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## **The Meaningful Involvement of Service Users in Social Work Education: Examples from Belgium and the Netherlands**

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### **Abstract**

This article links the development of service user involvement championed in the United Kingdom to two examples in Dutch speaking qualifying social work programmes: one from Belgium and one from the Netherlands. In both projects a longer lasting cooperation with more marginalized service users was established. The Belgium project highlights social work lecturers and service users living in poverty, working in tandem to deliver a module to social work and socio-educational care work students. The example from the Netherlands involves young people from a homeless shelter as peer-researchers, working together with social work students.

Both projects, different in focus on education or research, highlight striking similarities in the positives and challenges of working with service users including how this challenges both groups preconceptions of the other, deepens learning but also creates greater potential for confrontations which need to be managed creatively. The article also identifies the pre-requisites for this to be effective including appropriate resourcing, training, facilitative skills and acknowledges that collaborations can be extremely fragile. However, such projects need further investment, experimentation and implementation on an international scale to share learning and promote creative approaches for the development and learning of social work students.

### **1. Introduction**

Social work has a proud tradition of involving service users in practice but it has taken longer to develop in social work education. Although this article focuses primarily on the English experience, there have been similar developments promoting service user involvement across the four nations in the United Kingdom where service user involvement in social work has become mandated, for example Duffy and Hayes (2012), Duffy et al. (2013) in Northern Ireland, Ager et al. (2006) in Scotland and Biskin et al. (2013) and Morriss et al. (2012) in Wales. In 2003 in England it was identified as a key requirement for the approval of all programmes providing the new social work degree (DoH, 2002). In addition, such a requirement is now underpinned by a new standard of education and training (SET) introduced by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) the regulatory body for social work. This standard states that 'service users and carers must be involved in the programme' (HCPC, 2014). Service user and carer involvement in social work education is also being championed in other countries (Wikler, 1979; Završek & Videmšek, 2009). In this article, we link the British experiences to lessons learned through projects in two university colleges, one in Antwerp (Belgium) and one in Utrecht (Netherlands). We

discuss the projects highlighting cooperation with service users in the provision of a module in the professional bachelor degree programme of social work and of socio-educational care work and another experiment, in which service users and students carried out a project as co-researchers.

## 2. The development of a mandated practice in England

Since 2003 in England there has been a requirement for service users to be involved in all the differing aspects of social work education including; admissions process, curriculum design, curriculum delivery, assessment and programme management. To aid the development of service user involvement the General Social Care Council (GSCC) (the regulator at the time) provided all registered social work programmes with a grant to support and facilitate the involvement of service users in social work education. Service users have also been involved in the assessment of social work programmes as members of the approval teams for the HCPC who visit and assess social work courses as part of their approval and reapproval processes.

### 2.1 Considerations on the concept of 'service users'

First, we should clarify what we mean by a service user. Social work has referred to those who have been in receipt of its services in a number of different ways including viewing them as patients, clients, customers and as service users (McLaughlin, 2009a). The term service user can be criticised for focussing solely on one aspect of a person, that is, that they are someone who is in receipt of social services. This neglects that they may also be a parent, a football coach or even a university professor! Each of these roles may be deemed a more desirable role than merely a service user. As McLaughlin, (2009a p. 1115) notes the "language we use is imbued with meaning and power".

We should also avoid the danger of bifurcation in that it is possible to be both a service user and a service provider. Certainly, a service provider may not be a service user at present, but this is not to suggest that they have not been in the past or will be in the future. To further complicate matters, Smith (2014) (a pseudonym), who was sexually abused as a child writes about bringing this experience into the social work classroom as a social work student. We should therefore not automatically assume that all student social workers have no service user experience.

### 2.2 Lessons from a literature review

In a recent review of the literature Robinson and Webber (2013) found that there was a widespread support amongst service users, student social workers and lecturers for the involvement of service users in social work education. In response to this University social work departments have adopted a variety of methods to incorporate service user involvement in their programmes.

Methods include developing long-term relationships with service user networks (e.g. Baldwin and Sadd, 2006); involving a large number of local service user and carer groups (e.g. Ager et al., 2005a); and creating a pool of service user and carer consultants (e.g. Anghel and Ramon, 2009), often co-ordinated by service user involvement development workers (e.g. Stevens and Tanner, 2006). (Robinson and Webber, 2013, p. 936)

It is important to engage with a range of organisations and diverse service user groups to not only

avoid the charge of only using the 'usual suspects' but also to ensure that student social workers are exposed to a range of perspectives. This diversity of views is important; service users like social work students are not a homogenous group.

To actively promote the involvement of service users in social work programmes the active support of staff members is essential (McLaughlin 2009a). Service users cannot be expected to make effective contributions to the education of social workers if they are not supported or encouraged to develop the necessary skills. We should not assume that the participation of service users will always be positive. Edwards (2003) has noted that the involvement of service users in practice learning has often led to feedback that has been too ambiguous and inconsistent. This reinforces the need for training, clear criteria of assessment, clarity of roles and the need for service user training to make their involvement in assessment meaningful (Advocacy in Action, 2006). Farrow (2014) refers to the need for clear objectives and explanation of the reasons why educators are involving service users in their programmes, as well as the need to prepare both students and service users for this mutual contact and the importance of a debriefing session for service users.

Ambivalence to service user views is also possible and is best highlighted in the assessment process. Whilst many students find service user feedback helpful Crisp et al. (2006 p.729) there are also reported concerns that service users:

may be overly positive about the student and consequently service user feedback may reflect a student's popularity rather than their competence.

The opposite is also possible whereby the student may be marked too harshly. Duffy et al. (2011) in their study of involving service users in role plays to assess social work qualifying student's fitness to practice also reminds us that we should not assume that social work academics will be keen to share their power with service users.

The involvement of service users in social work programmes is generally seen as a 'good thing' providing a balanced education to potential practitioners and to modelling good practice for the future (Baldwin & Sadd, 2006). Sustainability and resources have also been key themes in the literature (e.g. Baldwin & Sadd, 2006 and Gutteridge & Dobbins, 2010). However, there are also organizational issues that can present barriers to involvement including access to universities, paperwork, the inflexibility of university payment systems, the support and training of service users and working with academic staff to ensure the meaningful involvement of service users (Branfield et al., 2007; Brown & Young, 2008). McLaughlin (2009b) also notes that service users previous negative experience of involvement /consultation can also be a barrier.

Whilst, social work students, and lecturers are supportive of service user involvement in social work education this is primarily focused on processes rather than outcomes. The meaningful involvement of service users in education has potential impacts for both students and educators and the possibility of new pedagogic approaches which Beresford and Boxall (2012) claim can lead to new forms of professional knowledge challenging traditional power structures. Robinson & Webber, (2013, p. 939) in their review of the literature however concluded that there is 'a dearth of outcome-focused research on service user involvement in social work education'. This article seeks to begin to address this shortfall. We describe two projects in dutch speaking qualifying social work programmes. The challenge was to set up a cooperation with more marginalized service users, one in education and one

in research projects with social work students. A comparative analyses on the evaluation reports showed us striking similarities in the benefits from the perspectives of the students and service users involved, in the specific facilitating role of the lecturers and the organizational conditions to support the cooperation with these extra vulnerable clients.

### **3. Service users as tandem partners in an educational module**

A project on educational innovation was conducted with service users living in poverty undertaken by the social work and socio-educational care work programmes at the Karel de Grote University College in Antwerp (Driessens & De Clerck, 2014). In the past, service users had been invited in as guest speakers to give their 'testimony' for one-off lectures. In this experiment, a lecturer assisted by service user provided the entire module in tandem. This was done with the conviction that the development of a deeper, more advanced dialogue would provide additional understanding of and insight into the client perspective, whilst also contributing to the development of a respectful attitude towards service users. Two programme components were selected. In social work, the project was conducted in the second-year training course in social work practice with individuals, which was taught in groups of approximately 15 students. In socio-educational care work, it was conducted in the second-year substantive course in 'family-centred practice in youth care', which is taught in groups of approximately 32 students. The project was supported by Bind-Kracht (Bonding/Bridging Strengths), a collaborative partnership of service users, who were living in poverty and academic researchers. Various Bind-Kracht trainers and service users with years of experience in providing educational programmes for professional service providers participated in the project. In all, 8 lecturers, 5 service users and 315 students were involved in the project during the 2013-2014 academic year.

Given the differences between the two programmes, they were evaluated separately using a mixed methods approach (Cresswell, 2014). The students were surveyed using a web-based anonymous questionnaire, informed consent to involvement was assumed by the completion of the questionnaire. There were no implications for students in non-completion of the survey. This quantitative data was supplemented through focus groups with students and an evaluation meeting involving all staff members. Lecturers and service users were also interviewed.

#### *3.1 Academic achievement influenced by the participation of service users*

The response rate for the web-based questionnaire was high. The questionnaire was based on the ET37-questionnaire for students' evaluation of teaching used by the University of Antwerpen (Spooren, Mortelmans & van Loon F., 2012), we introduced some extra questions about working with service users in education. It was completed by 72% (n= 43) of the social work students and by 92% (n=235) of the students of the socio-educational care work.

The students perceived the participation of the service users as a benefit. Although it seemed somewhat strange at first, a climate of openness and willingness to listen eventually emerged. The service users offered a glimpse into the worlds in which they were living, which enhanced the students' respect for their survival strategies, perceptions and experiences. The students learned a new way of looking at people living in poverty: as powerful people and as fighters.

*'It opens your eyes, you get a view on the field, you can hear it from a different perspective, a different voice.'*

Students of social work observed that the project had enhanced the realism of the course: the theories started to come to life, the cases gained a face and the students were able to practise working with real-life practical situations. Students gave additional consideration to their manner of interviewing (92% n=35/38<sup>1</sup>), and they became more aware of pitfalls and strengths in communication (90% n=34/38). They also learned to conduct a respectful dialogue with people who had experienced exclusion (84% n= 32/38) to suspend judgement, and identified the importance of a respectful and authentic attitude. The exercises with service users also taught them to focus their questions more (see also Skilton, 2011), even when sensitive information was required.

The socio-educational care students reported that they had heard striking and captivating stories that had made them rethink about the potential meaning of social services to those involved.

*Their stories helped me to see that there are many pitfalls in counselling clients, often due to inadequate communication or because the service providers failed to listen to the clients' stories.*

The majority of the students (80% n=184/230 ) reported that they had become more aware of pitfalls and the power imbalance of working with families in the delivery of services. They also learned to ask for and respect the opinions of parents. They gained insight into the ways in which youth services are perceived, in addition to acquiring more understanding for the reactions of parents (see also Gupta & Blewett, 2008; Krumer-Nuevo, 2008).

The feedback provided by service users was appreciated: they noticed different things, pointed out errors, stimulated discussion and showed how things could be done differently. Students observed their attitudes and the manner in which they expressed their ideas.

*This different way of looking at what you take for granted as a student was captivating. These confrontations are going to stay with you.*

The transdisciplinary working methods and the connection of various types of knowledge – theoretical frameworks, practical professional knowledge and the experience-based knowledge of clients – were explicitly mentioned as benefits (see also Driessens, Saurama & Fargion, 2011). Obvious assumptions were broken and different frames of reference became tangible, thereby strengthening the empathetic capacities of the students.

### *3.2 A combination of roles that promotes learning*

We asked all of the parties about the roles assumed by the various actors: what is the role of the service users and what do you expect of the lecturer?

#### *Role of the service users*

The students noted that service users bring practice into the classroom. They revealed the worlds in which they live, and thus the consequences of exclusion. They spoke from personal experience about their views of 'good social work'. They contributed real-life case studies, which were captivating due to the emotion, amazement and indignation that they invoked. They were able to bring theoretical

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<sup>1</sup> We only counted the answers 'completely agree' and 'agree'. The answers 'somewhat agree' we didn't include

frameworks to life, and they applied their own emphases to the interpretation of these frameworks. They shared their desire for involvement and participation in the delivery of services, expressing frustration when they were not given these opportunities.

Students were reluctant to impose conditions on the service users. They felt that service users should be social and open to other opinions and penetrating questions. It was important to take initiative, talk about relevant issues and to relate positive, hopeful stories. Students expected the service users to be able to recognise their efforts and provide reinforcement in their work. From their perspective, the service users identified opportunities that the students had missed and provided them with recommendations. In role-play exercises, they assumed the role of the client in a realistic manner and offered students safe opportunities to practise. Service users reported that they needed to be able to get along with students, to react to offensive statements and to dare to be cautiously confrontational in some cases. Both groups of students appreciated the fact that the service users did not assign any credits. This ensured an open and safe dialogue. In one of the programme components, however, they did participate in the assessment and provided feedback on a role-play exercise. The results indicated that they had found it difficult to look at the students critically (Skilton, 2011).

#### *Role of the lecturer*

Students noted that lecturers who work with service users had an entirely different presence in the classroom. They emphasised the importance of the facilitating role of the lecturer. In the beginning, it was important to introduce the service users properly, specifying the role and expectations clearly and making agreements for cooperation. Lecturers offered theory, frameworks and vision, in addition to securing the objectives of the programme component. They also invited dialogue, framing the stories of the service users and bringing structure to these stories. They provided sufficient space, posed focused questions and continually involved the service users and the students. They supported the service users and enhanced their strengths. One of the service users formulated it as follows:

*‘This lecturer always found new inroads; she could really respond to me. She could always find the right words to restart the conversation. I truly admired her, and I thought, “Wow! Nice job!”’*

Acting as a lecturer and colleague and not as a social worker is extra challenging. Lecturers needed additional skills in coaching and diplomacy, in interviewing, mediation, caring, flexibility and integrity to work in tandem with service users. Their roles are essential for keeping the delicate interaction on the right track.

### *3.3 Organisational conditions for successful collaboration*

The ability to transform collaboration with service users into a high-quality pedagogical method is subject to several conditions. Participants in the focus groups and interviews were asked about the organisational conditions for the success of such processes.

Comparison of the organisational structure of the programme components revealed a major difference in group size. The size of the training groups in the social work programme (maximum 15 students per group) proved ideal as it allowed for an in-depth dialogue. There was sufficient space for practice and feedback. This posed an obstacle in groups of approximately 32 students. Not all of the students exhibited commitment, and it was more difficult to guarantee safety or support an open dialogue. In

some groups, this was addressed by placing the chairs in a circle, thereby allowing for more eye contact.

For lecturers and service users, additional time was required for preparation and debriefing. For tandem teaching, it is important for both actors to be well attuned to each other, to be sufficiently familiar with each other and to be able to trust each other (Baldwin and Sadd, 2006). In addition, the support from Bind-Kracht proved essential. Bind-Kracht provided a pool of service users. In Bind-Kracht, the service users had the opportunity to participate and practice in training programs in small groups of service users, in which they could support each other. Bind-Kracht also ensured that all of the service users received volunteer contracts, permission to perform volunteer work and insurance during their activities, in addition to making sure that their volunteer payments were paid as quickly as possible. Studies conducted in other countries have identified this support as an important success factor (Gupta & Blewett, 2008).

### *3.4 Evaluation by the parties involved and lessons from the project*

The students were extremely positive with regard to the input provided by the service users. Their openness, honest input and experiences enhanced the realism of the course, brought the theoretical insights to life and contributed captivating examples. Students were introduced to 'people living in another world', and they had the opportunity to feel the effects that exclusion can have and to see how social services can lead to either negative reinforcement or positive change. A few students offered critical remarks: they would like to have heard more positive, hopeful stories about services. The service users could have been more proactive and the feedback on their actions and manners of communication could have been stronger.

The service users felt that they had been treated with respect, in addition to receiving recognition and appreciation. They considered it worthwhile to help beginning service providers find their way, and they empathised with the students. They nevertheless expressed a desire to do better the next time, by knowing more about the programme, the course objectives and the substantive topics, as well as about the requirements for good feedback (Beresford et al., 2006). The lecturers expressed a great deal of ambivalence and uncertainty. Some were concerned about the service users. They were satisfied about student attendance, the authentic dialogues and the stimulating teachable moments. All of the parties involved were convinced of the benefits of this type of collaboration and the programme is committed to continuing with the project.

## **4. On the trail of homeless young people: social work students as co-researchers in Utrecht.**

In 2013, fourth-year students in the social and community work programme at the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht (Hogeschool Utrecht, HU) collaborated on a research project with young people from the Pension Singelzicht<sup>2</sup> homeless shelter. In this project, four female students and four male homeless young people – who were of the same age - went in four pairs to interview twelve male former residents of Pension Singelzicht. Each interview was structured by a topic list and lasted

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<sup>2</sup> Stichting Singelzicht provides 24-hour care to homeless people between the ages of 17 and 23 years in Utrecht.

about an hour. The interviews took place at a location of preference by the interviewees. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed by the students. (Franchimont & Haarsma 2013).

#### *4.1 Academic achievements influenced by the cooperation with service users*

The primary beneficiaries of the research project were the four students. It allowed them to practise their research skills within the turbulent professional practice domain of homelessness services and to acquire knowledge about homeless young people and themselves.

*'Before the project, I had held several prejudices about homeless young people – that they often used alcohol and drugs, and that they were violent and aggressive. They obviously have a lot of problems, but they are also simply peers who share our concerns and dreams for the future.'*

Student Suze (25)

The research project was also beneficial for the residents of Singelzicht. For the homeless young people, it was an important experience collaborating with the students from the HU, whose lives were quite different from their own. It provided them with the opportunity to expand their social networks and broaden their horizons. Another aspect that they considered valuable was the interview training, in which they worked with students to practise engaging others, interviewing techniques and other skills.

*'Participating in such a study is certainly educational. You can earn a little pocket money. It's helpful in two ways: it allows you to learn something, and you get to help someone else'. He added, 'What I learned from the student was perseverance: things don't always go the way you plan. But now I know that I just have to keep going. The student helped me to see this, and it's made me more serious in some respects'. (Co-researcher Daryll, 18)*

Another co-researcher, Brian (19), stated what he had learned as follows: *'Just good co-operation. That at some point in the interviews, I just started talking more and taking charge. That's what I learned'*.

Another benefit of the research project for the homeless young people – most of whose experiences with education had been negative and most of whom had ended their school careers prematurely – was that it offered them the opportunity to gain new experiences at the HU and to adjust the images that they had of themselves, higher education and training. At the end of the study, the young people received certificates from the HU. This was a special moment for the homeless young people: some had never completed any type of diploma or certificate. Several were even inspired to enrol in a university degree programme.

A third benefit is that the study provided insight into the course of the rehabilitation processes of former residents of Singelzicht. This knowledge was valuable to the co-researchers. Former residents who had brought semblance of order to their lives became role models for them.

*'It was remarkable to see how much the homeless young people and the former residents found that they had in common. The contact with the former residents provided the homeless young people with food for thought regarding their futures. As a student, I was also a role model for them'. (Student Suze (25)*



Moreover, the reflections of the former homeless shelter residents on their rehabilitation processes provided valuable information for the professionals and the management of Singelzicht. There was however, considerable variation amongst the former residents in terms of satisfaction. Some former residents expressed great appreciation for the assistance that they had received from Singelzicht. They reported that, without the help and support of Singelzicht, they would still be homeless. In contrast, others were critical of the assistance and services provided: stating they had survived because of their own strengths. On the one hand, their statements indicated that they had indeed received little support from Singelzicht. On the other hand, they might also indicate that the professionals had succeeded in reinforcing their autonomy and independence, thereby helping them to take control over their own lives. The co-researchers also had difficulty understanding the meaning of these critical voices of former residents. They interpreted the statements of dissatisfied former residents as evidence of the failure of the services provided by Singelzicht, and they regarded this as a threat to their own situations. After the interviews, these co-researchers wondered whether they should be at Singelzicht. The lecturer-researchers discussed this topic at length with both students and co-researchers, but without satisfying results. This reverse side of the research project and the question of how it should be addressed deserve further consideration.

A fourth benefit of the participation of the co-researchers was the enhanced quality of the study (see also McLaughlin, 2010; Driessens, Saurama & Fargion, 2011). As an illustration, the co-researchers were closely involved in the process of drafting the list of items for the topics to be addressed in the interviews. They made many valuable suggestions. For example, in addition to asking their age, some of the homeless young people proposed asking the former residents the question, 'How old do you feel?' The co-researchers emphasised the importance of asking this question, as experience had taught them that homeless young people often feel younger or older than their actual ages. This question on the perception of age provided additional depth to the study. The co-researchers were also less reluctant than the students were to follow up when interviewees gave contradictory answers. The students also considered it instructive to reflect on the interviews with the co-researchers. During the interviews, the co-researchers sometimes noticed things that had escaped the students' attention, for example that an interviewee who had been sleeping rough for ten years, now spent the nights in his apartment sleeping on his couch instead of in his bed.

An additional benefit became apparent after the study was completed. The affinity between several pairs of students and homeless young people had been so strong that they remained in touch with each other expanding and enriching the social networks of both the students and the homeless young people.

#### *4.2 Lessons from the project*

The researchers and lecturers of the HU identified a number of lessons from the research project. It had offered them the opportunity to experiment with the form and content of the interview training for students and co-researchers. After the interim evaluation they concluded that the optimal form would be to offer a training course consisting of two sessions of two and three hours, respectively. The following topics would be addressed during the training: introductions, the goal and design of the study, the specification of mutual expectations and developing interviewing expertise through role-play exercises. A list of behavioural or groundrules for the interviewers was compiled during the training that both parties committed to – partly because they had developed the rules themselves.

Nevertheless, some of the interview pairs encountered problems. One of the homeless young people had become involved in a conflict at Singelzicht and was suspended for one month. In consultation with all parties involved, this person's participation was also suspended for one month. The pair resumed the interviews a month later. This resulted in a slight delay for the student in the completion of her studies.

During the training, all students and co-researchers worked collaboratively and at the end of the second training day, they were asked to choose the partners with whom they would prefer to work. The preferences coincided and the interviews were conducted by these pairings. One practical lesson was that the co-researchers, who were all chain-smokers with needed to take periodic smoking breaks during the training. The research project and the reflection on the research methods of the lecturers and the researchers resulted in a manual, thus rendering the method transferable (Franchimont & Haarsma, 2013).

#### *4.3 The role of lecturer-researchers*

The lecturer-researchers were charged with facilitating the project. This posed the recurring question of when they should direct the students and co-researchers and when they should relinquish control and trust the pairs.

To ensure that the project would proceed smoothly, the lecturer-researchers established groundrules with the students and the homeless young people with regard to do's and don'ts during the research project. For example, they adopted the rule that the interviews would be conducted only during the day (during daylight hours) and that they would be held in the homes of the former residents or at a mutually selected location. It was also agreed that the interview would be discontinued if the former resident was not responsive (e.g. due to being under the influence of drugs). Another rule required both the student and the co-researcher to be present during the interview. De-briefing sessions were held at the end of each interview, and both researchers called the project leader with a report. It was also agreed that the student, in consultation with the co-researcher, would make the appointments. The day before the interviews, students would remind their co-researchers of the appointments, and they would meet them at Singelzicht the following day. The lecturer-researchers also reached agreements with the pairs regarding privacy and confidentiality (Farrow & Fillingham, 2012).

#### *4.4 Organisational conditions for successful collaboration*

The research identified several organisational conditions that must be met in order to allow research with students and co-researchers to succeed. Such research requires flexibility on the part of the educational institution (for example the institute had to improvise an area where the co-researchers were allowed to smoke) and the efforts of highly experienced and committed lecturers. Second, it is advisable to reserve additional funds in the budget to cover unforeseen expenses, expect the unexpected. (McLaughlin, 2009b). Another recommendation is to schedule additional time for research projects involving the participation of co-researchers. Such projects require additional preparation time on the part of lecturer-researchers. For the fourth-year students, this was part of the final examination assignment. The co-researchers also had much at stake. Failure or disappointment would once again damage their self-respect and, as argued by McLaughlin (2009b), it could prevent them from participating in such projects in the future. For this research an ethical approval was not required under the Dutch law and code of conduct for research.

## 5. Conclusion

Scholars in various countries are conducting experiments with the involvement of service users in degree programmes in fields of social and community work. In the United Kingdom, such involvement has been mandatory for 10 years and this article connects British experiences to recent experiments in the Netherlands and Flanders where the findings were similar.

The results from the two projects in dutch speaking social work programmes, collaborating with very vulnerable service users (people in poverty and homeless youngsters) indicate that all the parties involved tended to regard the experience as beneficial. Gaining additional insight into different life experiences; sensing the limitations of one's own frame of reference; reflecting on one's own first impressions; communicating and acting; developing a respectful, positive basic attitude; and daring to engage in dialogue with the client – all of these are valuable learning outcomes related to the involvement of service users in education or research of students in social work and socio-educational care work.

Nevertheless, the various projects have indicated that such collaboration is extremely fragile. It requires lecturers to adopt a more facilitatory role, whilst service users are expected to have a certain level of stability in their lives, in addition to openness, communication skills, diplomacy and resilience. Organisational support is also of fundamental importance, in terms of training, coaching and supporting both the service users and the lecturers. The additional time that lecturers and service users must invest in relationship forming, preparation, delivery and debriefing requires additional resources, as does the practical organisation of such collaboration. Even if such resources are available, however, the balance is tenuous: confrontations, necessary survival strategies and collisions between contrasting life experiences are highly likely in any true collaboration. Such confrontations can be captivating and instructional to all parties, if managed properly. The collaboration transcends the professional, brings ethical dilemmas to the surface and touches the essence of the profession that we are training students to enter. It is the authors' contention that despite the care and reframing that it demands; the benefits of these educational innovations deserve further investment, experimentation and implementation on an international scale.

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