



‘I have a right to finish my final placement!’

Student, Practice Educator, and Person-With-Lived-Experience  
Reflections on an Innovative Simulated Practice Capability  
Assessment Adaptation for Social Work Students with Disability

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# Setting the scene

- ▶ **Tunde:** I was on my final 100 day placement and halfway through had a health problem unexpectedly. The placement said 'sorry we can't continue'. I had not failed the placement. Upon feeling better, and receiving an OH assessment, I started a new placement, which had to 're-start' from the beginning than take off from the previous placement. Despite the OH 'reasonable adjustments', again I experienced 'sorry we can't continue'. Again, I had not failed. The professional regulation is that I had to complete 100 days. I was 13 days short and waiting for another placement. In the context of diminishing availability of placements, it felt like a long-time waiting and with little hope.
- ▶ **Johanna:** The rigidity of that 'one-size-fits-all' practice learning assessment – the practice learning system – marginalised T.

An assessment adjustment had to be made – one that was different that had been tried before - and these are our critical reflections on it.

# The adjusted practice

## 5 day OSPA

(Woodcock Ross 2023)

- Focus on 'initial assessment activity' as part of social work processes
- Simulated online platform interview with a PWLE and audio telephone calls with professionals and a family member
- Product was a completed initial assessment and a written critical reflection of learning from it (for portfolio)
- Both items were rated (marked) by triads of PWLE, practitioners, educators using a structured tool developed with PWLE and practitioners
- Pre and post questionnaire to measure change

## 8 day Professional Leadership Project

- Aim was to co-produce a new OSPA
- Focus on disabled fathers
- Interviews with 2 PWLE members
- Reading research from practitioners
- Writing scripts for the OSPA – to reflect pWLE experience and provoke
- Present script to PWLE and PE to receive feedback and make changes
- Critical Reflection of process for portfolio

# Did our online practice capability simulation deliver sufficiently realistic experiential practice learning of practice to assess the student's capabilities?

- ▶ Johanna: On the surface the question attends to social work's Professional Standards and whether simulation activities can contribute to the challenge of finding reliable and valid assessment tools (Woodcock Ross 2023; Bogo *et al.* 2012), and if they can then this could be sufficient for 'adjusted assessment'.
- ▶ Tunde: It was realistic practice learning. It was rigorous in the sense that it was what I would do in my practice as a social worker...interviewing service users, digging out information to support wishes and feelings, writing up for authentic but also increased holistic understanding of circumstances.
- ▶ Craig: Though the environment was simulated, the student was still interviewing real service users...What makes it realistic is that we are drawing on real-life experiences, not simulating to the extent that we are playing another character, the scenario was developed so it had enough nuggets of truth for us as PWLE to be able to plug into that so that felt real.
- ▶ Johanna: On a deeper level the question reflects a portrayal of the imaginary 'ideal student' and 'ideal practice learning opportunity' [the placement] against its shadow, the 'non-ideal student' and 'non-ideal practice learning opportunity' [non-placement] – “a spanner in the works” that endangers the objectivity of academic systems (professional and academic Standards, integrity, efficiency)(Nieminen 2022)
- ▶ Craig: Our adjusted practice wasn't just a replacement for what was lost. We managed to meet the Standards, meet the criteria, but so much more happened. We created something new, and it was more rich.
- ▶ Tunde: It's like going to the GP for a health issue and the GP goes beyond what you've just told him or her and they refer to more investigation into how this can be holistically looked into and in the process you get more than you think you've gone to the GP for in terms of support and everything. That's my experience from the positive input from you.

# Was the assessment adjustment fair?

- ▶ Johanna: Fairness conceptions are shaped by principles: equality (equal treatment of everyone), equity (individualised treatment of everyone), and need (differentiated treatment based on individual's need) (Rasooli et al. 2018, 2019, 2021).
- ▶ We found that our conceptions of fairness were also shaped by our lived experiences of those principles – that our lived experience of unfairness in our own lives – supported by Rasooli's research. Interactional/interpersonal dynamics therefore operated in our adjusted practice, and this began with perceiving the unfairness of access and someone stepping out to find an alternative approach.
- ▶ Craig: Someone in a position of authority and power and leadership had to give permission, had to say “It's OK to do things differently...”
- ▶ Johanna: One such ‘stepping out’ was for us to include a service user – a person with lived experience – in helping the student to finish his placement. Again, this constituted an interactional dynamic within the adjusted practice (reflected in T and C's comments below)
- ▶ Tunde: Now when I meet with PWLE, what I got from this experience of co-production (which relied on what the PWLE could do) showed me that I can depend on strengths on a service user and I can look to what we can do together to meet Service User and my own joint goals. It changed my valuing of feedback. I could see that rather than coming from the angle of ableism, I come from a view that everyone has their own capabilities and we can appreciate that we are able to learn from each other. Having regular feedback from Craig (PWLE) during the adjusted practice helped me get my values to that level.
- ▶ Craig: I think for me it's not necessarily a tinkering of change in values, it's an *experiential* deepening understanding of why those values matter...This made the adjusted assessment ‘fair’ – it went beyond equality and equity to provide differentiated treatment based on the student's needs.
- ▶ Johanna: The student was able to be more honest and open about his own experiences of being a father and being disabled because it was a co-created piece of work, than if he was interviewing Craig on placement. More of a conversation of equals, more trust, more empathy.
- ▶ Johanna: There was importance in creating a “fair socio-emotional environment” - again interactional/interpersonal dynamics as key aspects to the success of the adjusted practice. Rasooli's research identified subthemes (equally relevant to our circumstance) of (a) student's self-concept , (b) impact of disability on socio- emotional environment and (c) interpersonal relationships with educators and peers (trusting relationship was critical).



# Did it encourage a strengths-based than deficit (individualised problem, medical-model) based approach?

- ▶ Johanna: The adjustment here was not a medical model adjustment, but focused on what the student can do.
- ▶ Tunde: The simulation was not designed based on the fact that the student has a form of disability or health issue (whereby things need to be adjusted to accommodate the deficit of that student). It actually encouraged a strengths base, what the student is capable of learning, how the student's learning needs can be met, how the student can demonstrate the development of the Professional Capabilities Framework (for social work), and what has actually been assessed in the student is strengths based rather than a deficit based approach where the student was given the opportunity to demonstrate and meet their learning needs. For example, the assessment mode being VLE made the assessment task more strengths based and therefore more accessible.
- ▶ Craig: First, regardless of need, regardless of medical condition, we are putting the effort here into this student because this student has the capability, has the skills, has the values to be a brilliant SW. That in itself is strengths based, because you are saying notwithstanding the health condition this person can be a social worker. Second, the response to this was not 'oh we'll kind of keep it the same and make some tweak's. That would have been a tweaking reasonable adjustment. This was a redefining, more than a tweaking exercise. It was a redesign to meet need rather than 'what can we do to help this student fit in with the existing assessment framework?' That for me, is radical, redesign.
- ▶ Craig: What we've shown is that its capable to stretch the boundaries of what people consider is reasonable.
- ▶ Johanna: Rasooli's research identified how contextual barriers influence fair assessment - participants principally described how the mandate of a policy tied to funding can deprive students with disability from having fair access to appropriate assessment and teaching adjustments. We went into this with a social model, with awareness of the need to look at how our academic and practice systems potentially cause or reproduces the social inequality structures of society, and actively tried to produce something that did not do this.
- ▶ Craig: The impact of this work, although individualised and some might say 'disproportionate in resource-allocation, is that it changes lives. Do we want people thrown on the scrap heap because of a medical condition or do we want an outcome of this which is T getting a job like what every other student is capable of doing?
- ▶ Johanna: The final word goes to Tunde who considered the adjustment to be 'fair' in relation to the outcomes of the adjustment – successfully progressing to the end of the 13 day simulated placement, passing the academic programme, the ability to display the knowledge, skills, and the experience at employment interviews, and being offered the job.
- ▶ Tunde: Returning to the first question and the needs for my adjusted practice: 'Did the simulation offer sufficiently realistic experiential practice learning to show capabilities for social work practice?'

# Questions for discussion

- ▶ Diverse fairness conceptions of students, educators, and PWLE contribute towards fairer experiences for students. Yet, current assessment literature/research largely represents fairness from the perspectives of students without disability and their educators, and do not include PWLE perspectives.
- ▶ So how *do you* explore the fairness perspectives of students with disability and their educators in an effort to diversely conceptualise fairness for adjusted assessment practices?
- ▶ How do you *or could you* involve PWLE within that? How do you conceive the contribution of PWLE?
- ▶ Fair assessment adjustment practices that are effective for enhancing the learning outcomes for students with disability have interactional and interpersonal dynamics. How have you seen these operate in your assessment adjusted practices?

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