

Art and Creativity in Social Work Pedagogy: A Catalyst for Change

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Abstract

Social work education is increasingly required to equip students for complex, uncertain, and inequitable practice environments. This presentation examines the use of arts-based and creative pedagogical methods as a means of enhancing student learning, participation, and critical reflexivity in professional education. Grounded in theories of creativity, co-production, social pedagogy, and critical social theory, the session problematises dominant understandings of creativity and explores its pedagogical, ethical, and political significance.

The paper draws on an applied, co-created arts-based learning initiative involving social work students, artists, and citizens. Working intensively in small groups over a defined period, participants collaboratively designed and produced creative outputs informed by lived experience and professional concerns. The initiative was assessed using reflective written assignments, complemented by qualitative data generated through focus groups and content analysis. These methods enabled in-depth exploration of students' experiences of participation, group work, power, and co-production.

Findings highlight a range of positive student outcomes, including enhanced engagement, deeper critical reflection, increased confidence in collaborative practice, and greater awareness of power dynamics and inclusion. Students reported that creative methods supported learning that was emotionally engaged, relational, and situated, enabling them to integrate theory and practice in more meaningful ways. At the same time, tensions emerged around control, expertise, and institutional expectations, offering valuable learning opportunities in themselves.

The presentation also addresses practical and structural barriers to implementing creative pedagogies, such as risk aversion, time pressures, and bureaucratic constraints, and identifies strategies for overcoming these challenges. Overall, the presentation suggests that arts-based, co-produced methods can support transformative student learning and invites educators to reconsider creativity as a legitimate, rigorous, and socially just approach to social work pedagogy.