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Enhancing ‘Educator by Experience’ Led Social Work Training: Lessons learned from the development of a Teaching Partnership funded project

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Abstract

This paper shares learning from a project designed as part of a UK regional Teaching Partnership (TP) development to enhance service user and carer, or what we prefer to term 'Educator-by Experience, Led'¹ social work teaching and training. The paper illustrates development of the project and the approach taken to agree the project remit and undertake the work. We discuss the project guiding principles and some challenges we encountered within the project development process and reflect on some lessons learned. The overall aim of this paper is to share practice-informed experiential learning to enhance 'Educators by Experience-Led' social work teaching and training. The paper will assist in enhancing the engagement of 'Educators by Experience' in the design, delivery and evaluation of social work education and training programmes.

Key words: Educators by Experience, Teaching Partnerships, Social Work Education, Trauma-Informed Principles, service user and carer involvement, Experts by Experience

Introduction

In this paper we share learning from a project designed as part of a regional Teaching Partnership (TP) development to enhance service user and carer, or what we prefer to term 'Educator by Experience (EbE)'¹, led social work education and training. As Department for Education/Department of Health (DfE/DfH) funded initiatives, all TPs are responsible for increasing standardised joint working arrangements between Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) and Local Authorities (LAs) across a range of social work education activities. Among these activities is the enhanced engagement of EbE in HEI social work education and training programmes. As an example of a regional TP joint working arrangement, this paper illustrates

¹ The term 'Experts by Experience' is the common terminology used to discuss service user and carer engagement in social work training and education. However, as will be explained later 'Educator by Experience' was the term preferred by participants who took part in the design and delivery of the project discussed in this paper.

the development of an EbE education and training project, the strategies used to undertake the work, and the lessons learned from the process.

Conversations about language

The ability to define oneself, or the “refusal to accept the definition of oneself that is put forward by the powerful” is an important form of power considered by Janeway (1980, p. 167). As such, Janeway’s (1980, p. 167) “ordered use of the power to disbelieve” is an important element to consider within projects of this kind. This consideration was acknowledged through ongoing and in-depth discussions about the language and labels used, thus conversations about language occurred frequently throughout the project. In line with Beresford’s (2005) critique of the term ‘service user’, some of the group (though not all!) felt this term carried negative connotations. These included feeling stigmatised through use of this label and having one aspect of their identity and/or experience highlighted over others. McLaughlin (2020), for example, has commented on the importance of avoiding binary thinking when defining social work relationships. One can be both ‘service user’ and ‘service provider’, but the language that we use often ignores this complexity and “denies the multiple socially constructed identities we all inhabit” (McLaughlin, 2009, p.1108). The group shared their concerns that use of this label hid the diversity of their experiences and changed the way they were treated. This has also been discussed by others, for example, Beresford (2005) and Fox (2016).

When other options were discussed, for example, ‘Expert by Experience’ a similar lack of consensus was found in relation to terminology the group wished to adopt. Such a lack of agreement is supported in debates about language by Sweeney who argues ‘there is no consensus on acceptable nomenclature’ (Christmas and Sweeney, 2016, p. 10). The TP itself had used the terminology of ‘Experts by Experience’ and this was initially adopted within the project. Whilst it may be argued this carries more positive connotations, including recognition and legitimisation of people’s experiences, many group members disliked this term, arguing that they did not consider themselves to be ‘experts’. McLaughlin (2020) raised a similar issue with the term Expert by Experience, questioning how much experience should qualify someone as an expert.

The group continued to have conversations about language used and eventually settled on the term 'Educators by Experience'. It was felt this was a term that acknowledged everyone as part of the teaching team through virtue of their experience, regardless of what that experience was, and thus drew attention to the equal value of both academic and experiential knowledge when teaching social work students. This is the term used within this paper, but with the acknowledgement that conversations need to continue.

Project Background

There are many underpinning reasons for involving EbE in the design, delivery and evaluation of social work education programmes. Within the UK, involvement of EbE in HEI social work training activities is a mandatory requirement. Until recently, the role of EbE has centred primarily on involvement in admissions processes and/or presenting lived experiences as personal stories in the classroom (DfE, 2019). However, since TPs were piloted in 2015, there has been increased emphasis on involving EbE in more meaningful and diverse social work teaching and training activities. Consequently, in a TP evaluation report, the DfE (2019) highlight how several HEI programmes have begun to facilitate recruitment and involvement of EbE in strategic and operational development groups and teaching on modules across curriculums. DfE (2019) evaluation results highlight how, following development of TPs as a government response to the Narey (2014) and Croisdale-Appleby (2014) reviews of social work education (which highlighted need for formal partnership arrangements between HEIs and LAs), EbE participation is now considered crucial to training capable social workers.

Involving EbEs in design and delivery of programmes enhances social work education in multiple ways (Lonbay et al., 2020). Themes emerging from the DfE (2019) evaluation and other TP summary reports (Berry-Lound, Tate and Greatbatch, 2016; Macquire-Plows, 2019) include, while sharing invaluable experiences, the EbE agenda has become more clearly situated at the forefront of social work education. The value EbE bring to the student learning experience include enhanced personal development and professional capability through development of a critical awareness of inequality and oppression different individuals and groups can experience in society (Lambert et al., 2020; Lonbay et al., 2020). Several studies (e.g. Hamilton & Fauri, 2001) highlight how students new to the profession can begin to

develop a critical awareness of the personal and often intersecting gender, race, class, sexuality, ability and socio-economic inequalities, discrimination and oppression EbE can experience.

Morley (2015) suggests students' engagement with the life-worlds of EbE helps promote the mission of social work through development of practitioners committed to human rights, equality, and social justice. Involvement also helps encourage criticality and reflexivity in relation to existing prescriptive policies in social work contexts. For example, where described by EbE as stigmatising and/or disempowering this encourages students to challenge dominant practice paradigms as constraints to anti-oppressive practice (Grey and Webb, 2013). However, while most HEIs have long standing EbE recruitment and participation processes, with the introduction of TPs within the UK challenges have presented. Among these are ensuring equality of access to contribute to HEI teaching programmes and providing the range of support and training needed for EbE to participate effectively and in an enabling way as part of teaching teams (DfE, 2019).

The project

To enhance access of opportunities for EbE to contribute to HEI programmes, we describe a project which aimed to build capacity by understanding and addressing learning and development needs of EbE in relation to social work education. In the context of working with individuals and diverse EbE groups, complex needs, managing expectations and dominant personalities, mediating diverse viewpoints, for example, in relation to discrimination and oppression, and maintaining momentum have proved challenging (MacQuire-Plows, 2019). As a result, , 'why' projects should be developed and coordinated has become a central aspect of the success of EbE contributions to social work education.

However, while evaluations have been published (e.g. MacQuire-Plows, 2019) papers and reports sharing the process in relation to 'how' regional TPs have developed and sustained EbEs' contributions to social work education have remained limited. Within this paper we therefore draw on a project designed to increase capacity for EbE to be involved in social work education, and illustrate and reflect on: (1) the aims and objectives of the project

(2) how the project was designed and developed (3) some challenges encountered and (4) lessons learned. As authors of this paper, we were all involved in the project in our capacity as social work educators, either through virtue of our lived experience or in our role as academics. As such, our different perspectives are presented as we share personal insights in to how the project was conceived, designed, and managed alongside key challenges experienced.

Aims and objectives

Beginning in March 2017, the project ran over a 24-month period and was funded by a regional TP with a host HEI academic acting as project manager. The TP funding the project was situated within the North East of England. The TP programme committee which commissioned and oversaw the project was made up of regional partner representatives from 12 LAs and 6 HEIs. The overall aim of the project was to increase and enhance EbE involvement in social work education and training across TP partner HEIs. Three objectives included:

1. Development of a supportive network of EbE, practitioners and staff who were involved in social work education as members of a regional TP
2. Development of robust training for EbE to enable meaningful engagement in admissions processes and delivery of teaching
3. Increased awareness amongst social work academics about the value of EbEs' involvement in social work education and training and key issues associated with this

Across the TP region where the project was developed, as is common within the UK, several EbE groups were already established and engaged in social work training and education activities. However, Cook (2012) states 'authentic participation' is about "ownership" (section 3). To this end, it is worth noting that the first two objectives were established by the TP project committee, not by the HEI lead or EbE regional groups already established. However, the third objective was developed by the regional EbE group. The project development began by drawing upon a participatory framework, although this was constrained in several ways which we highlight. Cook (2012), for example, has considered

issues with terminology pointing out different people have used the term 'participation' to mean different things. For the purposes of this project, participation was viewed as ownership of the group over the development of the project and partnership working in meeting the project objectives. The techniques used to do this and the challenges that arose are explored within this paper. However, we begin with an outline of the project guiding principles.

Principles

An important aspect of project development was recognising the role adversity, oppression, and marginalisation may have played in experience(s) of those involved. Therefore, we felt it was important to incorporate into the project core principles of *safety, trust, collaboration, choice* and *empowerment* which guide trauma-informed social work education and practice (Carello and Butler, 2015; Levenson, 2017). The rationale for adopting trauma-informed principles was based on awareness of evidence highlighting the high prevalence in the general population of people who have experienced traumatic events, as well as a high prevalence of trauma in social work students and amongst those who have had social work intervention in their lives (Butler et al., 2018; Cunningham, 2004; Didham et al., 2011; Ireland et al., 2015; Levenson, 2017; Levenson & Grady, 2016; Mersky et al., 2019). There is also evidence which highlights that indiscriminate exposure to adverse life experiences during social work training can risk vicarious trauma in narrators, students and educators (Carello & Butler, 2015). At a most basic level, vicarious trauma can be understood as a process of self-awareness which can lead to change in a person (Zurbriggen, 2011). Change can be prompted by feelings of anger, sadness and guilt, due to a person's empathetic (re)engagement or (re)connection with their own and/or another person's adverse life experience (Carello & Butler, 2015). In order to safeguard against vicarious trauma, using the project lead as group mediator, throughout the development process a range of ground rules were adopted.

Ground rules agreed within the group allowed participants to: (1) collaborate on choice and content of project development discussions (2) develop trust in each other through advocating and respecting unique viewpoints and/or sharing mutual opinions and (3) be situated in a physical and emotionally safe space where as collaborators they could experience a sense of empowerment through consistent, non-stigmatising and pro-active

practices which ensured their concerns and/or any feelings of exclusion or marginalisation within the project development process were acted upon. Examples of how core principles were practised throughout project development are highlighted throughout this paper, and explicitly within comments presented by those who contributed.

Objective 1: Development of the regional reference group

The first project objective was to establish a regional reference group of EbE who would oversee and manage project work. This was achieved initially through consultation with other HEIs to share information about the project and ask for people to volunteer to be part of the work. Physical access to meetings is a basic, but important, aspect of involvement which was considered in relation to the development of the reference group (Beresford, 2013). Due to the size of the TP region many people were not able to travel to all meetings. This meant meetings had to be repeated in different locations to try and ensure accessibility for people living across the region. As well as changing locations, meetings were held at different times of day which enabled more people, including adults and young people, to be involved. An EbE was elected as the chair of the overall regional group and the purpose of the group was defined as:

1. To take a lead on the project development
2. To help raise the profile of EbE needs, views and interests in the work of the TP
3. To provide a point of contact and support for those engaged in other project work as part of the TP

The first regional group meeting was used as an opportunity to welcome and thank everyone for their interest and explain more about the TP and the purpose of the project and reference group. An open discussion was held about the group role and ongoing project work. Allowing space for the group to define their own role and discuss the development of the project is an important step in partnership working. Power imbalances are created and maintained through tokenistic approaches to involvement (Duffy & Beresford, 2020). Having open and honest conversations about the role and remit of the reference group from the start of the project was therefore considered to be essential.

Objective 2: Development of the training for EbE involvement

Following the establishment of the group, meetings focused on understanding core needs of the group to be met by development of a training package. An important message from the group at this stage was that formal and required training may not be appropriate for everyone. This is again reflective of group diversity, largely in terms of previous experience(s) of working into social work programmes by EbE who have a range of backgrounds, skills and abilities. Training to support, for example, presentation skills, while identified as a need by the whole group, was not something that every individual wished or needed to develop. Having training as a formal or required aspect of involvement was also seen as off putting for some people who may only wish to engage in a limited way or felt that this was patronising if they had already had significant experience. Therefore, it was important to ensure there was a clear message about the training; that it should be flexible and offered as an additional (and optional) source of support, alongside other more informal arrangements that could be tailored to the requirements of individuals.

Where HEIs involved in the TP provided the information, existing training within the region was examined to establish the key needs being addressed. A card sort activity was used to review these needs and identify anything missing. This activity had been identified by the group as a way of reviewing material that would be accessible to most people. Figure a, below, shows the process followed for this activity. Group feedback indicated members enjoyed working in this way and felt able to engage with the activity. This was reliant, however, on having clear explanations of the activity and support from the facilitator to answer any questions arising. It was difficult for people in the group with literacy issues to engage with the task as the cards only had writing on them. In future, it would be worth developing this activity to include both writing and images to try and ensure it is accessible to a wider range of people. Other ways of capturing and reviewing this information could also be considered.

Figure a: Showing the details of the card sort activity

The group were asked to work in small groups of three or four and to read cards which had the different identified needs on them (identified from existing training arrangements in HEIs and through conversations with the reference group).

They were given the following instructions:

- Is there anything there that you don't think is needed? (if so, remove the card and put it to one side).
- Is there anything missing? (If so, use one of the spare cards and add it to the set).
- Once you have finished the above two tasks, please sort through the cards and rank them in order of how important you feel they are.
- Use the handout to record your group ranks and add any other comments that you feel would be useful.

Please ask someone in your group to feedback from your group discussions

The outcome of this exercise was a list of identified needs which had been ranked by order of importance. Examples of needs identified included: (1) feeling part of the teaching team (2) being familiar with campuses and teaching rooms (3) knowing what to look for in an applicant for the social work programme and (4) having opportunities to practice presenting material in front of an audience. As part of the discussion, it became clear identified needs fell broadly into three categories: (1) induction (2) presentation skills and (3) admissions skills to help with interviewing prospective social work students and undertaking candidate group observations.

The next meeting focused on discussion about how to meet identified needs. It is important to note here that whilst the project objective was to develop training, not all needs can be addressed in this way. For example, the need to feel part of the teaching team may be partially addressed through an induction event, but is also dependent on further opportunities to for educators to get to know each other, work together, and feel valued. This can support the development of strong relationships which are a crucial cornerstone for any involvement activity (Askheim et al., 2017; Robinson & Webber, 2013; Yeung & Ng, 2011).

In regards to the training, flexibility was again raised as an important element of identified training and predominantly in relation to timings. Group members felt a single set time for training may not be helpful. Additionally, it was expressed having a full-day of training would create difficulties for many in terms of balancing needs, levels of concentration, and other commitments. Further discussion took place around how to offer the best support and training to address identified needs, without making it too formal or time consuming. This resulted in shared ideas including using an informal induction as the starting point for engagement with training.

It was suggested that an informal induction could take the form of a coffee morning at the HEI and could be used to identify needs that had been categorised in this area. For example, wanting to be familiar with the HEI campus and teaching rooms etc. Views were shared on how familiarity with the HEI should be complimented with an induction pack which included key information about teaching for people who wish to be involved in social work education and training. The importance of providing adequate and appropriate information has also been raised by others (e.g. Beresford, 2013). With this in mind, an accessible version of the induction document was also produced and both copies were shared via email, the website, and in hard copy. Having distinct time slots for each of the identified areas, rather than a full day covering everything was also suggested. It was felt this would increase engagement by not taking up a full day and would mean that sessions could easily be repeated to allow more people to attend. This also meant people could engage with the elements of the training on offer which they felt were most appropriate for their needs. It was therefore decided the training would be broken into three core areas which could be delivered at different times.

Finally, the group agreed that it was also important to share training materials with participants so they could access these as a resource and view them before the sessions and refer back to them whenever they wished to do so. The group then considered development of a training framework considering: (1) the training methods (2) delivery style (3) content development (4) timeline and (5) flexibility. There was an agreement training should be delivered face-to-face, rather than via other methods. After group discussion was used to explore in detail all these areas, four training packages were subsequently developed which

included: (1) a welcome and induction package (designed to provide an opportunity to meet each other and the programme staff, find out more about social work education and how to get involved, and start to become familiar with the university campus), (2) a presentation skills package (designed to offer some basic pointers on undertaking a presentation, to share learning from others about sharing your story and looking after yourself, and offer a chance to practice speaking in front of a group), (3) an interview skills package (designed to support understanding of the admissions process, the interviews, and the role of the interviewer, as well as an opportunity for participants to familiarise themselves with the interview questions and role play an interview scenario) and, (4) a group observation package (designed to support understanding of the admissions process, the group observations, and the role of the observers, as well as an opportunity for participants to practice observing and feeding back on a group activity). These materials are available to view and download from the (*link redacted for peer review*) website.

Since packages were developed, training has been delivered multiple times with very positive feedback from EbE and staff involved. EbE have led on delivering training and supported each other to do so which was seen as a positive aspect of the training, as one author (and group member) commented:

'The beauty about the training is that staff at the university have allowed service users and carers to deliver this training which I have to say has boosted my confidence and allowed me to achieve things in my life that I never thought I was capable of doing. A lot of this has been made to happen only because of the belief and trust put in me by the staff at the university'

Feedback has consistently highlighted how positive people feel about having EbE deliver training and demonstrate the value EbE trainers bring.

Objective 3: Development of training for social work academics

The final objective was developed by the EbE regional reference group. They had fed back that sometimes they felt there was some resistance to their involvement, or they

encountered other issues when engaging with regional social work programmes. As a result, the group decided to develop a film to show case the value EbE bring to social work education, and to share key messages with academic colleagues. Whilst not everyone was able to be involved in the filming directly, messages from the wider group were gathered and included within the showing. The film was completed and shared via websites and social media platforms, as well as within the TP partner HEIs. The film is available to view here: (website link redacted for peer review).

Reflections

Previous work on the involvement of EbE in social work training and education and other areas has identified the need for 'gatekeepers' to reflect carefully on participation and associated activities. Gatekeepers is a term coined by Beresford (2013) to describe those in a position to support or obstruct involvement of EbE. Whilst overall project aims and objectives were met, there were challenges encountered in delivering these, particularly in relation to the project manager's own aim of utilising participatory methods to deliver project outputs. These included: (1) the importance of communication, (2) issues related to power, choice and control, (3) the challenges associated with bureaucracy and regional working and, (4) dissemination of project learning and outputs themselves.

1: Importance of communication

Time to get to know one another and talk broadly around objectives was a crucial starting point for this project. However, this was difficult to achieve due to project time-frames and the large geographical area it covered. Most conversations happened face-to-face in meetings, but it was important to consider how these meetings were managed. This was commented on by one of the authors (who was also a key member of the EbE regional reference group and had been asked to attend the TP project board):

'I've only been to one of the project board meetings as it was very hard for me to get my head around as a lot of jargon was being used. So, it wasn't very accessible for someone with a learning disability. Even if I had had the abbreviations, it meant by the time I found out what the

abbreviations meant it would have moved on. So, I only went to one as it wasn't very accessible. So, if they want involvement, they have to do it properly'

This comment highlights the importance of adapting meetings to ensure they are accessible for everyone (Beresford, 2013). This means not just physical access, but also communicative and cultural access, including, for example, avoiding the use of jargon (Beresford, 2013; Lonbay, 2018). Accessibility and inclusion were core considerations in how EbE project work was undertaken. Members of the reference group worked closely with the project manager and regional group chair to provide direction and guidance about how to try and ensure meetings were a space where everyone could contribute and enjoy being involved. This included having a second person to support the chair to run meetings; one person would run the meeting and the other would check to see people were understanding everything and that everybody was offered opportunities to speak. There was always a second room booked in case someone needed a quiet space during the meeting, also highlighted as important elsewhere (Lonbay et al., 2020). Ensuring meetings were accessible also required the need to consider the speed at which they were run. For example, although there were agendas for meetings that were followed, these were kept simple and short so plenty of time could be spent on each item. There was no jargon used, or if there needed to be it was carefully explained. As Chappell (co-author of this paper and group member) comments:

'When I came to meetings with you [project lead] I felt like I could contribute because of the speed that they ran. I could listen to the information and give feedback quite easily. There was really no jargon used. It felt really simple. It felt really new and relaxed. It felt like if we didn't get to the end of it, it wouldn't be the end of the world. You don't need to get everything done in one session, you can leave things until the next time. You look for the important bits and you do the important bits. Not everything has a deadline'.

When meetings were run in this way, important conversations emerged. For example, the group shared that, for them, it was important to consider the benefits for people involved in

the project and ensure EbE contributions were fully recognised. This included being recognised through appropriate payment which was discussed and agreed by the group. This has been highlighted as essential by myriad authors (e.g. Brown and Young, 2008; SCIE, 2009; Beresford, 2013). Flexibility was also highlighted as being essential. It was agreed the reference group would be a 'porous' group as it was felt membership needed to be flexible to accommodate people's individual needs. As such, the reference group evolved in a fluid manner. There were no expectations people would commit to all meetings and work, but instead it was agreed members could be involved as much or as little as they wished to be and they could contribute to work in meetings, or via email or phone. Additionally, the project manager met with and spoke to several members on a one-to-one basis or shared information about the project via email as this was identified as their preferred means of involvement. Overall, the key aim was to be as flexible as possible in relation to people's involvement with the group.

This flexibility, whilst it supported a wider range of people to be involved with the project, also raised challenges. For example, people did not always have time to think about or prepare their input before meetings. Indeed, the flexibility of their involvement meant that at each meeting there were some people there who had not previously engaged with the work and therefore did not have as strong an oversight of the project as others. Whilst attempts were made at each meeting to go over the project overview and what we had achieved so far, this was constrained by practical limitations, most notably time available. However, the key aspect for the group was to be able to raise the issues that they wanted to raise and the flexibility of the group and the manner in which meetings were run allowed this to happen.

2: Power, choice and control

As stated earlier, it was an aspiration of the project manager to work in partnership with the reference group to deliver the project outcomes. However, it was necessary to be mindful of tensions between wanting to ensure EbEs had choice and control over their involvement, development of the work, and the need to satisfy the project requirements. This is reflective of the wider antagonism inherent within social work education around the requirement to

involve people with lived experience versus the need to meet the requirements of the university and professional bodies accrediting the course.

Duffy and Beresford (2020) have drawn attention to the unequal power dynamics at play within involvement activity, highlighting the importance of EbE having and being able to make use of power in order to affect change. Power can be defined in different ways, but is often viewed as a commodity; something which can be 'given' and thus also 'taken away' (e.g. Luke's visible form of power) (Gaventa, 2006; Lukes, 1974). Such a perspective on power is problematic in a number of ways, for example, because it reinforces power as "domination" and positions some as 'winners' and some as 'losers' in the struggle for control (Hooks, 2000, p. 90). Within their engagement with HEIs, it can legitimately be questioned whether EbE can ever have full power, choice, or control over their involvement. As Skilton (2011) pointed out, whilst social work academics may seek to work in partnership with EbE, ultimately they retain the power to make final decisions.

Robinson & Webber (2013) described different models of involvement used within social work education which included empowerment, outcome-focused and partnership models. Regardless of the model used to frame such involvement, it is important to be mindful of power dynamics when seeking to work in partnership with people who come from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. Additionally, open acknowledgement that there is not an 'equality of power' is important, though this does not disqualify academics from using strategies to redress power imbalance through partnership working, particularly when "coming together" is viewed as a form of power, as proposed by Janeway (1980, p. 171).

Within this project it must also be acknowledged that there was an imbalance of power. Although the work was done in partnership by the group, ultimately it was the academic lead who had final say over decisions made. This was addressed to some extent through simple solutions which included sharing key decisions with the group for them to vote on and being open and honest about expected outcomes of the project. Additionally, where other ideas and suggestions could not feasibly be followed up within the project confines this was acknowledged.

Other limitations on the groups' control over the project included the actual aims of the work itself. The group and project manager were not involved in defining the first two aims of the project. However, the third aim arose through group discussions that identified this as an area of importance to them and which was concerned with communication and flexibility in addressing power imbalances. Open dialogue is a crucial aspect of partnership working. Allowing people to share and influence the work means being honest about what can and cannot be done within the boundaries of the project and sometimes means compromises must be made. Despite these limitations, feedback from the group was they felt fully included in the project work and able to influence the work that was undertaken, as commented on by O'Driscoll (co-author and group member):

'I also have to say that this has not been a tick box exercise; everyone's opinions have been listened to and used to improve the social work programme for staff, students and service users and carers. The TP also involved service users and carers in a piece of work about how to help failing students and there were lots of other meetings (probably too many to mention here) and at every single meeting our opinions were valued and used to make positive changes for everyone involved on the Social Work Programmes. I have to say it has been a pleasure to be involved in this project and it is a great example of coproduction in action'.

Overall, the learning is that flexibility is crucial and needs to be built into project goals, as does the time required for undertaking participatory work. Additionally, open conversations about power and control should be encouraged within participatory work. A feminist ideology can support the consideration of alternative forms of power, such as the power to disbelieve and the power that exists when people come together (Janeway, 1980). We also have a responsibility to challenge unhelpful power dynamics and to clarify the ways and means by which people exercise power as a form of control.

3: Bureaucracy and the challenge of regional working

Brown & Young's (2008, p. 91) comment 'a situation arose whereby the team was trying to administer a fluid, dynamic project within the structures of a large and slow-moving organisation' resonated strongly in relation to this work. In particular, tensions surrounding how to ensure EbE are recognised as part of teaching teams was a key discussion point, especially when they are not formally employed by universities. HEIs need to acknowledge the need for change if EbE are to be recognised as equal partners within the team. The benefits of their involvement are manifest and clear (as demonstrated by Tanner *et al.*, 2017, amongst others), but HEI structures often provide barriers to acknowledging and valuing their contributions as partners in the teaching team (Brown & Young, 2008). This is even more difficult when trying to develop parity across multiple HEIs. For example, EbEs frequently cited payments as an issue for them and wanted the same system across each HEI they worked with. To date this has not been possible due to different systems and processes being in operation across the region, not only in terms of finance, but more broadly in terms of who has responsibility for involvement in the HEIs and how they approach and manage the work.

To achieve these changes there needs to be a commitment to working together as a regional TP and an open acknowledgement that sharing good practice and information will benefit everyone. The logistics of working across the region also need to be considered. For these projects multiple meetings needed to be held in different locations and at different times. This represents a significant amount of time and other resources which are limited. One way in which we sought to bring everyone together was at two conferences which took place during the project work. This was a chance to network and for people from across the region to come together and discuss the involvement of EbE in social work education. Learning from the project development, as well as the project outcomes, was also shared at the conferences which were designed and delivered by the regional group. The authors of this paper hosted and oversaw the events as one author and group member commented;

'I really enjoyed delivering and helping to design the conference. I think the conference went well because of the way we made things accessible to everybody and we had well explained instructions. And we didn't rush anyone at the conference we just kept it chilled. It was good co-production

because it was ran by two people who are on the group and that works because then you can identify with everyone, if you understand what I mean? If they didn't want to talk to you they could talk to me or Steve'.

This was a way to bring people together and celebrate successes of the project, and another opportunity to share ideas and thoughts about how to further develop involvement of EbE in social work education. As Fox (2016, p. 966) noted, 'collective movement' may be more effective at challenging 'established power' than 'individual experts' so opportunities such as this, for people to meet and share their views, concerns and wishes are important. Dominating discussion at conferences were concerns about payments and different rates at different HEIs was a common theme as was delays in receiving money for work undertaken. Clearly, this area needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency by HEIs if we are to demonstrate a real commitment to authentic involvement of EbE.

5: Dissemination

It is important to disseminate learning from projects such as the one highlighted. However, as Cook (2012) has noted, very few papers "have involved users in the dissemination..." (section 5.4). Epistemic injustice as "our capacity to convey knowledge to others by testifying" needs to be examined within academia (Godrie *et al.*, 2020, p. 4) which has a tendency to reinforce such injustice by "excluding forms of knowledge that fail to conform" (p.6).

As with the project, the intention was to co-produce this paper, but restrictions in time, ensuring the paper meets the criteria for publication, and balancing different writing styles has meant the paper was mainly written by the two HEI authors. Godrie *et al.* (2020) also commented on how the norms of academic publishing can reinforce epistemic injustice. To address this, the key points made within this paper were developed, shared, and agreed by all of the authors. There is a need for a wider conversation about how we ensure the dissemination of projects such as this fully reflect the voices of those involved. This includes other forms of dissemination alongside academic publications. For example, there was an expectation that project reports would be produced and there were strict deadlines for sharing these and for the final project outcomes. Due to delays at the start of the project,

which were out of the groups' control, time was a limiting factor. This meant, for example, progress reports as agreed with the TP were not written by the group, but by the project lead. Therefore, although they were shared with the group for comment before being passed on to the TP, the 'involvement' of the group in producing these reports was inevitably superficial. The time needed to work in a participatory manner needs to be built into projects of this nature.

Challenging epistemic injustice necessitates the academic community having conversations about the practicalities of co-authoring academic papers, the merits of alternative methods of dissemination, the need to carefully consider the language and labels that we use in our writing, and valuing both traditional academic knowledge and experiential knowledge. Experiential knowledge has great importance and value, but we need to have more open conversations about how this sits alongside more 'traditional' forms of knowledge. As Fox (2016, p. 961) has acknowledged, there is currently a 'division in status' between these different types of knowledge and we need to address this. To borrow Brown and Young's (2008, p. 86) words, we need to ensure EbE 'knowledge sits alongside other forms of knowledge' and is equally valued within the academic community.

Conclusion

With this paper, we have shared learning from a project to enhance EbE involvement in social work education and training. The paper illustrates the aims, objectives, and design of the project and we share some practical issues and challenges which presented, highlighting how some of these were managed and addressed. Reflecting on some of the lessons learned, this paper offers some practical insights from the project to support similar developmental and partnership work elsewhere. Key insights offered include understanding the importance of allowing adequate time to work flexibly and in an inclusive manner with EbE who may have a diverse range of views, concerns, needs, beliefs, and previous experiences. Systems used within HEIs, particularly in relation to payments, need to be consistent, equal, robust, and fit for purpose. The project has shaped and enhanced some of the ways in which support is offered to EbE at the project lead's HEI and comments from group members shared within this paper support the fact they felt changed from their involvement in the work. These

changes included increased confidence and involvement in other activities, and it is felt by the authors that the core principles which guided the project contributed to the change process.

Ultimately, including those with lived experience of involvement with health and social care agencies as part of a teaching team enriches social work education and training in many ways. Therefore, it is clear from the learning achieved within this project that work undertaken to support and develop social work education and training programmes should be carried out in partnership with EbE. External funding for this project is no longer ongoing. However, HEIs in the UK continue to receive a budget to support the involvement of EbE in social work education. Fox (2016, p. 963) has raised the question 'is the place of expertise-by-experience in social work education transient or is it perceived as a permanent and powerful aspect of social work education'? This clearly focuses attention on the work still to be done, which most notably is concerned with continuing to address power imbalances, achieve equal status, and acknowledge the value of the experiential knowledge and learning that EbEs bring to social work education.

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