

Editorial

Special issue ‘Creative arts in the professions: Contributions to learning in practice’

Welcome to the Special themed issue of *Creative arts in the professions: Contributions to learning in Practice*. As the French modern artist, Henri Matisse (1869-1954) once said: *Creativity takes courage*. At a time of global recession and national austerity measures, the helping professions within all sectors – voluntary, statutory and independent, have been effected. The professionals within these organisations have continued to turn to the expressive and creative arts to unblock inner feelings and unleash human potential. In a political climate where adhering to policies and responding to external audits is a common feature, this takes great courage. The articles featured within this edition are a testament to what the helping professions have learnt from this creative process and practice and how the skills of professionals can be developed and led by service users.

We are fortunate to have a selection of articles in this issue that address learning within a number of health and social care settings. A variety of arts are used to innovatively connect with both service users/patients and students, including: proverbs, creative writing, collage, painting and drawing, animation and film, and magical illusions. The following articles also demonstrate how creativity is not restricted to the young – but that adults continue to find the process both cathartic and life changing.

Using creative arts in its many guises has a long standing tradition within the helping professions. As is demonstrated in this edition, creativity encompasses a number of approaches which can be healing, act as a mode of communication or simply encourages inner expression.

This is particularly evident in the article using African proverbs (Tedad). Here we can see how a social work educator, in an attempt to incorporate diverse teaching strategies to meet the needs of a diverse

group of learners, has innovatively turned to proverbs to facilitate learning. Proverbs offer us the gift of metaphors. Proverbs are also a piece of informal history, which are passed down from one generation to the next. Within this context, African proverbs have been used to enhance learning. Tedam demonstrates how proverbs from an array of countries from the African continent (Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe, and Malawi) can be used to better understand and add contextual meaning key concepts. For example educational journeys, social work practice such as collaborative working and significant social concerns like diversity.

The use of an animated film as recounted by Morris *et al* demonstrates how the creative arts can be used as a less threatening vehicle to liberate, hear, recount, see, feel and learn from human experience. This article by Morris *et al* we see how one social work education programme has creatively considered and captured the narrative of experience through the use of animation. The voices of both the student and service user are heard, seen and described. Whilst the practice learning setting is somewhat unconventional for a social work placement, it provides a space to enact professional values. From a service user perspective, we understand better how the use of making an animated film made her story more inclusive and accessible to others.

The contribution made to practice from the therapeutic elements of the creative arts is far reaching as the arts are used within a variety of contexts and professions with a wide range of groups of individuals. McCaughan *et al* present a case study of an Arts and Health based voluntary organisation that works with adults experiencing emotional and psychological distress. In many ways this again is not a traditional social work practice learning environment. However it provides an invaluable opportunity. Here we can see how the arts play a significant role within the recovery of an individual to reach their full potential, raise confidence and find hope. It is fitting that within this edition that the powerful stories and experiences that service users have to tell us are unlocked and shared through imagery, film and poetry.

We are reminded in Grubb's piece, how health care professionals, and in particular nurses, routinely deal with patients and their families in emotionally-charged and traumatic situations. A newly established project using creative writing techniques in the curriculum of nursing and health professional studies students is presented. Far from seeing creative writing as irrelevant, the students embraced this new technique. With the introduction of set tasks such as active reading and critical

writing, within a workshop format produced an innovative teaching and learning experience. Students were able to tap into an inner world which reflects the complexity of everyday life – where there are not necessarily any ‘wrong’ answers but there are a number of ‘right’ answers.

This edition ends with a *Practice Reflection* where Allenby explores the use of a ‘magic trick’ or illusion to help children and young people make sense of traumatic events. Allenby draws upon his experience of working within a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service to demonstrate how professionals can help children make sense of trauma and the role of ‘magic’ within the recovery process. Allenby reminds us of the subtle and obvious differences of the adult and child’s worlds – where they meet and converge and offers the reader a practice tool that some children might find healing.

We hope that this issue serves to demonstrate how educators, practitioners and students are using the creative arts courageously to reach and retell people’s stories.

Angie Bartoli
Guest Editor
30th September 2013