

Pedagogies of power: experiential groupwork as a mechanism for promoting equality in social work education

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Overview of our whistlestop journey today

Why we introduced new
teaching sessions in MA Social
Work

What we did

How we did it

Impact and learning



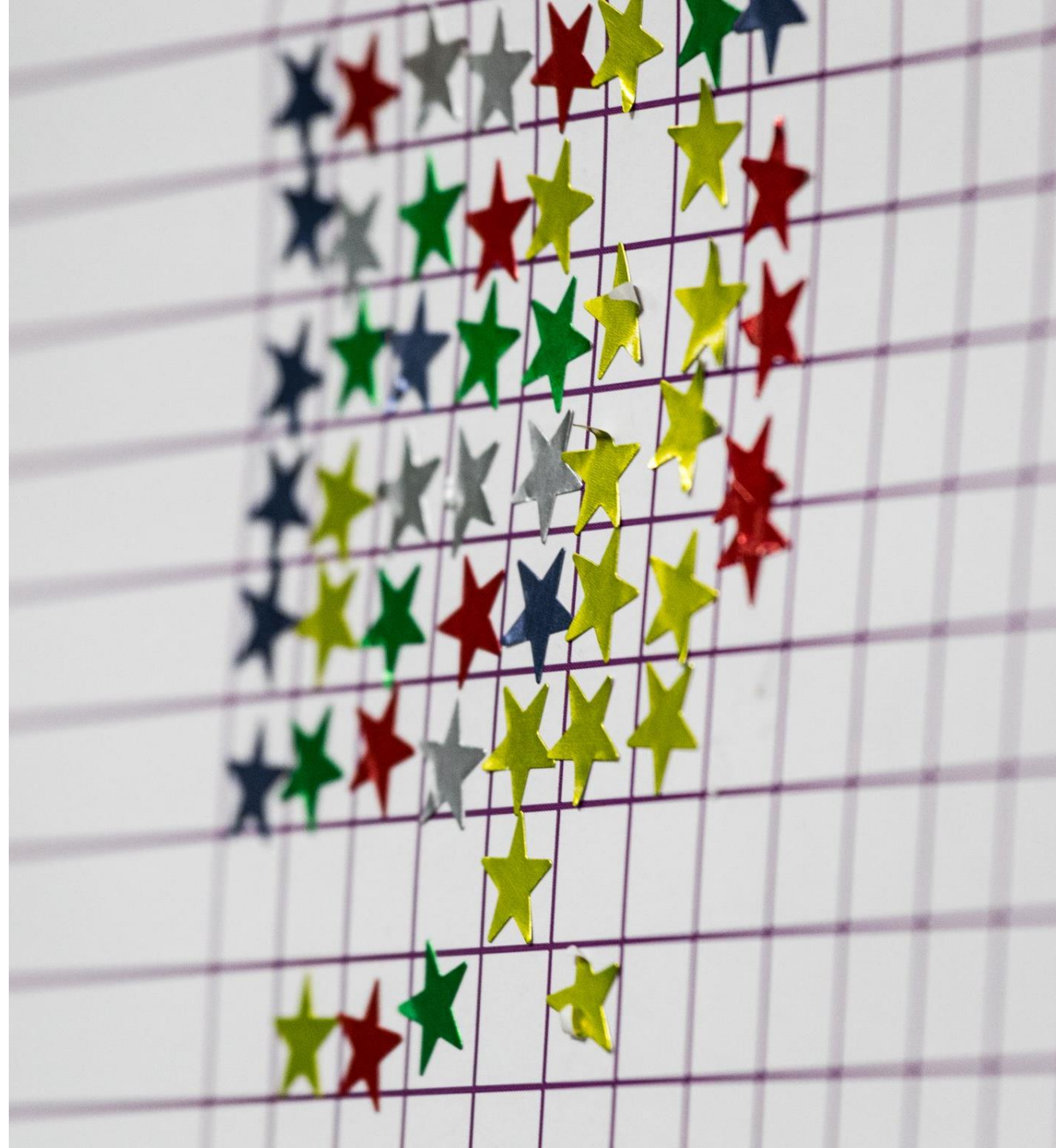
Why – coming together of events

Student feedback – critical incident concerning student interactions in a previous cohort

National evidence of unequal outcomes on practice placements, relating to race, gender and disability

Need to decolonise the institution and its curricula

Commitment from programme team to work collaboratively on these issues





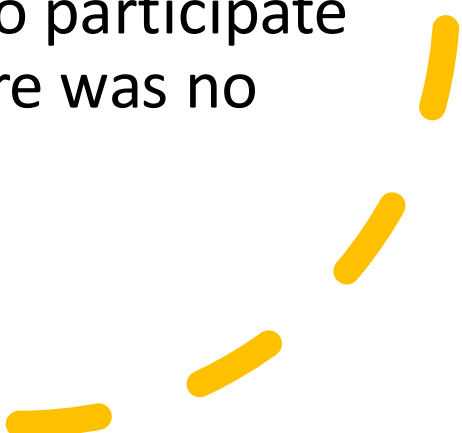
Key elements

Unit focused on supporting experiential and reflective learning about power and how it operates in groups

Emphasis on putting knowledge and ideas into practice in student groups and on placement

Students were asked to review some asynchronous material beforehand, but groupwork focused on personal experiences, with no didactic input

Students were strongly encouraged to participate but this was not compulsory and there was no assessed element






Overarching aims

Support students to reflect on their knowledge in relation to their own experiences in current and previous groups

Help group to consider together how best to actively work with power issues in a diverse student body and diverse communities of practice

Challenge some of our 'taken for granted' ways of being in groups and actively reflect on group processes

Connect our own practices and interactions in groups including how systems of social difference play out and are given meaning in our interactions



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Features of experiential workshops

We began with a group agreement about how we should work together on these issues

Reflective and experiential space to consider group processes and encourage self-reflection

Facilitators as group members with different roles but sharing too



Focus of the four workshops

To discuss and debate sociological and psychological understandings about power and group processes

To reflect on what these understandings suggest about students' past experiences of being and working in groups

To think about how students can apply these understandings to how they work in group settings in university

To consider how students will apply these understandings on their practice placements and reflect on how issues of power are enacted and negotiated

Impacts on student learning

- 95% rated unit as excellent
- Liked discussion-based learning
- Liked opportunities for connection with other students
- Liked challenge to previous way of thinking and being
- 'Every class was a safe space where people could feel comfortable to share with others and actively listen to what others were saying'
- 'Without (these workshops) I never would have spoken'



But...

‘Not all students attended every session and this took away the feeling of being in a learning community slightly’

Raised question around investment and commitment

Some of our learning and challenges

Couldn't initially
register
attendance as
'extra –
curricular'


Year One –
voluntary nature
of learning
impacted on
group presence
and dynamic

Were groups
really 'safe
enough' and
were we
reaching
everyone?

Getting
engagement
from some
students when
not credit-rated



Our question
to you....



Would you consider using this
model of learning with your
students?