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TLQIS PROJECT – FINAL REPORT

THE ‘ETCHETON’ MODEL: HOW WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH LEARNING DISABLED PEOPLE CAN EFFECT EMPOWERMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADVOCACY SKILLS

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Rationale and background

As Senior lecturers we have been involved in teaching students studying for the Diploma/Degree in Professional Studies in Nursing and Social Work. The three-year programme is designed and delivered as a partnership between the School of Nursing at Manchester University and the School of Community, Health Sciences and Social Work at Salford University. The programme aims to professionally prepare workers going into the field of learning disabilities. One of the key aspects of the programmes is to consider how people with learning disabilities have been oppressed by society and to consider ways of working which may help redress this experience.

Although empowerment is a contested concept (Means and Smith 1993) some of the existing literature on this topic presents empowerment as a key to redressing oppressions (Ward and Mullender 1991). However, empowerment tends to be presented as a vague concept with no practical models offered to help students learn how to ‘do it’. It is suggested that the term empowerment has become a buzz word in recent years (Adams 1990), indicating that there is much rhetoric but little action. Other methods suggested to redress oppression are working in partnership (Rose and Jones 1994; Dalrymple & Burke 1995) and the development of advocacy skills (Walmsley & Downer 1997). The Literature tends to focus on empowerment, partnership, and advocacy as separate entities rather than, as we believe, activities which not only bear some relationship to each other but are inextricably linked. There appeared to us to be a deficiency in the current literature and our response was to ‘fill the gap’.

We have been working for some time, on developing this teaching resource which is intended to help students to consider how empowerment, partnership and advocacy are integral processes. The teaching resource takes the form of a flow chart and is referred to as the ‘Etcheton’ model (see attached). The model illustrates various stages to show how powerless or powerful a person with learning disabilities might be and how the actions of others working in a partnership with them might be helping or hindering the process. The model makes a practical contribution to the students’ learning by offering a visual resource which enables them to apply theory to practice and relates directly to the requirements of the programmes validating bodies e.g. The General Social Care Council and the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

We have a background in social work within learning disabilities practice and it has

Become evident to us, from that experience, that there is little existence of learning resource material which supports the development of empowering practice in a practical and easy to understand format.

The model has been modified several times, due to our learning and its use as a teaching resource has been demonstrated with students. Feedback from the students has been positive and they are able to relate it to their learning on practice placement.

The model has been shared with practitioners in order to evaluate it as a teaching resource and to develop it into an assessment tool, which explains how those working with learning disabled people have an effect on the empowerment process.

ORIGINAL PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim of the project

The aim of the project was to evaluate the 'Etcheton' model as a teaching resource in practice and to develop its use as an assessment tool which will identify how individual and organisational barriers effect the empowerment of learning disabled people.

It is already known that individual attitudes and organisational structures can either work to include or exclude disabled people (Oliver 1996). People with learning disabilities have long histories of being excluded from the mainstream of society. This group of people have historically been segregated in large institutions, the closure of which now is almost complete. Despite this resettlement process the majority of learning disabled people remain excluded from the rest of the society (Malin 1995 Ramcharan 1997).

Intellectual disability appears to be a particularly disempowering characteristic, which leads to dependence on others.

This project aimed to relate to the concepts of empowerment, advocacy and partnership and apply them as a joint concept in practice. It set out to do this will by working directly with people who currently use Learning Disability Services and their paid carers. These are the people who are likely to have experienced a lifetime of exclusion from opportunities available to the rest of the society. They may have lived in long stay institutions at some time and certainly now are likely to live in residential accommodation purchased, if not provided by statutory agencies. They are likely to have attended special schools and gone on to attend day services or supported employment.

Original Objectives

The following objectives will be achieved by collaborating and working in partnership with people with learning disabilities and their paid carers from a Learning Disability Service and with students from the Diploma in professional Studies in Nursing and Social Work.

1. To share the current model. This would be done by presentation of the current Etcheton model
2. To facilitate critical analysis of the current model as a potential assessment tool which would measure how individual and organisational barriers effect the empowerment of people with learning disabilities. This would be done by focus groups.

3. To develop a revised model for use as an assessment tool. This would be undertaken by the applicants utilising information gathered through the focus groups.
4. To pilot the revised model as an assessment tool. This would be done by paid carers, students and people with learning disabilities within a practice setting.
5. To evaluate the implementation of the revised model. This would be done by reconvening the focus groups and would include any other carer or learning disabled person who has been involved in the pilot.
6. To develop and disseminate project materials and project outcomes. This would be undertaken by applicants.
7. To incorporate learning from this project into future teaching and learning activities e.g. lectures, seminars and handouts for students studying a range of programmes within the faculty.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND PROGRESS AT INTERIM REVIEW STAGE

Objective 1 To share the current model. This would be done by presentation of the current Etcheton model.

Progress made.

The model was shared with students in university, with practitioners at a national conference and with practitioners within a service agency.

A further conference paper had been accepted at an international conference in Montpellier in July 2002.

Objective 2 To facilitate critical analysis of the current model as a potential assessment tool which would measure how individual and organisational barriers effect the empowerment of people with learning disabilities. This would be done by focus groups.

Progress made.

A learning disability service was identified along with particular practitioners and service users. However, we were unable to progress with the focus group work. The work we intended to do was identified at a senior management level to be beneficial, however, Staffing issues at a local level prevented us from continuing with this work. This made objectives three, four and five extremely difficult to achieve.

Objective 3 To develop a revised model for use as an assessment tool. This would be undertaken by the applicants utilising information gathered through the focus groups.

Objective 4 To pilot the revised model as an assessment tool. This would be done by paid carers, students and people with learning disabilities within a practice setting.

Objective 5 To Evaluate The implementation of the revised model. This would be done by reconvening the focus groups and would include any other carer or learning disabled person who has been involved in the pilot.

It was therefore proposed to substitute the original objectives three to five with the following:

- 1 To develop a revised model, based upon the feedback received from students and practitioners.
- 2 To develop the revised model into a teaching and learning package for use with health and social care students.
- 3 To disseminate the teaching and learning package to students, lecturers and teachers and assessors in practice learning bases.
- 4 To evaluate the teaching and learning package by surveying students lecturers, and teachers and assessors in practice learning bases.

Objective 6 To develop and disseminate project materials and project Outcomes. This would be undertaken by applicants.

Objective 7 To incorporate learning from this project into future teaching and learning activities e.g. lectures, seminars and handouts for students studying a range of programmes within the faculty.

Objectives six and seven remained unchanged.

DESCRIPTION AND EVALUATION OF PROGRESS FOLLOWING INTERIM REPORT

Objective 1

The model has been shared with practitioners at international level by presentation at two conferences, one in Montpellier, France in July 2002 and one in Calgary, Canada in June 2003. It has also been shared with regional practitioners and academics at a seminar at Salford University, held in September 2003. The model has been incorporated into a 'toolkit', which has been used by students and practitioners during the final placement of the programme. It also now forms the basis of a short

programme offered to practitioners by the University.

Objective 2

The model was used with students in classroom teaching and received positive feedback. What became clear to us was that the model on its own was useful for students' self-directed learning as it needed more explanation or facilitation. Therefore for use in the practice learning setting the model needed to be incorporated into a more developed teaching and learning package. Scenarios, questions and activities were developed to accompany each situation described in the model in order to facilitate deeper student learning.

Modified Objectives 3-5

A teaching and learning package was developed and is attached. It is entitled 'learning for successful partnerships: a toolkit for analysing power in direct interactions with people with learning disabilities'. It was introduced to students in the classroom setting and subsequently taken out into final practice placement. Copies were given to all final year students and their practice teachers. The toolkit contained an evaluative questionnaire to be returned to us at the end of placement. The response to this was poor but a series of semi-structured interviews took place with students and practice teachers as an evaluative method.

Objectives 6&7

The model and toolkit have been presented using various media. There have been two international conferences (See objective 1) resulting in the publication of two articles. The toolkit has been developed into a short programme offered by the University of Salford. Both the model and the toolkit continue to be used in the teaching of students and are now presented in all years of the programme as well as during the final placement. The model is also used in the training of practice teachers for the programme.

Reflection and conclusion

Overall this project has been successful in improving teaching and learning quality for a particular group of students. It has also enhanced the teaching and learning of practitioners who act as practice teachers. In all instances feedback has indicated that the project successfully developed a teaching and learning resource that meets a need and fills a gap in the existing literature. Empowerment, which for many is an intangible and abstract concept, in the toolkit becomes much more real and students are able to relate theory to practice in meaningful ways. In addition, feedback indicates that the toolkit triangulates the concepts of empowerment, advocacy and partnership.

We have realised by undertaking this project that it is important to continually review your objectives and change them as necessary. We had to change some of

Our objectives because of external influences, for example when the service agency personnel were unable to work with us, due to issues unrelated to the project. We also chose to change some objectives because of our own learning and development as a result of being involved in the project, for example developing the toolkit.

With one exception the evaluation processes have worked well and we have valued and responded to feedback. The exception was in the administration of an evaluative questionnaire. Unfortunately neither of us was able to have contact with the students at the end of their taught module when we could have ensured that students were aware of the necessity to return their completed questionnaires. However we are aware that the response rate for questionnaire tends to be low and therefore it is not advisable to rely on that one method of evaluation. We did respond to this by use of semi-structured interviews, which resulted in rich data. In evaluating the toolkit, evidence has been gathered that supports the belief, expressed in the model, that the actions of workers can and do prevent people with learning disabilities from becoming more powerful, but in a climate where there is an illustration of empowerment. For example, one student interviewee explained that the learning disability agency they were placed with had written a philosophy statement that embraced the principles expressed in the

White paper *Valuing people: A New strategy for learning disability for the 21st Century* (rights, inclusion, choice and independence) but that the principles are not evident in the agencies practices

“...at the placement everybody talked about empowerment and whatever but in reality it was far from anything to do with empowerment”

This was supported by a practice teacher interviewee who said that

“the majority of agencies have a perfectly acceptable mission statement...but very little is being done about staff attitudes and values...there is a gap between what they say they do and what they actually do””

The fact there was a need to produce the white paper *Valuing people* can be cited as evidence of the continued exclusion and disempowerment of people with learning disabilities and the lack of valued social roles. It is the situation that raises the question,

“What is needed to enable partners to analyse their direct interactions with people with learning disabilities and to move toward mutually empowering partnerships that result in people with learning difficulties becoming full citizens with valued social roles?”

The model and the toolkit attempt to address this question and its uses enables both Parties to become more powerful. Becoming more *powerful* means that both parties in the

partnership gain and have recognised new knowledge, new skills, new abilities and new attitudes. One aim of the toolkit is to urge partners to reflect on and to fully consider how they communicate with people with learning disabilities and to enter their world, rather than as is usual expecting the learning disabled person to enter theirs. It seems from the evaluation that this is one of the strengths of the tool kit. For example the student interviewees all referred to developing heightened awareness of how they communicate with people with learning disabilities and of how they may influence the outcomes in decision making.

“ I feel that consciously I have got quite a strong commitment towards anti-oppressive practice but unconsciously is my commitment to achieving what I want to achieve more powerful?...it is something I need to keep asking myself now, *am I doing this for me or am I doing this for that person?*”

This interviewee also said that using the toolkit had helped them to consider how they communicate

‘ I now think it is about me moving into the person with a learning disabilities form of communication...I have learnt to be very patient and wait for a person with a learning disability to respond rather than fill the gaps’

The same interviewee referred to giving the “*right*” information to help people become actively and meaningfully involved in decision making.

Teaching students to analyse their interactions with service users, which is the stated aim of the toolkit, is supportive of the position expressed by Thompson (2000)

“Power relations are generally reflected in interpersonal interactions and can be reinforced or challenged by such interactions...Power is not just an abstract concept but exists at a very practical, concrete level in our day to day interactions. It is important then that Social Workers are aware of, and sensitive to the power issues involved in interpersonal skills interactions so that they can contribute to empowerment, rather than reinforce a sense of powerlessness”.(p.58)

It was our experience that power, and therefore empowerment, were largely viewed by students as abstract concepts and that there was a *gap* between their class room based learning and their practice based learning. The valuation produced some evidence to support this

“you are given all the theories at college but until you are actually sitting down and reflecting you don’t truly understand what is going on ”

“what I found useful about the model was...there are some practical suggestions for

developing empowerment in practice and I found that quite useful...and also the identification of some of the things that are quite oppressive and actually analysing those and thinking *am I doing anything that is oppressive?* And what else can I do to actually improve that way I am interacting with people”

The theory practice gap was also reflected in a comment by one of the practice teacher interviewees who stated that

“I think we need to prepare students in some way for the fact that social work values are not as clearly practised as they ought to be”

Significantly the data informed us of the importance of facilitating learning. We originally sent out the toolkit to practitioners believing that the guidance included was sufficient for them to be able to use it. The evaluative interviews indicated that they would have preferred a workshop of introduction to the toolkit. This feedback led to the development of the seminar workshop offered to practitioners, to the incorporation of the toolkit into the practice teacher training and to the development of a short programme.

In conclusion, we feel that this project has been very worthwhile and recognize that the development of a teaching and learning resource is an evolutionary process. We have responded flexibly to all feedback received and have made changes to the project as our own learning has deepened.

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