some IT skills.

Source: (Rebecca, social worker)

The experience of teaching helps social workers to imagine new career possibilities. The teaching consultant role extended a social worker's capabilities by helping them to develop new skills. This can help some social workers to expand their professional identity and open up new career possibilities.

'I want to come back and do more training and stuff now as well but it's made me think about like career paths and things like that and you know starting to think about like getting to social policy or education myself or something like that and I just think that's really important if we can then get people that have got experience of being in practice going back to do those kinds of strategic jobs then it only kind of bodes well for the future'.

Source: (James, Social Worker)

Practice Benefits

This section highlights a range of practice benefits which can arise as a result of social workers undertaking the teaching consultant role. These benefits can be thought of in terms of social workers developing new ways of thinking about social work practice and more tangible benefits concerning how aspects of social work practice (e.g. supervision) are conducted.

Re-thinking Social Work Practice

When teaching consultants and social work students interact, the trajectory of learning is not only in one direction. While students hope to understand how experienced social workers tackle work, teaching consultants also benefit in terms of using teaching opportunities to think about their work in different ways. A manager, Malcolm, talked about how contact with students and being in a different environment allowed him to take a different perspective about work.

'I think leaving what is a very stressful non-stop environment and coming here allowed me time to breathe and reflect and think about cases in a different form, away from social workers and managing them and think about cases with students who brought something new and we could discuss it and there was no pressure to have time schedules or outcomes and so it was, it was very stress relieving and so it was, it was, it was very beneficial and I think, I think very different actually'.

Source: (Malcolm, Team Manager)

Undertaking the teaching role at Goldsmiths enabled social workers to reflect on the relevance of theoretical knowledge underpinning their practice.

'It made me look at theories and things that perhaps when you're in day to day work you're just getting on with your day to day work because there's so much and so having time to think and plan, I found really enjoyed'.

Source: (Alan, social worker)

'And I think for us as practitioners it just brings to life the fact that you're not practicing in a vacuum, actually the theory supports what we're doing and how we do it and I've been out of academics for a long time so it was just good to be refreshed again and reiterating that what I'm doing is based on something as well'.

Source: (Sinead, social worker)

Encounters with students can be constructively challenging: teaching consultants need to explain and defend their social work practice decisions. Student encounters generate reflective opportunities for social workers to consider whether they could have done things differently.

'I think one thing that I found beneficial as well was having discussing practice, it was current and we were thinking about it on our team, that having a different point of view, like their[students] point of view so they saw it with fresh eyes and I'm being challenged by them actually, why are you doing it like this and having to account so you come outside of your organisation and you almost I think that's really helpfully actually having that almost like a peer kind of revision in a sense but you know so I think that, that was helpful'.

Source: (Rachel, social worker)

'When there's some sort of conflict or [students say] I don't, don't quite agree - when you think, oh my goodness have I been doing it wrong all this time (laughs) let me just make sure that I do know what I'm doing, so yeah, it is a chance to go back and look, look it up, make sure that actually the way you understand it is the way it should be'.

Source: (Richard, social worker)

Teaching requires social workers to revisit ideas underpinning their practice. Teaching opportunities enable social workers to reflect on the framework guiding their approach to social work, which can lead some social workers to question why they approach social work tasks from a particular perspective. For example, Martha critiqued the legislation framing her approach to social work, eventually leading her to become more passionate about her role as an advocate for social justice.

'But I think one of the biggest things has been how it has impacted my own practice, so in the work we did about the mental health act, the mental capacity act, I brought it back to the European Convention on Human Rights and got really passionate about

why we have that - and a lot of people, students didn't know that history of where human rights legislation came from, and how that is a grounding, and I'm looking at my work as a social worker, being a social worker from a human rights perspective, and that's really good because you get re-energised into why you are doing this in the first place, this job...I guess by revisiting it. I asked myself the question why do we have the human rights act, why do we have the mental capacity act, because I thought that might help the students to work out why we have it. Although I felt that I know why we have it, I just did some work thinking let's just strip it all back, and so it built it back up, if you see what I mean'.

Source: (Rebecca, senior social worker)

Tangible Practice Benefits

Having to think about what you are going to say to students motivates a social worker to consider an area of practice in some depth. Not only do students profit from an experienced social worker's reflections on a topic, the people with whom the teaching consultant interacts in her everyday working life are also rewarded. The benefits for practice occur in different ways.

Supervision

Teaching students can help social work supervisors to reflect on the nature of supervision in social work practice. Getting an opportunity to think about practice or reflecting on the form of interaction with students can lead supervisors to reflect on how they conduct supervision sessions. Nadia, for example, highlighted how preparing for teaching helped her to think about supervision in a different way.

'I've never done that [teaching] before and I really enjoyed thinking about what is, what is important about this subject, what and how to bring that across and how to describe it. I found that really refreshing and you know in a strange - it has also helped me going back into work because when I've been supervising it's actually helped me perhaps be a bit more reflective on how day to day supervision is sort of, it's really gone both ways with me I would say'.

Source: (Nadia, senior social worker)

Shopna, a team manager, was reminded of how social work learning in an interactive process between people during her teaching session with students. This experience helped her to reconsider the meaning of reflective supervision with staff.

'That two-way process [during teaching] reminded me that we have to change our perspective and look at the work we are doing. That's come very much from having that relationship with students. It's also informed how I supervise the work of the social workers that I have. I've always been a big fan of reflective supervision. But I guess what it did, it refocused me on what that might mean, in relation to the way I choose to work and I choose to practice. I had to look at myself critically too'.

Source: (Shopna, team manager)

Supporting students on placement more effectively

For those teaching consultants who are also practice educators, the experience of teaching at Goldsmiths enables them to make connections between what is taught at the university and what students do on placement. The opportunity to meet and teach students at the university enables practice educators to be better informed about students' pre-placement learning experiences, opening new ways to think about placement learning opportunities.

'Now I kind of get more of an idea of what they're being taught here and how I can adjust how I do this theory practice with them on placement so knowing a bit more about what they're doing in the classroom I can then change a little bit of how I work with them on placement so I can be a bit more in-depth about certain aspects of their academic stuff and they have actually been, you know it's really interesting that they will, now I'm more be willing to look at some of the assignments they do and look at the theory and that because this is what we need to do from the academic side of things. For me it feels like it's tied up a bit you know rather than that's that academic side and this is the placement, it feels its fluid now, I've got more of a sense of what's happening to the students particularly in the final year, for me to then be able to support them in a slightly different way'.

Source: (Alan, social worker)

Similarly, Gemina (below) sees the teaching experience as an opportunity to understand what students have been learning at Goldsmiths. This in turn helps her to think about how best to support students when they start their social work placements.

'I learned how to find a different way to support and enable all these students that I have on placement with me as a practice educator and to be able to do it in a different way in a classroom setting and for me that's what would be important because I just get more of a sense of where they were at in academic studies so when they came on placement it felt different for me'.

Source: (Gemina, social worker)

Teaching at Goldsmiths also helps social workers to empathise more with students. In turn this can lead to social workers becoming more willing to engage with the student induction process when the latter commence their social work placements.

'It's made me a lot more generous in my thoughts towards you know like I seemed to be, somehow found myself on the induction list for another team in social work'.

Source: (Alison, social worker)

Interacting with Service Users

Teaching encounters force social workers to think about their practice. James gave an example of how teaching led him to read an article about trauma and how this affected his own thinking about practice.

'An area in one of the intervision sessions[i.e. student peer group supervision] we were talking about trauma and the impact of trauma on you as a practitioner and it made me go away, find an article for the group and when I was reading the article it kind of helped me think about some of the experiences that I've been feeling and some of the struggles that I've been having so that was really good for me coz it actually made me read something and put a name to some of the experiences I had...so the article was for them but when I read it, it was for my(laughs)'

Source: (James, social worker)

He then went on to talk about working with a family and how he changed his practice as a result of encounters with students

'I did a case where they were the reflecting team and they've given me ideas that I'm going to go away and write a, a, a therapeutic letter to a family that I've been working with where I was erm having some misgivings so yeah'

Source: (James, social worker)

Seeing other professionals in different ways

Becoming a teaching consultant provides an opportunity to think about your work and your relationships with colleagues in different ways. Arguably a reflective space – as well as a teaching space – has been created to enable social workers to think about their own organisations and the relationships with other professionals.

'I was doing a session in working in an MDT which I'm part of and some of the student were asking different questions and I'm thinking do you know what I'm going to go find out a bit more about that. I'm going to look at these themes in a slightly different way with my health colleagues so I've started to look at that in a different way and actually made a couple of suggestions, you know and extended it the following way because of what the students were saying, I'm like I never thought about that before, you know when you're stuck in something you can't, you're not on the outside looking in so much but they kind of were and I thought ooh I never looked at it this way, that was helpful'

Source: (Amy, social worker)

Impact if you are a manager

A significant theme emerging from the research was the consequences for social workers in terms of returning to their day to day practice. However, the level of your social worker role can influence how your teaching experience affects your capacity to influence practice. Put another way, a teaching consultant may have more power to alter a social work team's practice if she has a managerial role. This is evident in the case study of Deirdre (below), who highlights the impact of her interaction with students. She suggests that her contact with students altered her thinking about the impact of austerity and the need for community and commercial organisations to become more sensitive to dementia sufferers.

'When the students ask me about empowerment, enablement, what are you able to do with your service users, what's available out there. I start to think, gosh, it goes from bad to worse, in my head. I think how limited things are and available. I take it back to the team, and I'm thinking that there's got to be a better way of dealing with this. it makes me question more, fire off a load of emails to people, to say that we got to find a way around this. You know it's there but when the students ask you really interesting questions, it makes me reflect on the practice that we have in our team and how we can do things differently. I say at the team meetings why don't we do things in a slightly different way. Can we not link up with another team to do something different, so It starts to make you more creative in the way you work, and I really like that as it kind of empowers me to do something a bit more. I know about legislation, but it is about the other more creative ways of working and the students have some great ideas, when they do workshops as well. I liked that idea. I'm going to see if I take that back somewhere. It refreshes your own practice.

Interviewer: Have you taken this forward?

Deirdre: We have linked up already with two teams in our building, so we're doing some more closer work. So we're trying to do some work in the community with different shops and banks and things like that, so they become dementia aware. I did some teaching on dementia the week before last. And I thought there is a better way of doing this. I'll link up with them, so they said we were thinking about doing that, but we don't know how to do it, so we got our heads together. We're finding ways of getting the local community. We're going to look at shops and banks and how to be a bit more dementia friendly. What to look for? If there is any safeguarding financial abuse in banks, would spot something, if somebody was taking out £300 every day, would you not question that. So let's tighten this up a bit more. It felt like it wasn't moving at a pace, I suddenly felt it needed to be moved at only because I was fired up by what the students were saying, so we are speeding up on that as well. It's really interesting how it can make you - It just makes me revisit how much I love doing this job. And why I came into it in the first place, and it is to make a difference, yes, it is about social justice, yes, let's do something about. It was MA students that had these lovely conversations about what it must be like to go into a care home with somebody with dementia, a lack of resources, what's in the community, there's got to be something else'.

Source: Deirdre, Social Work Manager

Sandra, a team manager, provides a powerful case study example of how her team's approach to practice was galvanised by her own interactions with students. She discusses how the local authority process of making placement decisions was affected by discussions with students on race, class and social justice.

'It's a two-way process because what I'm experiencing are students who are coming with that particular mindset already; they are already coming with the ideas of empowerment, equality; they are talking in terms of race and class; that's something that seemed to have slipped off the radar for statutory services; I don't think you really hear social workers talking about the notion of race or class or the impact that poverty may have on families and the choices that they make, so it's two-way from the perspective of being able to receive that information back again, but also about

wanting to use it in a way which is also productive when I go back to work, knowing that there will be a cohort of those students who are going to come and work within our organisation. It has galvanised for me a different way of discussing the cases. Within the adoption team, we had an opportunity to look at a case in its totality. We will look at a matrix, for example, we will look at a child in terms of matching criteria. We'll ask some very good questions about the identity, the location, contact, all of these quite vibrant issues. But actually I wanted it to be broader than that. I wanted that before social workers who was a Family Social Worker, to come along and book a slot for the agency decision maker to decide or not whether they should apply for a placement order. I wanted to ask the social worker more questions about how they got to that particular point, because what I was hearing a lot about there's 26 weeks and we have to rush it forward'.

Source: (Sandra, Team Manager)

Impact for Local Authorities

Recruitment Agents for Local Authorities

'It's advertising for the local authority at the end of the day'.

Source: (Toby, social worker)

We all have a tendency to see the world from our personal, professional or organisational viewpoint. An illuminating insight from the research was how social workers reflected on the potential benefits of the teaching partnership for local authorities. Social workers saw themselves as potential recruiting agents for their employers.

'Well if we're linked with this university then the likelihood is hopefully if we model it well is that students will come and they'll apply for permanent posts'

Source: (Aquarius, social worker)

There was a sense among some teaching consultants that local authority employers have not fully considered the potential impact of the teaching partnership in terms of attracting social work graduates from Goldsmiths to work for them. Teaching consultants identified the formation of relationships with students in the classroom as a vehicle to present local authorities in a good light. Instead of seeing the local authority as an inanimate organisation, teaching consultants put a 'face' on the local authority.

'I would imagine that you know through the relationships that we've established that it would make applying to whatever borough we're from more attractive so yeah, you know I know you know I want to go and work there'.

Source: (Aquarius, social worker)

'Well if we're linked with this university then the likelihood is hopefully if we model it well is that students will come and they'll apply for permanent posts'.

Source: (Alex, social worker)

Discussion

The social work teaching partnership initiative builds on the well-established tradition of inviting social workers into the classroom to speak about their work to social work students. The teaching partnership initiative sees the State endorsing and mainstreaming this teaching tradition. Teaching partnership funding enabled the South East London Teaching Partnership to increase practitioner involvement in the classroom from 10% to over 60% of the curriculum. The effects of this initiative interest policymakers, not only to establish how social work students benefit from practitioner input in the classroom but also to understand if the teaching experience rubs off in any way on social workers.

Social work students soak up stories about contemporary social work practice. Students benefit from hearing about present-day practice decisions, often complex decisions taken over time within a complex working environment; they hear about statutory frameworks and how these get translated into practice by local authorities operating with finite resources; students are also given insight into the organisational culture of local authorities and the nature of the roles they will later perform.

But the benefits go two ways. Social workers also learn *from* teaching in the classroom. Focus groups revealed teaching consultants making temporal and spacial connections between the teaching space of the university, the time when they were social work students, their day-to-day working environment, their careers and future social work practice. These connections materialise because the experience of teaching asks social workers to think again about their understanding of social work knowledge, their practice and the context within which they work. The teaching experience can evoke memories of their own learning. The experience can remind some social workers of their own frustration as social work students when the classroom did not deliver sufficient insight into the mechanics of practice. Opportunities to teach can also re-engage teaching consultants with education in more positive ways. It reconnects social workers to the joy of learning, the significance of reflection and case exploration, and the relevance of theoretical and research knowledge in their work, associations which some might find it easier to cultivate within an educational setting than in a busy social work environment. The teaching space is different and provides an opportunity to pause and think about casework in an alternative way. At the very least, the reasons for discussing practice decisions are likely to be different in a university setting than in a social work office.

The experience of undertaking the teaching consultant role is generally positive, as students welcome input from those in practice. Social work can be a stressful occupation, where it can be difficult at times to engage with people or help them to manage challenges in their lives. In contrast, which of us does not want to engage with a group of students who are keen to listen and understand why we do the things

we do? The enthusiasm of students to learn is felt by teaching consultants, contributing to social workers reflecting positively about their encounters with students. Furthermore, encounters with students can lead teaching consultants to become more enthusiastic about social work itself. This enthusiasm can become embodied and witnessed by colleagues at work. And for some, the opportunity to shape the next generation of social workers was the compelling reason to teach.

At the same time, teaching social work students is also not an undemanding experience. Contact with students results in social workers reflecting on and justifying their practice decisions. Students assist practitioners to think again about their practice by asking questions, posing hypotheses and challenging decisions. Social work students generally have not acculturated to social work settings; they ask questions and offer reflections with no or limited local authority experience, assisting social workers to 'think out the box'. The teaching space therefore affords teaching consultants with a creative opportunity to reflect on cases and work, outside the deadline, procedural and organisational constraints of the local authority setting.

'to be able to do that [reflect] with lots of different people in a different environment is really, really useful'.

Source: (Petula, social worker)

The nature of the teaching consultant role lends itself to social workers thinking critically about the information they wish to convey to students. Having to think analytically about one's day-to-day social work role can facilitate teaching consultants to unpack, for example, the legislation framing their practice. This in turn can lead to teaching consultants revisiting the reasons behind why they became social workers and speculating on whether primary legislation such as The Care Act can be applied by organisations in more innovative ways with service users. Alternatively, time spent with students can embolden and refresh teaching consultants. Furthermore, if the teaching consultant also happens to be a manager, this can lead to new ways in which teams work and spawn innovative community practices.

Social workers also commented upon the impact of their presence in the classroom in terms of the benefits it offered local authority employers. By undertaking the teaching partnership role, they felt that they acted as ambassadors for their local authorities. Not only did they see themselves as social workers who could impart their practice knowledge, they positioned themselves as representatives of local authorities. Their presence would encourage social work students to perceive their local authority employers in a positive light, nudging students to be more receptive to working with particular local authorities in the future.

The teaching partnership initiative offers practicing social workers an opportunity to share their practice knowledge with motivated and enthusiastic social work students. Teaching consultants and social work students have evaluated positively these encounters. Therefore, is there still a need for social work lecturers in the classroom if social work students can learn about current practice from practising social workers? This question can be considered from a number of perspectives. Undoubtedly there are social workers who make excellent teachers and social work lecturers who fail to communicate effectively. However, all things being equal, it is also fair to propose

that the experienced practitioner in any field is likely to be more effective than the novice practitioner. With the advent of the teaching partnership initiative, what needs to be acknowledged is the presence of two overlapping communities of practice: the community of practice related to social work and the community of practice connected to teaching. Lave and Wenger (1991) propose a model of situated learning in which learning is contingent upon students participating in a community of practice. Learning to teach social work students also has to be learnt and is partly determined by the culturally specific forms of teaching and learning operating on social work programmes. Just as the position of students early on in practice placements could be described as one of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.108), so arguably is the position of social workers who become social work teachers. The experienced social worker is likely to be immersed in her own community of social work practice, but if she is a novice social work teacher, she is joining a community of teaching practice. She is therefore likely to trial pedagogic approaches and reflect on their effectiveness. It was interesting and not surprising to note that some teaching consultants in this study who taught social work students on more than one occasion felt that their subsequent teaching encounters were better.

A key to legitimate peripheral participation is 'to learn to talk' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p108). But learning to talk provided some teaching consultants with a challenge, witnessed in some of their reflections concerning the study units. Social workers had to learn to adjust to the cultural form of teacher participation that the programmes espouse. To teach effectively, social workers need to identify learning outcomes and become familiar with the curriculum, but they also need to learn to participate in teaching and learning practices which shape the nature of teacher-student interaction. Teaching consultants, for example, working on study units have to find ways in which to legitimately participate in a learning environment that invites students to work together imaginatively to create hypotheses and possible courses of action to respond to social issues. These hypotheses and courses of action may be detached from the reality of statutory social work. Engaging with students on these terms can be a particularly tricky challenge for those who only see their 'local authority' way of addressing social problems. The novice social work teacher may have to deal with anxiety management, performance management, a new learning culture, not having enough knowledge to answer questions, letting students take the lead in their own learning.

The 'value-added' which practising social workers bring to the classroom is their specialist and practical knowledge (Trevithick (2008, p.1212). What remains is a need to somehow connect this specialist and practical knowledge to research and theoretical knowledge. Social work lecturers, removed from day-to-day practice, may be best placed to help students make these connections to aid professional formation. I draw on my own experience of co-teaching an assessment study unit with a relatively recently qualified social worker. While he imparted knowledge concerning how he and his local authority would deal with a particular case study, what was missing from his reflections was a sense of conditionality. Other local authorities may approach the assessment in different ways; alternative arrangements could be put in place concerning how social workers from adult and children's teams work together; the historical dimension was also underreported. Of course practical knowledge is necessary for students to learn, but is it sufficient in order to perform as a competent social worker? Therefore, the teaching partnership initiative allows universities to

revisit their role in terms of educating social work students. While social work students acquire insight from social workers concerning how they practise, this understanding may be partial, particularly if practical knowledge has only been acquired within a limited range of practice settings. Practical knowledge needs to be connected to historical and political discourses, otherwise there is a risk that the social work student may be left with a limited contextual understanding of how social workers operate. Social work lecturers may find it easier to offer insight into wider structural issues at play, which may or may not remain opaque to social workers embedded within agencies.

Conclusion

Students studying to become professionals want to learn knowledge that is relevant to their future careers (Entwistle, 2009, p.20). One way of acquiring this knowledge is to learn from practitioners. In social work this form of learning usually occurs during a practice placement. The creation of the social work teaching partnership initiative demonstrates the State's keenness to promote and finance opportunities for students to learn from practitioners outside placement. Bringing social workers into the classroom as teaching consultants enables students to ask questions about how practitioners work with service users to address challenges and risk. The teaching partnership brings everyday social work into the University classroom. However, the University also affects social work practice. Social workers learn from teaching and they bring this knowledge back to their everyday working world. At their best, social work teaching partnerships are likely to foster benefits for a range of stakeholders (e.g. practitioners, students, local authorities, service users and communities), some of which are surprising and unexpected.

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