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Manuscript title:

Negotiating identity and alterity: Cultural competence, colonization and cultural voyeurism in students' work-based learning

Abstract:

There is increasing demand for work-based learning experiences to form part of undergraduate degrees concerned with working with people. Social justice and anti-oppressive practice underpin the philosophies of many such degrees which attract students with the promise of working within diverse communities and with the marginalized and vulnerable.

Benefits to students include the development of a professional identity, an anti-oppressive approach and culturally competent practices. Despite this, critical approaches to work-based learning highlight ways in which the student can be colonized by dominant values via 'cultural voyeurism'. This can lead to power inequalities being replicated and perpetuated by the student rather than challenged.

The roles of identity and alterity in these learning processes are examined and the concept of professional identity is questioned. The article concludes that the tasks of negotiating identity and alterity are characterized by uncertainty and unfinalizability, and that the notion of cultural competence is itself problematic.

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Negotiating identity and alterity: Cultural competence, colonization and cultural voyeurism in students' work-based learning

Introduction

The increasing demand for work-based learning experiences to form part of the undergraduate learning journey is well documented and this is particularly the case for courses concerned with working with people (Billett, 2009; Conway et al., 2009; Eraut, 2000). Social justice and anti-oppressive practice underpin the philosophies of many such programmes of study (Arieli, 2013; Coleman et al., 1999; Dominelli, 2002; Tew, 2006). The ideal of addressing injustice and inequality may attract students to courses where they are offered the opportunity to work within communities and/or with the marginalized and vulnerable.

The current work-based learning context that students find themselves in is one that is global, inter-cultural and highly diverse. It is probable that students will be working with individuals who are different from them in multiple ways. The ever increasing movement of people globally is likely to mean that the United Kingdom's diverse society will become what Fanshawe & Sriskandarajah (2010) describe as a 'super-diverse' society. It is for this reason that students will be required to become culturally competent practitioners.

Work-based learning is one vehicle through which students in 'people professions' such as social work, community work, health and social care can develop 'culturally competent' practices. Cultural competence is a set of values, behaviors, attitudes and practices within a system, organization, or among individuals that enables them to work effectively across cultures, responding respectfully to people of all backgrounds (Garran & Rozas, 2013). Barrett (2013) suggests that, in practice, cultural competence should entail: "understanding and respecting people who are perceived to be culturally different from oneself; interacting and communicating effectively and appropriately with such people; and establishing positive and constructive relationships with such people." (p.152).

In the current United Kingdom health and social care sector, for example, interactions are inevitably intercultural, transcultural and cross cultural (Gray et al., 2007). Students are

increasingly required to practise in diverse, multicultural settings and there is much evidence to suggest that diversity has an impact on learning as well as on students' general satisfaction and academic integration (Arieli, Friedman & Hirschfield, 2012; Gibbs, 2005; Prunuske et al., 2013).

Students' cognisance of their own cultural identity including their cultural values, beliefs and lifestyle is a key starting point for embracing and responding to difference of those whom they may be working with or on behalf of. There is a view that such students need to develop 'cultural competence' or 'cultural safety' (Arieli, Friedman & Hirschfield, 2012) in order to recognize that what is 'normal' to them may not be to someone from a different culture or background (Smith et al., 2014). The learning involved in developing cultural competence, then, includes the negotiation of challenges to the student's sense of 'normality' and to their identity.

Set in this context, students undertaking the challenge of processing their own identity transformation in both personal and professional terms may be faced with groups of 'others' whom they perceive to be differentially positioned from themselves. Apart from the power differential of status there is the differential of 'difference'. They themselves may be differentially positioned viz-a-viz their work placement supervisors and/or academic tutors in terms of one or both aspects. Students need therefore to both reflect on the development of their own identity, as well as to recognize the power dynamics inherent in the multiple sets of relations they encounter in their practice.

Prior to the process of developing cultural competence it may be that individuals hold particular ideas and stereotypes about those who are different from themselves. It may also be the case that approaches to practice are overwhelmingly from a culturally specific standpoint. Part of the transformative process of learning to be culturally competent involves the challenge of these views and practices: Cherry (2007), for example, talks about the 'messy realities of practice'. While such messy realities can undoubtedly provide rich learning experiences, the often haphazard nature of work-based learning offers few guarantees of how students will make sense of these experiences. As we shall discuss, there are several reasons for this: Work-based learning is highly complex, unpredictable and influenced by multiple factors; there is little in the way of a coherent theoretical framework for work-based learning; the formation of culturally competent practices via work-based learning is dependent on some

level of transformation in the student's identity and this is risky and potentially painful. For these reasons alone, work-based learning can provide the very conditions which threaten rather than nurture culturally competent practices.

Work-Based Learning and identity

United Kingdom higher education institutions are increasingly providing work-based learning opportunities for students (Mumford & Roodhouse, 2010). Such opportunities are perceived as a key part in the development of the current and future workforce (University Vocational Awards Council [UVAC], 2005; Developing European Work Based Learning Approaches and Methods [DEWBLAM], 2006), as well as being a key means of engaging with employers as part of the wider 'employability agenda'. Whilst this agenda is not particularly new, there has never been more political and institutional pressure to demonstrate the vocational and 'real world' relevance of undergraduate degree programmes as well as their effectiveness in equipping students for graduate employment (Billett, 2009; Reid et al., 2008; Wilton, 2012).

Work-based learning can be distinguished from classroom learning in a number of important ways (Raelin, 2000). Firstly, work-based learning is centered around reflection on work practices; it is not merely a question of acquiring a set of technical skills, but a case of reviewing and learning from experience. Secondly, work-based learning views learning as arising from action and problem solving within a working environment and this concerns live projects and challenges to individuals and organizations. Work-based learning also sees the creation of knowledge as a shared and collective activity, one in which people discuss ideas and share problems and solutions. Finally, work-based learning requires not only the acquisition of new knowledge but the acquisition of competence – learning to learn. Achieving the goals of work-based learning requires new learning that is achieved by a combination of thinking, experimentation and dialogue with others. Students' learning in workplace settings is therefore very much dependent on 'others' within the organizations providing the experience. This dependence on dialogue with others is highly significant but under-examined – a point we shall return to later.

Students' development in this way is contingent on 'transformative learning', a form of learning which focuses not only on knowledge, but also identity. Transformative learning arises from the development of a new identity, not just the acquisition of new skills or knowledge (Mezirow, 1997) and is an ongoing process (Coleman et al., 1999) rather than one which culminates in achievement of a particular outcome or the crossing of a clearly defined 'finishing line'. In this sense the development of cultural competence is a transformative learning process and not simply the procurement of a 'bolt-on' skillset or technique. Transformative learning experiences of this sort necessitate an ongoing inner and outer struggle – an 'identity project' or series of experiences through which the individual's sense of self undergoes reconfiguration. The endeavor of becoming culturally competent, then, entails transformative learning and transformation of the self.

While some of this will be painful for students in their transformative learning journey there is much to be gained in the development of their personal and professional identity. The opportunity for personal growth and development, an increased awareness and appreciation of other peoples and cultures so necessary for the current demographic context and, hopefully, an ability to respond to the needs of the diverse and multicultural population with whom they will be working (Racine & Perron, 2012).

The impact of work-based learning on student development is generally assumed to be positive (Crebert et al., 2004; Murakami et al., 2009; Sims et al., 2006) and some importance is attached to developing students as culturally competent practitioners through this kind of transformative learning experience (Dawes & Larson, 2011; Kirmayer, 2013; Perry & Katula, 2001). Nevertheless, this process or set of processes is not particularly well understood. Whilst there is still limited understanding of what makes for a high quality and valid learning experience for the student (Nixon et al., 2006; Ogilvie & Homan, 2012) there is little doubt that the student faces numerous and often competing challenges while engaged in work-based learning: In addition to critically reflecting on their own identity, the student is usually expected – or required – to cultivate an appropriate 'professional identity'. This is a far from straightforward task.

Firstly, the term 'identity' has arguably lost much of its value due to its ambiguity and lazy over-use (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Cairns & Fouz-Hernández, 2014). As Cairns & Fouz-Hernández (2014) point out, the term identity is appealing precisely because of its flexibility

and polysemy (its properties as an ‘umbrella’ term). Secondly, the term ‘professional identity’ is equally nebulous although this is undoubtedly a consequence of the complex, multiple processes and attributes that it is used to describe. In their systematic review of the literature on professional identity Trede et al. (2012) argue that the research base for understanding the development of professional identity (and the role of universities in this) is not strong. Nevertheless, development of a ‘professional identity’ is often seen as one of the key purposes of work-based learning and there is an assumption that a strong professional identity is something to which students should aspire (Social Work Reform Board, 2010; Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2015). Despite this, there is a complete lack of any coherent theoretical framework to understand professional identity development and Trede et al. (2012) found “a remarkably disparate range of theoretical frameworks, indicating an underdeveloped field where there is little agreement amongst scholars.” (p.375)

To compound these issues further, it seems that professional identities – whatever they are, exactly – are subject to unpredictable and often rapid change. As a result, the idea that a student can acquire such an identity which then remains fixed throughout the individual’s working life seems rather quaint and simplistic:

“The professions have arguably become more volatile, with what counts as the ‘marks’ of a good professional constantly shifting. Educators must now design their curricula in ways that will help graduates engage with a constantly shifting professional identity. Rather than help them build an armour that they can then face the world and their clients with over the course of their career, educators must now help students to see that they are constantly becoming professionals and that their identity development is increasingly fluid.” (Trede et al., 2012, p.382)

This metaphor of helping students to build an ‘armor’ is both powerful and apposite, as we shall show in our discussion of identity and alterity. First, an introduction to the phenomenon of ‘cultural voyeurism’ will help to provide the context in which work-based learning can be viewed as both an empowering and oppressive space.

Cultural voyeurism

In their desire to help other people, students may undertake work-based learning placements with a mixture of curiosity and naïve expectations about helping or ‘rescuing’ socially excluded individuals and/or communities. Rather than promote and develop cultural

competence, such placements threaten to provide voyeuristic experiences which position community members as mere objects of fascination (Williams, 2008). Under these conditions the student's encounters with the 'other' can serve to widen the gap between them rather than offer learning opportunities in which the student and community members can gain mutual understanding and collaborate as equal partners.

'Cultural voyeurism' is a form of gratification akin to 'poverty porn', 'slum tourism', 'ghettotourism' (the desire to view extreme poverty and/or violence) or 'voluntourism' (contributing to welfare projects). Although it is an under-researched area, the term 'cultural voyeurism' describes a combination of curiosity or fascination with difference and a naïve desire to 'help' or 'rescue' people who live in deprived communities (along with the associated assuaging of guilt). In the words of Durr & Jaffe (2012) it: "...involves the commodification of urban deprivation." (p.120). In the context of tourism in Rio, for example, Williams (2008) describes the: "charitable, if not voyeuristic desire to 'observe' and 'help' disadvantaged communities." (p.485). The dubious ethics of *favela* (Brazilian slum) tours have prompted suggestions that:

"...they are like an exoticising 'safari' around a kind of 'zoo', with commentaries in languages the residents do not understand, and that the profits go into organisers' pockets rather than being invested in *favela* projects." (Williams, 2008, p.486)

There are troubling similarities between such tourism activities and some United Kingdom work-based learning opportunities in areas of deprivation and poverty. It may be all too easy for students to slip into the passive mode of spectator, visiting communities as if on safari, talking in academic language which excludes the community members (whilst this simultaneously asserts and flatters the student's nascent status as an 'expert'), with 'profits' flooding out of the community in the form of the student's learning or enhanced CV/employability skills. In this way, the student is positioned as 'savior' or 'spectator' to the 'needy' or 'oppressed'. The non-professional community member – the 'other' – is positioned as an object of fascination or pity, exoticism even. It may be all too easy for the student to become fixated on her or his own learning and development and so overlook the possibility that community members – like *favela* inhabitants – have no wish to be mere objects of fascination. As Williams (2008) points out, they: "...want to be recognised as human beings with feelings and opinions, rather than objects of research:" (p.496)

In a similar vein, Jamrozik (2006) speaks of the way in which epidemiologists can exhibit what he calls ‘helicopter epidemiology’, where they ‘fly in’, collect data, ‘fly out’ and then publish the data. Racine & Perron (2012) offer this as an analogy to international student nurse placements and suggest that the placement can simply turn into an excuse for ‘an interesting placement’ with little benefit to the community visited. This is all the more pernicious as the practice of nursing is couched in the language of ethics and equity. Equally in social work, the dominant discourse around social work as an anti-oppressive activity serves to hide what may in actuality be exploitative and voyeuristic practice.

Curiosity and fascination with the ‘other’ may seem relatively innocuous but when placed in a wider context of power relations these voyeuristic tendencies can be seen to pose a real threat to the formation of culturally competent practices. Various critical approaches to work-based learning have identified ways in which power inequalities can be replicated and perpetuated by the student rather than challenged. For example, Sakamoto & Pitner (2005) describe the ‘teacher/student trap’ where the student models practice in which the ‘expert’ dispenses wisdom and support from above in a hierarchical relationship. As the student pursues the credentials that confer professional identity or expert status they invert the relationship and become ‘teacher’ to the community member/service user’s ‘student’. In this way the student simultaneously occupies the role of the ‘oppressed’ (in the sense that they are subordinate to their university tutor and work placement supervisor) and the ‘oppressor’ (either as a dispassionate spectator or as a wielder of power over others).

Although the student may be motivated by a desire to help others, their desire for professional legitimacy and a professional identity can lead them to position themselves in a more powerful role, even if this is done unwittingly. In effect the student – however powerless they think themselves to be – is engaging in colonization or ‘professional imposition’ (Racine & Perron, 2012) by promoting dominant discourses, narratives and practices. At the same time, they are being colonized willingly by those dominant discourses and narratives. There is a powerful tension involved in this: Just as the student is undergoing a potentially disorienting and painful identity transformation, their encounters with the ‘other’ invite them to embrace uncertainty. They also face the competing demands of developing a professional identity which seems to promise certainty. The student therefore faces a difficult task of negotiating identity.

Negotiating identity

Identity, and its transformation, appears to be at the heart of work-based learning. However, a major challenge to gaining understanding of identity development through work-based learning is the contested nature of identity itself. According to Lawler (2008) identity describes, amongst other things, the extent to which an individual shares common features with and differences from others. Seidman (1993) argues that: “identity is a site of on-going social regulation and contestation rather than a quasi-natural substance or an accomplished social fact” (p.134). This is consistent with the view that identity encompasses some form of ongoing project that involves negotiation or struggle with others.

It is widely recognized (though not universally accepted) that identity and the self are at least partially socially constructed. Figures such as Gergen (1991) have gone further, arguing that in today's society we are 'saturated' by information, by a multitude of different voices which are often conflicting. This, he claims, leads to the 'saturated self':

"...social saturation brings with it a general loss in our assumption of true and knowable selves. As we absorb multiple voices, we find that each 'truth' is relativized by our simultaneous consciousness of compelling alternatives. We come to be aware that each truth about ourselves is a construction of the moment, true only for a given time and within certain relationships." (Gergen, 1991, p.16)

Although many psychologists stop short of endorsing a fully postmodern 'saturated' self, there is fairly widespread support for a general view of the self as a reconstructive 'project' which both creates and is created by narrative processes that are grounded in social interactions. Cairns & Fouz-Hernández (2014), for example, highlight the “narrative dimension to these self-understandings that are labelled identities.” (p.3). These interactions are both enabled and constrained by structural features of the social environment, meaning that in contrast to Gergen's (1991) suggestion, individuals are not able to write and rewrite their identities at will in some abstract form. Identity may be something that we can write and rewrite but we are also compelled to draw on the existing narratives around us: Identity choices are constrained. Some are more privileged and carry more status than others.

These identity 'choices' may be more accurately described as 'subject positions': Positions we adopt in our discursive interactions with others and positions that are ascribed to us (Davies & Harré, 1990). Though there may be scope to reject or subvert these discursive

‘slots’ we are allocated, this negotiation is often located within the sphere of interpersonal or intergroup conflict: “through the dynamic of in-group dispute (in which constructions invite counter-constructions, and so on) changes in identity definition are ever-present and on-going.” (Hopkins, 2008, p.365). Identity – whether personal or professional – can be viewed as something fairly fluid but also something that is constrained or regulated by an array of interpersonal and social influences. Rather than being a fixed property of the individual, identity can be understood more as a: “...fluid, multiple, fragmented, dialogical, constantly re-constructed and negotiated process.” (Märtsin, 2010, p.66).

An important element in this process for students will be the way in which they see themselves not just individually but also collectively. Collective discourses play an important part in creating and maintaining individual identity. They become a significant point of reference for the individual in asserting and confirming the self. It is also well documented (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Anderson, 1991) how individuals seek affirmation of their identity through the process of creating in- and out-groups; them and us; self and other. Hopkins (2008) looks at the endless process of identity construction and reconstruction through the lens of intergroup dialogue, and specifically how dialogue is experienced by less powerful and/or the minority group. He suggests that “the dynamics to dialogue are never power-free” (p.367), neither is dialogue a panacea. Dialogue can be empowering – giving voice to marginalized groups – or it can be oppressive by silencing or subverting such voices and narratives (Hopkins, 2008; Kirmayer, 2013) through, for example, the positioning of rival voices as ‘expert’ and authoritative.

Students undertaking work-based learning in a multicultural and diverse environment where they may be required to develop as culturally competent practitioners through transformative learning – and the reconfiguration of the self that this entails – will frequently find themselves in dialogue with those who are different from themselves: “...individuals negotiate and continuously re-create their sense of identity based on their lived-through experiences in diverse and multiple socio-cultural contexts” (Märtsin, 2010, p.67). It is, however, when this sense of continuity becomes disturbed, disrupted even, that they are forced to reconsider ‘who they are’, and most significantly, to consider the possibility of being ‘otherwise’: the reality of being different (Murakami & Middleton, 2006). This is a likely occurrence for students on work-based learning striving to develop a professional identity within a diverse and multicultural society. It may be that they have to reconsider

‘who they are’ and the possibility of being ‘otherwise’ many times. Bauman (2001) refers to this as ‘disembeddment’ for which there is no prospect of finality.

This supports the view that the transformative process involved in work-based learning poses significant challenges to the student including the propensity to challenge or undermine their sense of certainty, as well as questioning their beliefs, values and outlook. Meyer & Land (2003) suggest that students are exposed to ‘troublesome knowledge’. They find that their ‘safe’ and ‘secure’ knowledge and practice has to be reconfigured. It is at this point that the potential for transformation lies but it requires an affective development of the self in relation to others to resolve it. The process of reconceptualization – perhaps of a whole world view – inevitably affects the student’s sense of self. New understandings, which at times may be deeply challenging for the student, need to be negotiated and managed. Clouder (2005) refers to this period for the student: “as being in a ‘liminal space’ that must be negotiated to resolve uncertainty” (p.507). Savin-Baden (2007 cited in Cherry, 2014) also describes such learning as creating ‘troublesome spaces’. It presents learners with the experience of being “stuck, or disoriented, where personal and professional certainty and mastery are threatened” (p.242).

It is within this period however when the student may experience a significant struggle with the ‘identity project’. The feeling of liminality while negotiating the challenges to their world view and practice may lead to anxiety, hostility and defensiveness. It is here where students need to make sense of themselves and the subject/practice world that they find themselves in. They need to render their experiences meaningful and move beyond to a space where ‘troublesome knowledge’ is diminished and the feeling of transformation lessened (Cherry, 2007; Clouder, 2006; Märtsin, 2010). Neither may ever completely disappear however: “Being able to engage with the unfamiliar, the complex and the frightening, in ways that are not dysfunctional, being able to learn from a position of ‘not knowing’: these are demanding capabilities.” (Cherry, 2007, p.317).

Such learning depends on reflexivity, self awareness and also requires dialogue with self and others (Bleakley, 1999; Cherry, 2007). This dialogue can not only illuminate what underpins our thoughts, actions and emotions, but also how these may be created and maintained by specific ways of relating and particular relationships of power. Transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) – and transformation of the self – takes place through this dialogical process and, crucially, this also requires transformation of how ‘the other’ is viewed.

This project of transformation may mean that the student is faced with unsettling and disquieting experiences, what some writers refer to as ‘rupture’ (Simão, 2003; Märtsin, 2010). A rupturing life experience questions the way of being and encourages us to see and hear the other differently. Such moments are typically unsettling and uncomfortable: “...another voice becomes evident...and needs to be addressed, it questions our existing way of being and pushes us to position ourselves in relation to that otherness.” (Märtsin, 2010, p.78).

Although these ruptures sound painful, they can be viewed as a type of cognitive and emotional disequilibrium. Indeed, Mitchell & Humphries (2007) argue that such disequilibrium drives student learning. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) suggested that the collisions between the personal and collective open up possibilities for qualitative transformations. In essence this collision may lead to a reconfiguration of the self. Zittoun et al. (2003) focus on how sudden changes in individuals’ socio-cultural contexts may result in such ruptures. They seek to understand these ruptures in the life experience – which then lead to reconfiguration – through the concepts of constraint and transition. It is by the transitional experience that development of the self occurs. The constraint is the dimension of what is possible but it is the transition that involves the overcoming of the rupturing life experience provoked by the hope of achieving what is possible. This then enables the individual to readjust in the shadow and in relation to others.

Simão (2003) talks about ‘disquieting experience’: Experience that ‘hurts’. There is a disjuncture between expectance and experience and it is the tension generated by that which requires new action and new meaning. It is through an ongoing process of dialogue that this challenge to normality may be negotiated and in so doing, the way in which the other is viewed is transformed. Clearly the role of the ‘other’ is central and it is this which we see as dialogic: “Differentiating becomes then, the basic condition for living: existence is a dialogue that has the settlement of diversity as its basic condition for emergence” (Simão, 2003, p.455). This form of dialogue involves contradiction, multiplicity and reflects struggle and conflict (Bakhtin, 1994). It exists within our own sense-making and in relation to others, and can be encapsulated in the notion of ‘alterity’. It is when the transitioning of the ‘disquieting experience’ has taken place that we can see ourselves entering a relationship of alterity: Seeing the other as comparable to the self although simultaneously different. This creates

“the possibility of the subject recognising him/herself in his/her own identity; it also involves the possibility that the subject could legitimate the other’s identity as different from his/her own.” (Simão, 2003, p.456). Part of the task of negotiating identity, then, is negotiating alterity.

Negotiating alterity

Treacher (2006) suggests that the act of alterity “...is giving up on oneself, giving one’s self over to the other, and this is characterised by conscientiousness, humility and sensibility.” (p.36). The process of negotiating alterity requires an awareness of and dialogue with otherness: The unfamiliar; the strange; the exotic. There are, however, multiple threats to this dialogical process of interpersonal negotiation.

The desire for professional identity, characterized by feeling part of an established community of practice, may make the student vulnerable to resisting alterity and instead encourage them to seek the ‘armor’ of dominant voices. Batory (2015) suggests that the more that something is desired in identity formation the greater the discomfort when it is endangered. Additionally, it is acknowledged that learning encourages and facilitates learners into the norms and values of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Participation ensures identity formation through mutual recognition and a sense of belonging is fostered between newcomers and those already established. This may sometimes be at odds with the notion of rupture and reconfiguration and hence with alterity. As Trede et al. (2012) point out, the notion of ‘professional identity’ rests heavily on assumptions of individual agency, neglecting external factors. The existing literature focuses overwhelmingly on the individual learner and includes limited discussion of how power relations and external factors could be managed as part of the professional identity learning process. As already indicated, these power relations and external factors lie at the heart of the work-based learning process.

Kirmayer (2013) stresses the need for an ‘active embrace of uncertainty’ in developing culturally competent practice, and yet there is very low tolerance of uncertainty in professional settings: “professional training and interaction work to contain the destabilizing effects of uncertainty, shoring up authority and maintaining the power of...experts.” (p.370). Whilst negotiating alterity promises risk, uncertainty and potential pain, the ‘armor’ of professional certainty invokes power inequalities. The task of addressing issues around

power, voice and discrimination (Kirmayer, 2013; Ramsden, 2002; Racine & Perron, 2012) involves managing: “The tension between the comfort and safety of the familiar and the challenge of ‘holding’ difference and alterity.” (Kirmayer, 2013, p.367). This tension arises from attempts to relinquish some professional power and authority and thereby allow space for non-professional voices and perspectives: The comfort of the familiar versus the discomfort of the unfamiliar. Kirmayer (2013) identifies one other important issue involved in challenging the expert position:

“Professionals are taught to demonstrate their expertise by always having an authoritative answer ready to hand... Students are rewarded not for original thinking or problem solving but for their capacity to guess the teacher’s intention. In practice, this stance of being the knowing expert stifles dialogue and reinforces conventional thinking by conveying that there is one correct answer.” (p.367)

This encourages procedural or ‘rule-based’ working that inhibits criticality and threatens ethical and culturally competent practice. Kirmayer (2013) points out that professional narratives are not simply neutral or fact-based searches for truth, rather they – like any other narrative – are political discourses that represent and position people and issues that both reveal and conceal, give voice to some people and silence others, and empower and marginalize certain subject positions. Weick (2012), for example, discusses the importance of dominant stories in telling practitioners who they are and what they do which avoids what he calls ‘buzzing confusion’. They justify and legitimate personal choices, creating and limiting logics for future action.

The power of the dominant story may then work against the recognition of and engagement with otherness and alterity. The ‘othering’ that takes place may actually be at the hands of the work-based learning student in a way that is colonizing rather than culturally aware. Existing inequalities and injustices are thus maintained and the student retreats from being open to the ‘other’, instead reinforcing a dialogue of power and imbalance. Too often, professional practice is carried out in the name of a code of practice and set of values of the professional body and from the student’s perspective this can render it unassailable at times. Motivation and honorable intention do not guarantee an acceptance of otherness and a desire for dialogue. As Treacher (2006) agrees: “Knowing and accepting alterity alongside respecting, knowing and acknowledging an alternative viewpoint, are ethical states of mind that may currently not be so readily available.” (p.28)

Conclusion

Students face many risks and potential crises during their work-based learning journey. Although the student may be motivated strongly by a wish to ‘make a difference’, their desire for professional legitimacy and a professional identity – with all the seductive trappings of authority and sense of certainty that this promises – can militate against this. This is partly because professional identity is commonly viewed as a ‘badge’ (sometimes literally): A property of the individual that commemorates an achievement. In this sense professional identity can be understood as an ossified – or even fossilized – static entity rather than an orientation to action.

We have argued that far from being stable, personal and professional identities are fluid and subject to multiple influences and power-saturated interpersonal relations. Work-based learning opportunities can and do present serious challenges to students and they experience uncertainties, crises and threats to their self-narrative (‘ruptures’) which can trigger growth and change leading to reconfiguration of the self. Whilst there is an abundance of ruptures available to the engaged and attentive learner, the temptation is to ignore or contain such ruptures with the attitude that they: “need to be overcome to re-establish the disturbed *status quo* in one’s self-system.” (Märtsin, 2010, p.77). The seductive and gratifying nature of this process is illustrated by the phenomenon of cultural voyeurism. Superficially ‘good’ and ‘helpful’ actions can overshadow the pernicious re-establishment of the status quo in moments of rupture.

While it may feel safer to maintain this status quo (both internally and externally), to do so would be to silence the voice of the other. Defensive maneuvers that seek to quell or deny these disturbances are quite clearly at odds with the development of culturally competent practices. If work-based learning is to nurture culturally competent practitioners, then, these defensive and oppressive tendencies must be addressed. The challenge is to manage moments of rupture by listening to the voice of the other and seek commonalities with it, rather than to build ‘armor’ and retreat to the safety of dominant voices which fortify existing assumptions rather than allow space and security for the student to yield and adapt. But how can this challenge be met?

Fairtlough et al. (2013) have suggested that as a starting point in the education of students a critical perspective must permeate the curriculum. Trede et al. (2012) also indicate that this might help students become more aware of the ongoing processes and make them better able to contest them, thus adopting a fluid ongoing professional identity rather than a 'suit of armor'. We would certainly contend that students need to examine the relations of power, including the structural elements, which lie at the heart of their practice. There is a need to not just 'gaze' at the 'needy' in a passive and voyeuristic fashion, but to locate themselves and those with whom they work in a social and cultural context.

If only it were that simple. Examining the processes of negotiating identity and alterity reveals something of the problematic nature of cultural competence. The moral and cognitive impetus behind facilitating student understanding of those who are different from themselves seems to be beyond question. Gray et al. (2007) suggest that the notion of cultural competence is now standard within anti-oppressive social work practice as a way of responding to and dealing with difference. Too often however, there is an assumption that by simply being exposed to individuals from different cultures students will experience reduced ethnocentrism, refined communication and observation skills and increased cross cultural working skills (Chipchase et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2014). This in turn will facilitate the successful outcome of becoming a culturally competent practitioner.

Gray et al. (2007) argue, however, that this focus on cultural competence as a vehicle for anti-oppressive practice and the development of an appropriate professional identity can actually serve to universalize and colonize minority cultural difference, and hence, serve to replicate power differentials. The notion of 'cultural competence' implies that knowledge can be learned about the 'different' cultural group and that the practitioner develops critical reflection and emotional sensitivity about their own values and beliefs. This is then utilized to practise in a culturally sensitive ('competent') manner. Miller (1998) refers to this as developing 'bicultural integration': The bringing together of culturally specific knowledge, values and skills to understand the service user's worldview or 'cultural frame of reference'. The problem with this approach lies in the notion that the student *can* 'become culturally competent'. This immediately locates them as an 'expert' on 'other' lives and assumes that culture is something that is fixed and can be 'learned', rather than something that is negotiated. Dean (2001) discusses the idea that the notion of cultural competence as something that can be achieved is embedded within a belief that knowledge brings control

and effectiveness. The inference is that culture is something that is static and homogeneous, something that can be 'known'.

By encouraging students to develop in this way there is the danger that the hierarchical 'teacher/student trap' (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005) or expert/service user relationship is nurtured. This can stray into what Marcuse (1965, cited in Brookfield, 2007) calls, within educational settings, the territory of 'repressive tolerance': A tendency to ensure inclusivity and to recognize a range of multiple and diverse perspectives and voices. Brookfield (2007) suggests that repressive tolerance has two dimensions which may actually prove to be oppressive: The tolerance of intolerable ideologies and practices and the marginalization of perspectives and viewpoints that are 'other' to the dominant societal perspective.

It seems that the student can never cease in their attempts to negotiate identity and alterity: The prospect that the student can 'achieve' a professional identity is no more or less doubtful than that of their 'becoming' culturally competent. Both are reliant on assumptions that they are fixed, known and readily achievable. As Trede et al. (2012) suggest, professional identity is increasingly fluid and the processes involved in its development are under-researched. Similarly, the role of work-based learning in forming a professional identity and culturally competent practices is largely a matter of conjecture: There is limited insight into what students and those who supervise them in workplace and/or practice settings think (or care) about it. Clearly, this is an area ripe for further exploration.

We take the position that the kind of 'troublesome knowledge' students encounter in their work-based learning experiences and the uncomfortable nature of their 'identity project' are themselves examples of 'otherness' that need to be embraced rather than contained or avoided. As Mitchell & Humphries (2007) argue, it is this disequilibrium that drives learning and processes of change. Work-based learning locates the student in a matrix of polyvocality and multiple spaces which can seem bewildering. These liminal spaces offer learning opportunities that are characterized by uncertainty and unfinalizability. In this sense, the term 'learning journey' has become a cliché but it does at least connote a sense of ongoing travel and exploration: An odyssey of sorts.

Working towards cultural competence is perhaps more than teaching students about the qualities and characteristics of 'other' groups. It is about shifting one's gaze from the self to

others and conditions of injustice in the world (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). In doing this there is an acknowledgement that the people professions are not value-free but rather politically and socially situated and affected. Although the processes involved in the student's learning odyssey are not yet fully understood this highlights the importance of what Britton (1998) describes as the need for a: "capacity for seeing ourselves in interaction with others and for entertaining another point of view whilst retaining our own, for reflecting on ourselves while being ourselves" (p.87).

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