ORIGINAL ARTICLE

"Making It Remarkable": Teaching Professional Youth Work Values in a UK Higher Education Institution

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Abstract

This paper reports on the findings of a study exploring the role of values in professional qualifying courses taught at a Scottish University. The study aimed to enhance understanding of the way in which these courses draw on values-based pedagogy to incorporate professional values laid out in formal standards by external professional bodies. The paper reports on the findings relating specifically to values teaching on a professionally qualifying youth work programme, drawing on contributions uploaded to an online survey by students and lecturers engaged with the programme. It explores the themes to emerge from the survey data, including the centrality of values in practice and teaching; how these align with students' personal values and are shaped by wider societal influences; lecturers' pedagogical approaches; and the importance of supervised placements and dialogue between students, their supervisors, and lecturers in building their understanding and helping them to navigate the complexities of enacting values-based practice. The study concludes that youth worker education programmes, in which professional values are thoroughly embedded, offer the potential to deliver a transformative educative experience to students, and to potentially disrupt the reductionist values systems that have permeated the neo-liberal university.

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Introduction

The practice of educating and facilitating the professional formation of youth workers has achieved increased attention over the past decade, reflecting deliberations in Europe (including the UK) to give greater recognition to youth work and non-formal education, and to strengthen the professional status of youth work (e.g. Alldred and Howard 2022; Taru et al. 2020; Seal 2019). This paper contributes to the continuing dialogue around youth worker education, focussing in particular on the teaching of professional values, drawing on qualitative data gathered in a study conducted in one higher UK education institute (HEI), exploring the role and importance of professional values in children's services qualifying courses. While the study encompassed professionally qualifying courses taught in a School of Education & Social Work at this Scottish university (including Initial Teacher Education and Social Work), this paper addresses the findings relating specifically to teaching on an undergraduate programme accredited under the QAA Youth & Community Work framework (QAA 2019) and validated by the national agency for community learning and development (CLD Standards Council 2021). Both validations foreground underpinning professional values (including voluntary participation and active involvement; social justice; and equity, diversity and inclusion), requiring accredited courses to.

"encourage students to develop inclusive and anti-oppressive practice in their own settings as well as in the wider social context of education [and] equip students with the ability to deal with complex ethical issues" (QAA 2019).

Reflecting on the history of these values in youth and community work practice, Batsleer (2021: 645) asserts that youth worker education has been a "site of contestation" in the UK, particularly as.

"the ethical and political imperatives associated with anti-oppressive practice remain in contradiction with [those] of 'capitalist realism' in both universities and many contemporary forms of youth work practice".

These contestations have been shaped by the neo-liberal ideologies which have dominated political discourse over the past 30 years, and which have had a profound impact on the way in which youth work is perceived and supported by policy-makers (Bradford and Cullen 2014). Neo-liberalism—a political and economic doctrine giving precedence to the principles of market logic over public sector provision of services—has altered the way in which young people are perceived and has changed radically the provision of youth work services to them. These shifts in rhetoric and policy subjectify both young people and youth workers, effectively denying young people any place in society other than as consumers and workers-in-making, and re-defining the purpose of youth work from a radical and transformational practice to an instrumental element of the process of preparing young people for work (Giroux 2015). Contested by practitioners and theorists alike (e.g. Davies 2015; de St Croix 2018), the de-professionalising pressures of neoliberalism have increasingly positioned youth workers as managers of this risky population (characterised as irresponsible, incapable, and dependent outsiders), ensuring their engagement with

education to ensure they fulfil their obligation as citizens (Bessant 2011). Youth work has been promoted as a counterbalance to the wider deleterious impacts of neo-liberalism and its attendant ills (including climate collapse, heightened social and economic inequalities, precarity, insecurity, and a global mental health crisis) on young people (e.g. Davies 2015; Purcell et al. 2022).

The prevalence of these contradictory conceptualisations of youth work requires youth worker educators to prepare their students for the challenge of enacting values-based transformational practice with young people in a working environment in which they will encounter pressures to work instrumentally. Reflecting similar pressures experienced by youth workers in the field (de St Croix 2018), these pressures are prevalent in the very HEIs where professionally qualifying youth work programmes are delivered, with neo-liberal policies having re-shaped universities such that efficiency, managerialism, and performativity prevail over academic democracy and debate and professional judgement, all while lecturers face de-professionalising pressures (Taberner 2018). Educators in this context need—through the application of praxis—to embed the professional values in their own practice as a means of modelling to students how to achieve this themselves (Corney 2019).

The study on which this paper reports aimed to enhance our understanding of the way in which these societal, professional, and contextual drivers play out in the delivery of children's service qualifying courses. It sought to generate responses to any practical manifestations of the likely contradictions to emerge in programme delivery, and—in relation to youth worker education in particular—with the objectives being to:

- determine the extent to which HEI practice is shaped by professional youth work values;
- identify how values are incorporated into the delivery of a youth work degree programme;
- capture lecturer and student perspectives on the place of values in the delivery of a professionally qualifying youth work programme; and
- assess the extent to which participation on the programme enables students to align their practice with the professional youth work values.

Literature Review

Youth Worker Education

Forms of practice across the globe that align with youth work in the UK—including child and youth care in Canada, youth development in the USA, youth work in Europe, the Commonwealth, Australia, and Canada—are all subject to some degree of professionalisation, including adherence to professional principles, ethical codes, and values (Brooker 2017). While the nomenclature reflects clear distinctions in paradigms reflecting their unique framing of practice (informal education in the UK; positive youth development in the USA, Australia, and New Zealand; and therapeutic care in Canada), the professional formation of these practitioners is undertaken

through the completion of degree level qualifications, with academic study undertaken alongside supervised practice in community-based settings (ibid). Similar routes to professionalisation are being developed in countries across the Commonwealth and in European states, where attention has been paid over the past decade to clarifying the role of youth work and in seeking to strengthen the profession through the development of common codes of practice and values (Commonwealth Secretariat 2017; Council of Europe (CoE) 2013).

These developments distinguish between vocational youth worker training in situ and undergraduate level youth worker qualifications intended to prepare practitioners for a more developmental role. Formal recognition of HEI-based professional qualifications validates and certifies learning processes and outcomes in youth work, as well as the professional formation of youth workers within the context of youth work itself, albeit framed within formal education systems (CoE 2013). Central to the pedagogical approaches to youth worker education in these diverse contexts is a commitment to embed the professional values of youth work in the delivery of professional qualifications, and to align these with informal and critical approaches to engagement with policy and theory, so that newly qualified practitioners are equipped to be reflective and critical practitioners, promoting equality, social justice, and human rights (Flett and Tyler 2019; Kiilakoski 2020).

This foregrounds the importance of lecturers modelling and embedding reflection and praxis as key components of the educative process, particularly in relation to the enactment of professional values (Russo 2001; Daniels 2017). Through the integration of knowledge (theory) and action (practice), praxis is a profound form of engagement with the world, based on a moral disposition to further human wellbeing and to engage in thought and deed to transform the lives of those with whom we work, foregrounding the role of values, respect, dialogue, and action in the effort to make a difference in the world (Freire 1970).

Personal, Professional, and Institutional Values

Professional values reflect the professional identity held by those members of each children's service profession (e.g. NYA[1] 2023). For professions where effective practice requires particular moral qualities (including youth work), practitioners require "principled dispositions or virtues" to discharge their duties in a moral and fair manner; these include temperance, courage, honesty, and justice (Carr 2011: 173). Practitioners' personalities and professional activity should both be underpinned by high ideals and aspirations, and driven by a desire to encourage the development of these in the young people with whom they work. Youth worker motivations range from "a desire to right

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[1] Although published by the national agency for youth work in England, these standards apply to the nations of the UK and all Ireland. They are drafted by representatives of the Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) for youth and community work in each country, which also oversee validation and standard setting for courses leading to qualifications in professional youth work (CLD in Scotland). This quality assurance function is central to the profession's obligation to ensure that youth workers are fit to practice.

wrongs and resolve social and political problems to ensuring that others do not have to suffer through similar personal difficulties" (Sapin 2013: 16). This interplay between the personal and the professional is reflected in the trajectories of youth worker educators, the majority of whom are recruited from the profession and should shape their pedagogy to facilitate students' understanding and the development of dispositions required to enact the values in practice (Carr 2011).

Tensions can arise between the professional values and an individual's personal values, particularly with the increasing predominance of neo-liberal economic thought, which influences discourse and practice (Gunetilleke et al. 2011). For instance, exacerbated by the tensions between professional and organisational values, community workers continually strive to balance competing values claims, seeking to prioritise those of the groups with whom they work over those of their host organisation (Banks 2019). Likewise, teachers have found that the only way to overcome this "values-practice gap" is through continuous professional learning and the sharing of practice in managing values tensions in communities of practice with colleagues demonstrating similar values sets (Brennan and King 2022).

Although these real and perceived tensions are often resolved by individuals choosing to work in areas which align more closely with their own values, students should be supported in grappling with these challenges as they develop their professional identity, to help them overcome anxiety or self-doubt arising from these values clashes, and to achieve greater fulfilment in their work (Englebertink et al. 2021). Furthermore, practitioner education programmes should incorporate forms of critical activism to support emerging practitioners in challenging societal inequalities and hegemonic discourses (Kennedy 2018). This approach enables tensions between compliant and disruptive narratives in higher education professional training programmes to be tackled in such a way that the professional values are honoured (ibid).

Most HEIs produce statements reflecting the institution's espoused values and beliefs, commonly emphasising the overall purpose of university education as being to benefit society (Elwick 2020). For instance, the case study university's publicly stated values are described on its website as "*valuing people, working together, integrity, making a difference, and excellence*" (Anonymised online). However, university mission statements and strategies increasingly incorporate reference to managerialist agendas concerned with performance, competition, and excellence agendas reflecting the neo-liberal formulation of higher education. This has re-framed educational values such that they are "synonymous with economic return and institutional accountability" and has transformed the relationship between students and institutions to be increasingly transactional (Tomlinson 2018: 715). As with their students, lecturers must grapple with the challenge of balancing these opposing values claims, being required to align their practice required by their employer when they are, in the main, practitioners committed to enacting the values of the youth work profession.

Youth Work Values

Values are the primary, foundational element of effective youth work practice, in which all youth workers' actions are shaped by personal and professional values and

beliefs (Davies 2015; Sapin 2013). The values and principles underpinning practice are based on progressive political and ideological positions on social justice and a commitment to human rights (ibid). Central to the professional values base is a recognition of the autonomy of each young person and respect for their right to make and enact decisions about their lives, starting with choices about who they associate with, reflected in the principle of voluntary participation (Davies 2015). As intimated above, youth work values run counter to the prevailing neo-liberal narrative articulated in mainstream youth policy (Bradford and Cullen 2014), aiming to empower young people and facilitate their agency and control over their lives, by valuing young people for who they are (not as measured by some arbitrary, externally determined yardstick), meaning that youth workers:

> "value different perspectives and address expressed needs and interests … recognise young people's rights to be treated with dignity as individuals … reject negative labelling and challenge negative stereotypes" (Sapin 2013: 3).

Professional youth work practice starts where young people are at, giving prominence to their lifeworlds (Davies 2015; Metz 2017). Hence, practitioners engage with young people in different domains, including (Dunne et al. 2014; Cooper 2016) working with young people in their own spaces, starting from young people's perspectives, and helping young people to formulate their own sense of identity. Such an approach affords youth workers considerable access to and influence over the lives of the young people with whom they work, creating a moral obligation on them to focus attention solely on the needs and aspirations of those young people (Banks 2010). This obligation will inevitably present practitioners with ethical dilemmas, responses to which should be shaped by professional wisdom informed by these values, with critical reflection being the process by which by the youth worker determines the efficacy of their intervention (ibid). Conceived of as someone who has been educated in an identifiable body of knowledge, values and beliefs and who can integrate these into their practice, the training of practitioners promotes adherence to professional practice frameworks such that they act from a particular knowledge and value stance and are able to apply these in different contexts (Fook et al. 2000: 243–44).

Teaching Youth Work Values in Higher Education

Teaching practice in the HEI context reflects lecturers' commitment to informal methodologies and critical pedagogical approaches so that work with students reflects our professional imperative to "address social disadvantage and ensure that the voices of the most marginalised are included in policy creation and societal formation" (Curran et al. 2022: 3). The delivery of qualifying programmes involves a process of "professional socialisation", specifically the "acquisition of values, attitudes, skills and knowledge pertaining to the profession" (Corneilissen and van Wyk 2008: 826). This is achieved through facilitated engagement with theory, practice (via placements with external agencies), and interactions with more experienced practitioners, to:

"produce graduates who display mastery of theoretical ideas, competence in applying theory in complex workplace settings, and professional dispositions that foster ethical and reflective professional practices' (Trede et al. 2012: 365).

The delivery of youth worker education within the confines of HEIs' formal learning environments presents challenges in many areas, including the need to devise a flexible curriculum, allowing for co-construction with and challenge by the students, within the rigid university systems and the framing of education within an overarching neo-liberal values-base contradictory to our professional values (Smith and Seal 2021: 19–20). Indeed, the way in which neo-liberal "values" have permeated the formal education system presents specific challenges to youth work programmes in that our "non-traditional" students are often under-valued and excluded by universities, and the value ascribed by youth work to criticality and transformation threatens their power structures (Woolley et al. 2021).

Research Design

The interpretivist design of the study on which this paper reports was informed by our commitment to utilising participants' perspectives to enhance the professionally qualifying programmes under consideration (youth work, social work, and initial teacher education). We sought to capture and interpret the perspectives of participants with experience of engagement in the programmes and an understanding therefore of professional values and teaching on the programmes.

We created two discrete surveys which were made available to potential participants via JISC Online Surveys. These were used to capture the perspectives of students and lecturers engaged with the three professionally qualifying courses, all of which share a core first year module addressing the interplay of personal, professional, and societal values. This approach elicited personal descriptions of participants' experiences, helping us to better understand the meanings that individual lecturers and students hold in relation to "values" (van Manen 2016).

The issue was investigated incrementally, allowing us to challenge our own preconceived ideas about the issues under consideration, although we sought throughout to embody our own professional values in the process, as we do in our practice and teaching. Questions were designed to reflect our understanding of themes drawn from the literature and to generate "rich" description; this facilitated our active and ongoing engagement with the interplay of informants' experience and theory.

Using purposive sampling, an invitation to participate in the online surveys was sent by e-mail to all students and lecturers engaged with the qualifying courses. Initial data collection took place in June, 2021. However, due to the impact of the ongoing covid-19 pandemic, the initial trawl generated only a very small response rate. Consequently, the invitation was re-sent in December, 2021, and participants were provided with a 6-week timeframe within which to complete the survey. Data emerging from both phases were combined for the final analysis; hence, the findings

are based on sample sizes of 24 staff and 39 students, with participants drawn from across all three disciplines.

Reflecting our own diverse backgrounds and adherence with the professional codes of our professions, our approach to the study was rooted in ethical practice. Specifically, we followed BERA ethical guidance (BERA 2018) and complied with the University's Code of Practice for Non-clinical Research (Anonymised 2016), securing ethical approval from the School's Research Ethics Committee before involving any human participants. We recognised the potential for power dynamics to interfere with the study, in relation to the recruitment of staff and of students. Accordingly, the use of a neutral e-mail address created a "buffer zone" between researchers and informants for the duration of the study, thereby minimising potential complications arising from these unequal relationships (Gormally and Coburn 2014).

Before completing the survey, participants were invited to read an opening statement about the purpose of the study and the use to which we intended to put the anonymised data generated from their responses. We reaffirmed here the voluntary nature of participation in the study, and reiterated participants' right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

We used thematic analysis to interrogate data (Braun and Clarke 2012), which was split up so that responses were grouped by discipline. As two members of the research team teach on the programmes under investigation, we were conscious of the need to neutralise the potential for our positionality to impede the objectivity of our analysis, and sought to curtail any potential bias in our interpretations of participants' contributions (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). This was achieved by ensuring that we only had access to the data sets relating to the programmes for which we hold no responsibilities, and by subsequently cross-checking one another's analysis to generate a set of themes from across all datasets.

Findings

Our data analysis identified common themes present across the different participant populations that enabled us to identify actions to strengthen values teaching on the programmes under consideration. The findings from this analysis are presented here specifically as they apply to youth work in particular, and to identify recommendations for the teaching of values in youth worker education more generally.

HEI Practice and Professional Youth Work Values

Local factors with the potential to impact teaching on the professionally qualifying programmes, specifically relating to values, include the university's statement on its identify, purpose, and values. This foregrounds the importance of values, stating at the outset:

> "We are a university that holds social purpose, building on our long-standing values, dear to our hearts. We are not afraid to act purposively to make

a real difference in the world … as we continue to transform lives, locally and globally, working together as a community to deliver positive change" (Anonymised online).

This statement appears to align the university closely with the stated purpose of youth work, a potentially transformative associational and educative intervention in young people's lives that allows individuals "to act together to promote well-being or human flourishing" (Smith 1988: 111), aiming to:

"enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential" (NYA 2023).

The university develops its rationale on its purpose, stating that its values (valuing people; working together; integrity; making a difference; excellence) "inform how we behave, make decisions, communicate and work" (Anonymised online). Again, there is some overlap in the university's espoused values, and those of the youth work profession, which should underpin and be reflected in practice (CLD Standards Council 2019):

- participation and active involvement;
- equity, diversity, and inclusion;
- partnership with young people and others; and
- personal, social, and political development.

Attention is paid to personal, professional, and societal values throughout the delivery of the programme, starting in the first module students on professionally qualifying courses complete together (Anonymised 2023). The application of these values is revisited explicitly in module descriptors for practice-aligned modules in each of the four years of the programme, as well as in modules addressing collaboration, praxis, and critical reflection (ibid). The professional values and competencies (CLD Standards Council 2019) are addressed implicitly in all other taught modules.

There were contradictory views on the extent to which the professional values promoted on the programme align with those of the university, with some students in particular expressing strong views about the contradictions these present. For instance, when discussing the professional values, one student opined "I don't think the university shares these values" (CES5), while another said "I don't believe the values of the university as a whole sometimes fit with the values of my profession" (CES1). One lecturer observed that the professional values "map on quite neatly" to the university values (CEL2), though a student demonstrated the subtleties in interpreting espoused and enacted values, highlighting one specific conflict in relation to inclusion and anti-discriminatory practice, stating:

"I don't think CLD practice would expect nor pressure anyone into achieving 'excellence', as the word itself has connotations of struggle and comparison" (CES3).

Incorporating Values into a Youth Work Programme

The embedded nature of values across all areas of the programme featured in responses from both staff and students, reflecting previous emphasis on how the teaching of professional values on higher education programmes should help students bridge the theory/practice gap (e.g. Brennan and King 2022). Lecturers identified the importance of values as a core component of the curriculum, with one claiming that values are "imbued throughout our programme" (CEL1), and another asserting that values "are threaded throughout all the modules I have taught on" (CEL2). Students reflected a similar perspective, locating values at the heart of the curriculum, with one articulating how the teaching of values evolved throughout their engagement in the programme:

> "I feel the values have been taught well and implemented from the very beginning … and these are developed on as the course continued" (CES1).

The majority of respondents confirmed that there is alignment between what is being taught on the programme and the values required by the professional qualifying organisation, particularly in the shared first year module. Lecturers emphasised the fact that the professional values are given prominence, and that these are "clearly laid out by CLD Standards Council" (CEL2), and that students are required to reflect on how their personal and professional values align in the context of their evolving practice throughout their time on the programme. Students, too, acknowledged the usefulness of reference to the professional competences framework within the programme, with one stating that:

> "the CLD Standards Council provides a clear and concise set of core values that are easily accessible" (CES4).

Conversely, some students suggested that values are only "touched upon", and that these are only addressed explicitly in the first year values module and thereafter only by "certain members of staff" (CES2). This highlights the need for consideration to be given to enhancing taught input about values on the programme, to ensure opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogue about values beyond the core first year module.

Values and Placements

A mandatory element of all qualifying courses, successful completion of supervised placements was recognised by both students and staff as critical in understanding the way in which values shape our work with young people, and the continuous interplay between values and practice. Students' descriptions of their experience of values on placement highlight how this process helps values come to life, with one student suggesting that "professional values have been made example of during practice. I implement these in my daily practice when working with the community" (CES1). One student emphasised the benefits of placement

in "being able to *continuously* see the values in practice" (CES7), while others emphasised how placements enable them to reflect on values in real-life scenarios and over extended periods. From the lecturers' perspective, placements provide them with the opportunity to assess how students make sense of the theoretical discussions about values in a practice context, meaning that they can determine the extent to which students meet requirements in relation to values-based practice.

These contributions confirm findings from previous studies highlighting the unfeasibility of separating learning taking place in the university setting from that which occurs during professional practice (Lovat 2011; Brennan and King 2022). Indeed, they reinforce the view that surfacing values can bring about holistic benefits for students' learning, enabling them to interrogate their personal views and apply their learning about professional values in real-life situations.

Teaching of Values

Students identified a number of different aspects of the pedagogical approaches adopted by lecturers in engaging them in learning about values. Several students seemed to appreciate the fact that their pre-conceived views were open to challenge and revision through their interactions with lecturers, with one stating typically that "lecturers aimed to challenge ways of thinking which helped to develop and understand professional values" (CES1). While one student reflected on their view that "values have been focused on from the very beginning, but I do think *this has been necessary*" (CE7, emphasis added), another claimed that "lecturers have applied these values to their teaching, making it remarkable" (CES3).

Dialogue was the most cited approach to teaching values, with many references to this peppering student and staff responses. For instance, one student asserted that "conversation about values is actively encouraged to develop understanding" (CES3). Additionally, reference was made to access to "good resources to identify our professional values" (CES2).

The merit in staff modelling their professional values was recognised by staff and students, both within the classroom and in practice settings. This seems to be equally important in lecturer-led theoretical discussions about values, and in discussions with practice supervisors and colleagues, with students appreciating the efforts made by their mentors to model sound, values-based practice. Priority was given to "difference" by several students, who flagged the need for more opportunities to understand how different approaches can be applied in a variety of contexts while maintaining alignment between practice and the professional values. Some participants highlighted the need for more role modelling and learning about real-life situations before encountering these in practice, particularly in relation to how these ideas interact with the students' own values base. As one student observed, there is merit in providing:

> "Opportunities that highlight the differences in values that we have [to] help illustrate how we interpret them differently" (CES4).

Reflecting the breadth of issues covered in the youth work "curriculum", one student acknowledged the usefulness of locating values in "discussions and debates around … global issues that we face" (CES3). Additionally, students highlighted the value of these discussions in empowering them to not only discuss the importance of values but also to practice their enactment on placement.

Aligning Student Practice with Professional Youth Work Values

Reflections on the alignment of values—at personal, professional, and university levels—featured throughout responses from both students and staff. As one student explained, professional values "act as a way of making sure you do right by the people you work with, not just what *you* think is right" (CES3, original emphasis). Another student saw how their participation on the programme has helped them to put their values "into context, link[ing] them with all areas of my practice" (CES6).

One student, reflecting on how their own values align with the professional values, indicated that their participation on the programme had helped them to "better understand values required within my chosen profession" (CES3). Another student flagged up the fact that "values I hadn't considered myself to have previously have come up" in discussions of the professional values (CES4), demonstrating the depth of impact of the programme in facilitating reflection and transformation in students' perspectives.

The process of balancing competing values through reflection, dialogue, and challenge in class and practice settings—as highlighted by Banks (2019) and Brennan and King (2022)—was found to be problematic for some students. Concerns raised in their responses included the potential for being judged if they were seen to challenge the received orthodoxy around values, and the fact that their limited understanding—developed only in abstract terms in class-based teaching—was brought into sharper focus once tested in practice. Furthermore, given the range of placement settings, the issue of diversity in interpretation and application of professional values was identified as potentially problematic by lecturers and students alike.

A small number of responses expanded on the challenges of reflecting on ethical dilemmas, both to keep the discourse around values relevant and up to date (i.e. relating them to contemporary socio-political issues) and to prepare students to respond to the kinds of challenges they may face in practice. This suggests that qualifying programmes might provide more opportunities for students to reflect current trends and priorities, and to provide a safe space to engage in dialogue about the alignment of their personal and professional values, and how they might navigate potential difficulties in future.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has successfully engaged students and lecturers from one professionally qualifying youth work programme in reflecting on the role and importance of values in the professional formation of those students, foregrounding their perspectives on

the place of values in its delivery. The findings demonstrate that programme lecturers—all coming to the HEI context with professional youth work qualifications and experience in the field—can navigate the complexity of delivering what is essentially a qualification in informal education within the constraints of a formal education setting. Moreover, the study has shown how lecturers are able to teach, model, and support the development of the professional values they bring from the field, even though they potentially conflict with those of the HE context within which the programme is delivered. It seems that the imposition of a neo-liberal framing of higher education more generally needs not undermine lecturers' ability to foster contradictory values and criticality in professionally qualifying youth work programmes.

It is encouraging to see how this programme is able to incorporate values in all areas of delivery, helping students better understand the interplay between personal, professional, and societal values in their chosen career, both in abstract discourse in the university classroom, and in supervised practice on placements. The professional formation of youth workers is a complex process, and the study has demonstrated that this is particularly so in relation to the enactment of values in practice. The findings confirm the utility of the placement experience in helping students test out theory learnt in class, and in exposing them to contextual facets within and between different practice contexts; something they will need to be able to navigate throughout their careers. The anchoring effect of values in this process is key, allowing for classroom-based discussion—led by lecturers with nuanced differences in their interpretation of the central values of inclusive, participatory, and anti-oppressive practice—to be complemented by students' own experiences and dialogue with practitioners on placement. This reflects the importance of lecturers' pedagogical approach being framed more by their dispositional traits than the performative requirements of neo-liberal university systems.

Given that youth work practice is undertaken within a wider socio-political context shaped by neo-liberalism, it is useful for students to learn to negotiate a way through the apparent values contradictions between the qualifying programme's host institution and their chosen career. This affords students further opportunities to juggle with the areas of contestation surrounding their profession. The extent to which students have agency to question or/and challenge sometimes contradictory messages they encounter in the course of their studies remains unclear from this study. This "values schizophrenia" (Ball 2003: 221), highlighting the disjuncture between being an authentic practitioner following one's own values in the face of challenges from myriad perspectives (in particular potentially contradictory accountabilities to employers, communities, and professional bodies), is something that lecturers and placement supervisors must try to ameliorate.

It is important to recognise the limitations of the study as a basis on which to make generalisable recommendations. A single case inquiry—particularly one with a relatively small sample size—does not necessarily provide sufficiently robust evidence to be able to make assertions about the findings' transferability, though their alignment with prior research gives some confidence in their veracity (Yin 2018). It may not be unreasonable to suppose that professionally qualifying programmes delivered within HEIs—both in the UK and further afield—experience similar values contradictions with host institutions and tensions in relation to the delivery of a programme promoting

critical and informal practice in a formal education context. Hence, one might expect to find similar discourse around the teaching of values in other settings, suggesting that these findings will not be unique, and that the conclusions are transferrable, making this a potentially useful illustrative case.

This suggests that programmes should consider carefully the factors that shape and influence students' attitudes and values bases, particularly how these impact on their emerging professional values. Explicit teaching and reflection on broader societal issues reflected here are useful in acknowledging how socio-political aspects of education need to permeate both university and placement learning contexts on all professionally qualifying programmes, to enhance the contributions made by both placement supervisors and university lecturers in shaping the development of student values. Further, lecturers on these programmes should be confident in applying critical and dialogical pedagogical approaches that challenge and offer the potential to disrupt the status quo of the universities in which they teach, modelling their values as a central element of transformational practice.

Bringing their professional values to life in this way goes beyond simply teaching what is required by PSRBs, and demonstrates how values can shape effective practice in multiple contexts, making the learning experience "remarkable". This underlines the importance of sustaining placements at settings demonstrating genuinely transformative practice. Additionally, programmes should help students explore—through extensive dialogue around alternative solutions to common challenges—approaches to resolving ethical dilemmas, thereby equipping them to enact ethics in action. Similarly, more effort needs to be applied to developing students' understanding values in interdisciplinary working, as this will feature in their future practice.

Declarations

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