12-15-2010

Applied Methods of Teaching about Oppression and Diversity to Graduate Social Work Students: A Case Example of Digital Stories

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Abstract

Social work education accreditation requires the completion of course work specifically around issues related to oppression and diversity within society. Educators offer a range of approaches to engage students in discussion about oppression and diversity from academic content and structured curriculum to reflective practice and experiential learning opportunities. The following describes a Master of Social Work course on oppression, social justice, and diversity offered at a western Canadian university that utilized a mixed method of teaching practices – including the creation of digital stories by the students in small groups. Beyond this description of the course content, students' insight into the impact of using digital stories for their own learning and application to professional practice around issues of oppression and diversity is presented and discussed.

Pour être agréé comme travailleur social, il faut avoir suivi des cours axés sur les questions d'oppression et de diversité au sein de la société. Pour faire participer les étudiants, les éducateurs emploient diverses méthodes qui vont des discussions à partir d'un contenu universitaire à un programme d'enseignement structuré et utilisent une approche réflective ainsi que des occasions d'apprentissage expérientiel. L'article traite d'un cours de maîtrise en travail social sur l'oppression, la justice sociale et la diversité, offert dans une université de l'Ouest du Canada, qui utilise une méthode combinée de pratiques d'enseignement, y compris la création d'histoires digitales par les étudiants en petits groupes. En plus d'en décrire le contenu, l'article présente un aperçu de l'impact de l'utilisation de ces histoires sur l'apprentissage des étudiants et de son application aux pratiques professionnelles entourant les questions d'oppression et de diversité.

Multiple and creative methods of teaching oppression and diversity within social work education have been proposed and evaluated within the literature (Fineran, Bolen, Urban, & Zimmerman, 2002; Littlefield & Bertera, 2004; Nagda et al., 1999; Plionis & Lewis, 1995; Van Soest, Canon, & Grant, 2000; Van Voorhis, 1998). While some of the studies that have been conducted in this field focus primarily on academic material and curriculum development, others are concerned with the experiential learning process itself. The intention in this article is to recognize these distinct approaches but not enter into the debate regarding the effective merits of each. What many of these studies demonstrate is that there are multiple ways in which educators can engage students around issues of oppression and diversity. Moving from resistance to consciousness about particular issues is an underlying intention of all these approaches and acts as a primary motive for engaging in educational exercises around oppression and diversity (Pierce & Taitano, 1999; Vinton & Nelson, 1993). In 2009 a western Canadian university undertook a process in a graduate social work course, *Diversity, Social Justice, and Oppression*, to foster learning by engaging students in this content.

We find it useful at the outset to outline a few key core assumptions. The first assumption contends that social work students at the graduate level come with some basic understanding of the literature on oppression and diversity, most likely received in their Bachelor of Social Work (BSW). This understanding however needs to be further developed as identified in a survey of American social work educators which suggested that incorporating more content on specific populations would be more useful than general discussions on types of oppression (Gutierrez, Fredricksen, & Soifer, 1999). Therefore, the Master of Social Work (MSW) should give the opportunity to extend practitioners' knowledge through application of core concepts of oppression and diversity.

The second assumption has to do with the nature of participatory processes in relation to student learning. What is participation? Who should participate and for what reasons? These questions are rooted in anti-oppressive practice and suggest a need to reflect on the role of education in promoting and creating positive space for diverse identities. Our rationality stems from the importance of reflective practice in relation to internal and external conditions and factors of the practitioner, and teaching (Mishna & Bogo, 2007) manifested in such a way that students are able to connect with and share their own experiences within the classroom. This process of reflection allows students to engage with their own (and others') feelings and emotions within the classroom setting (Sullivan & Johns, 2002).

Literature on anti-oppressive practice frames the social worker in relation to multiple roles and identities. There is a focus on the role of the social worker in the relationship with the client and being critically conscious of diversity (Dietz, 2000; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). Yet, do the ways in which we educate social workers follow these frameworks? The way that we interact with students in our teaching often aligns with and reinforces oppression. Towns (2006), for example, describes the experience of a gay student having access to a social work classroom and the means by which this student was allowed to participate – through a videotape documenting his/her experience but remaining disconnected from the face-to-face classroom context. In contrast, some research has shown that teaching content related to diversity is easier for students if the learning is coming from someone who identifies with these oppressed groups (Bronstein, Berman, & Winfield, 2002; Cain, 1996).

There is a sense within much of the published dialogue regarding teaching about oppression, diversity and social justice that student participation, reflection, and challenging of personal beliefs and values are necessary (Garcia & Van Soest, 1999). Literature points to the

role of educators in promoting safe space in the classroom, having structure and being prepared for the course, and facilitating discussions (Garcia & Melendez, 1997; Hyde & Ruth, 2002; Mildred & Zuniga, 2004). Others have argued for the need to undertake a paradigm shift away from liberal pluralism to a position of critical multiculturalism with regard to social work education and practice (Daniel, 2008). Liberal pluralism refers to the dominant view within society which seeks to have oppressed groups to achieve greater equality without changing the systemic environment that creates that inequality. Alternatively, critical multiculturalism may attempt to challenge those systemic issues in society that create oppression and maintain marginalization (Daniel, 2008). A related deconstructive process has been proposed by Vodde and Gallant (2002) that seeks to re-bridge the gap within social work education and practice between the micro and macro societal levels. Based on these theoretical discussions, and their relation to oppression, it becomes necessary to effectively engage in teaching around issues related to diversity and oppression, for educators to engage students in dialogue and exercises that enable them to consider the oppression in their own lives.

Creating a safe environment within the classroom has received some attention within social work literature (Chan & Treacy, 1996; Holley & Steiner, 2005). Scholarship has focused on the possible negative impact on students (e.g., Sullivan & Johns, 2002), and the role of the educator in mediating conflict that arises (Mishna & Rasmussen, 2001). Building on the existing research the following describes a course on diversity and oppression that utilized a participatory method, which involved students in a process of creating digital stories around specific and intersecting forms of oppression (i.e., ableism, ageism, classism, heterosexism, Indigenous issues, racism, and sexism).

Digital storytelling has emerged as a creative process that provides opportunity for people to tell a story through the use of modern digital technologies (Burgess, 2006). The process blends creative writing, oral history, art therapy, and facilitative community media production techniques and is being used as a community development model, curriculum tool for elementary to graduate students, an aid to professional development and collaboration, and as a participatory research method (e.g., Notley & Tacchi, 2005; Skuse, Fildes, Tacchi, Martin, & Baulch, 2007; University of Houston, n.d.; Vermont Teachers Teaching with Technology, n.d.). While the term digital storytelling is somewhat contested in its direct meaning and intention, our course followed practice similar to that described by the Center for Digital Storytelling (n.d.). That is, we sought to create short digital films to tell a particular story from the first-person narrative, following a meaningful workshop process, and utilized participatory methods of production (i.e., the students created and owned the story). An example of which is found here http://fsw.ucalgary.ca/Stories.

We used digital storytelling in our course in hopes of bridging the gap between micro and macro issues related to diversity and oppression within society. This paper first describes the course content and structure from the MSW class. Then we offer some insight from the students regarding their learning in relation to oppression and diversity to highlight the applicability of such an applied approach to teaching for other possible graduate level courses around similar themes. Our main research question is: Do students disclose aspects of learning from the multiple components of the course in ways that demonstrate increased knowledge of the subject material and its link to social work practice?

Course Content and Structure

The purpose of the required course in the MSW program was to critically examine issues of diversity and the power relations that form common links among the experiences of oppression and marginalization in Canadian society – experiences such as racism, colonization, classism, sexism, homophobia and heterosexism, ethnocentrism, ableism, and ageism. The course was designed to allow students to reflect on issues of diversity, oppression and power relation issues through presentations and readings, followed by an applied exercise involving: (a) the creation of a digital story in small groups; and (b) the creation of a training workshop on a particular theme of oppression.

The course was offered over five days, with six hours of scheduled class time each day. Prior to beginning the course, students were challenged to provide a two page, self-graded self reflection on one aspect of oppression and diversity. This assignment would not be read by the course instructors but rather it was intended to help students to increase their own self-awareness about diversity, oppression, and social justice issues; including the role of these concepts in the students' personal life and how they impact the students' professional work. Students self-graded this assignment by presenting to the lead course instructor how their reflection would usefully inform the second assignment (i.e., the creation of a digital story), the depth of the reflection, and how through the reflection students were able to start thinking about these issues in novel ways.

Facilitated by the lead instructor, the first two days of class were comprised of a series of presentations on various forms of oppression presented by members of the university and broader academic and professional community. The presentations focused on how issues of oppression have impacted their lives personally and professionally. For example, some guest presenters provided insight on how sexism and ableism were addressed through their professional work, while others presented on the impacts of colonization or heterosexism on their personal lives – which essentially had implications for their professional roles and experiences. Through these discussions and presentations students were given applied examples of the impact of oppression and diversity at a societal level. These presentations served as foundational work for the second assignment.

The purpose of the digital story (the second assignment) was to provide students with the opportunity for a collaborative in-depth study in one area of diversity, oppression, and social justice that was of interest or relevance to them and their social work practice. Students formed groups of two or three based on interest in a specific topic, and later presented the issue of oppression through a narrative script, which was recorded and acted as the foundation of the digital stories. During the final three days of the course, students created and presented their digital stories to their class peers and those from another section of the course, which followed a different format.

In order to create a digital story, students began with a script or an idea for a story, and then received feedback from peers in a sharing circle format. The three-day workshop was led by two additional trained facilitators. Two sharing circles were formed, each comprising 15 students. Following this the students in the class were given hands-on editing tutorials to become familiar with the technology. Students then recorded their narration, gathered and created still images, and video-edited using the video software. Following the editing process, there was a screening of the stories which concluded the in-class portion of the course.

After the five-day in-class course, students worked in their same small groups to create a diversity training module where their digital story acted as a foundation to illustrate perspectives

on diversity, oppression, and social justice. In their small groups, the students provided a 15 to 20 page analysis of the identified problem which included a one to four hour training module for a target audience (for example practitioners/educators). The training module included the following: (a) an introduction which provided an identification and analysis of the problem being addressed in the training module with a clear identification of its relationship to diversity issues and the targeted audience; (b) a literature review providing an overview of the relevant empirical research; (c) a description of relevant theoretical frameworks so that one could understand the issue being presented; and (d) the application of resources (e.g., digital story) that facilitate increasing the understanding and knowledge about diversity, oppression and social justice. The instructors received ethics approval to evaluate the course and participating students volunteered and provided informed consent. Information about which students consented to participate was not made available until all of the marks had been submitted to the university's registrar. Also, students did not provide feedback on the course until all components were completed. As a result, the analysis and discussion from their feedback is exploratory and it essentially only identifies how the course's components contributed to their learning. Further comparative research would be necessary to understand with greater certainty how the components were related to one another and to the intended student learning outcomes. For example, a researcher could investigate learning with each of these components separately, or implement a review process after each component in the course.

Student Learning Objectives

The learning objectives of the course are as follows:
1. Identify major characteristics of "isms" and explain why they are important considerations for social work practice and/or policy in relation to oppression and power relation issues.
2. Evaluate students' own views about diversity and oppression issues discussed in class with the intent of improving their effectiveness as social workers.
3. Develop a multimedia resource to raise questions and identify concerns and issues that arise from reflecting on readings, presentations, peer collaborations, and class discussions.

Students were asked the following open-ended questions, via email from the course lead instructor, to help evaluate the effectiveness of this structure to learning and teaching issues of oppression, diversity, and social justice in society:

1. In what ways has the course influenced your thinking about diversity, oppression, and social justice?
2. How has this course contributed to your learning about diversity, oppression and social justice?
3. How do the individual components (readings, self-reflection, guest speakers, digital storytelling workshop, group work, and others) contribute to your learning?
4. Are there applications to practice from this learning?
5. Can you make some suggestions to improve the course?

Students were given the opportunity to give the responses directly to the instructor or to leave an anonymous printed version of their responses in the front office of the faculty.

Students commented on the process undertaken in the course and how it impacted their learning. These results are described in the following section. As this evaluation was voluntary

and anonymous, some students elected to not participate. In total, 15 (out of 30) students participated in this research investigating the impact of this course on their learning and therefore the comments reported here are meant only for descriptive purposes. To analyze the data we followed standard qualitative methods of analytic induction (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) and constant comparison strategies (Charmaz, 2000; Fetterman, 2008) to detect patterns within the student course review documents. Initially the first two of the authors of the paper read through all the interview transcripts in order to identify and later code common themes. The themes were then translated into more general working categories, which continued to be refined until all instances of contradictions, similarities, and differences were explained. This final stage helped to increase the dependability and consistency of the findings. To maintain the credibility criteria of the study the research team collaboratively worked on the data analysis. The following four general working categories, identified in the thematic analysis, describe the effectiveness of the teaching and learning relative to: (a) overall learning, (b) specific course components, (c) relationship to practice, and (d) the teaching process. Each of these themes is described with illustrative quotes in the following section.

Student Evaluation of Course Learning

Course Structure and Overall Learning

The course structure was designed to facilitate a progression of learning around issues of oppression and diversity. Students were asked to provide insight into how the structure of the course, in its entirety, impacted their learning. For example, learning throughout the overall class helped some students to understand the pervasiveness of oppression and make individual connections with the subject material as it relates to their own lives. For example, one student reported:

> This course has helped me to see how everyone has a story and how any one of us could have told a story about any of the isms. Even though the course is about diversity, it highlights the similarities we all face and that perhaps we are not so different than our clients. One of the personal lessons for me is with regards to feminism. While I have considered myself a feminist for years, it is not something I have thought much about the last few years or done anything about; but being the mother of a young daughter I realize I need to be more aware and more active.

Similarly, another learner commenting on a renewed interest in these issues as a result of the course stated:

> I think experiential learning is very useful, and having had this experience – I feel more connected to the issues. I think stories are a powerful way to learn, and I heard some powerful stories. I don't think there were a lot of new "facts" but there was a lot of increased appreciation for the stories told and what they represent. In a way, I have more of a vested interest than I did before.

Also, many students commented on how the integrated assignments of the course helped conceptualize the impact of the various forms of oppression being discussed. One, for example, commented:

> I appreciated the readings in this course because they not only covered my own "ism," which was classism, but it also showed how classism relates to other "isms." The self-reflection at the beginning set the tone for our digital story and I think that this was a good opportunity to do some preliminary thinking about this course. I really enjoyed the guest speakers, and think that by them sharing their own stories and experiences it drew me in and it made me realize how we experience each "ism" in such a personal way. The digital story also showed me how each "ism" is a unique and personal experience.

The structure of the class allowed students to make connections between the micro and macro levels of these issues of oppression. One student commented:

> All of the learning components when combined as they were in this class contributed to my learning...I felt the most meaningful piece for me was creating the actual script for the story; it helped make the 'ism' come to life and I was truly able to understand the personal story behind each 'ism'. The script writing allowed the group members to reflect, share, provide compassion and heal some experiences of members. I found that the way the learning components went from the macro (educational readings) to the micro (our own personal experience) was helpful for my learning.

Beyond the individual student reflection, the course structure provided opportunity for students to learn about the impact of oppression on the people around them, providing new perspective about issues of oppression and diversity. One participant commented:

> This format was useful because it was more applied than a traditional class on diversity and oppression would typically be (i.e., characterized by the instructor lecturing about the theoretical nature of oppression and issues of diversity). Having students reflect on oppression in their lives, and within the group dynamic, and then being able to share the stories was a powerful way to demonstrate how oppression impacts people that we are interconnected with (for however long those relationships last). At the least, in my mind, this is empowerment. We not only learned through practice about the impact of oppression on people, we were also given the opportunity to facilitate empowerment for those who shared their stories.

Another concurred, highlighting the power of the story to reveal the person:

> What fascinated me the most was that I had gone to school with many of these students last semester, and actually thought that I knew them, but I now realize that you don't really know anyone until you hear their story. It made me realize that we are all very complex people with very different backgrounds, and there is merit in sharing our experiences.

Individual Components of the Course and Learning

Beyond the overall structure of the course, students also provided some insight into the utility of the specific components of the course and how these components contributed to their learning. The key subsections (i.e., required readings, self reflection, digital storytelling, training module, and intersecting learning) are reported here in the same order as they appeared in the course.

Required readings. The required readings were perceived by students to set the stage for the learning requirements of the class, as one respondent explains:

> The readings helped to give a background to the different isms and served as a reminder of previous learning around the many isms. The readings and the self-reflection combined with the guest speakers got me thinking again about oppressions. I think it is easy to forget some of that once a person is working. Most workplaces do not even discuss oppression even though it is a big part of their job. For me, that is the real learning, that it is not enough to be aware, but that we need to move that into practice and into our workplaces.

Self-reflection. Students reported that the self-reflection assignment allowed them to understand deeper their own experiences with oppression and this insight carried through and was enhanced throughout the learning process. Regarding the self-reflection component, one student, for example, stated:

> A creative way to familiarize with the content was the self-reflection assignment. The strength of this assignment was that it offered the opportunity to approach a subject from two different perspectives: cognitive and emotional. Thus, as a cognitive level it was necessary to understand the historical and socio-political context of the issue discussed. Moreover, at the emotional level the self-reflection paper provided an opportunity to self-examine preconceived ideas that are inevitably present in one's mind. I think that this integrative approach is an important experience, particularly for social workers who need to rationally think about social justice as well as work with emotions and trauma.

Guest presentations. Presentations by individuals with direct personal and professional experiences related to a specific oppression gave students permission to tell their stories and link this disclosure to professional practice. Commenting on the guest presentations, one student stated:

> I appreciated the fact that the guest speakers' lectures focused on the historical and social overview of the 'isms', emphasizing essential social movements. I also appreciated the personal lens that was applied in each discourse. This convinced me once again that social workers start their action or practice with themselves; looking at deep awareness of their biases.

Digital storytelling. Students identified that the digital storytelling process was useful in sharing personal stories of oppression and served to link all of the components of the class together in a immediate, powerful way. As one participant described:

Because this class allowed for students to invest in their own stories and their own experience, it allowed for a significant depth of self-reflection vis-à-vis the wide range of topics addressed. As the academic learning process often involves suppressing to a certain extent one's intuition, one's story, one's creativity and one's personal experience with the subject matter, the digital storytelling opportunity provided a medium to move beyond those barriers and engage freely with the subject matter.

For some students, the components of the course allowed them to self-reflect on oppression and privilege in their own lives. For example, one student commented:

I found that the content of the course, especially the digital story allowed me to look deeper at my own story and feel the connection toward some of the oppression and injustice that I have experienced. Sometimes in courses with content such as diversity and oppression, I feel guilty or unable to relate, as I have been a white Canadian, with relatively privileged lifestyle and have the luxury of attending a post-secondary institution for two degrees. Because of the format of this course, in particular the creation of the digital story, I was able to understand my own experiences of sexism. It helped me to truly form a deeper understanding of what it means to be a woman in today's society.

One learner commented on the importance of the screening of the digital stories:

The Friday afternoon screening was the most powerful part of the course. One thing I really appreciated was the diversity of stories; of presentation…each group's story was unique and reflected both the subject and the creators. Without being "taught" diversity, we were shown how much richness there can be in it.

Training module. Students provided commentary on the usefulness in creating the training module. One student explains:

It was difficult, however, one that I would encourage you to consider incorporating into the course. By having to think how I would teach a topic, my learning was enhanced as I become both the student and the teacher.

Intersecting learning. A sub-theme which emerged from the overall learning related to the ways in which the *intersection* of course components was important for overall learning, as one learner illustrated:

The digital storytelling project linked the other class components in a very coherent and creative manner. Thus, in order to articulate a story, students had to have an overview of the issue that was facilitated by the readings and the quest speakers' lectures. Moreover this overview had to be complemented by our personal perspective based on the self-reflection assignment and the guest speakers' discourses to some extent.

Linking Course Learning and Content to Practice

A further theme emerging from the student descriptions relates to their experiences in the course and applying these experiences to their social work practice. For example, participants in the course commented on linking their work from this class in an applied sense to their communities of practice. One student stated:

> I think that the whole process of digital storytelling helps us share our stories and become stronger not only as individuals, but as a group of people. It would be a valuable tool to use in practice, especially because there is a barrier between us and our clients due to a power differential, and digital storytelling gives clients the power to share their stories and be heard.

Another student commented on how the course work helped him/her to rethink how he/she could relate to client populations:

> I really found myself critically thinking about the more subtle forms of oppression that act to maintain the subjugation of particular populations. While I think there are many forms of discrimination, it is the subtleties of our language and actions that really reinforce social injustice. I think that as a social worker this is where I need to focus my attention so that I am open to the clients I serve. I have not stopped thinking about the topic of heterosexism and sexism since the class ended and I find continuously finding examples in my own life where such discrimination is evident.

Students also made connections between the work completed in the class and direct work with clients. One student described:

> I think digital storytelling might be useful in clinical work. Telling a story together as a family…a therapeutic group working together to tell their stories of whatever oppressions they face (i.e., authors of their own story). In community work – this is a story of our community. Working with youth, it'd be great there…also I think it is a great teaching tool, in a school of social work; it is a very interesting way of working with social issues.

Similarly, commenting on the applied aspects of the course but relating them to social action, another student described:

> The social action dimension of the course should not be understated either. All too often, the insights one learns through seminar discussions are reproduced via research papers and not disseminated widely – and certainly not to the audiences that could benefit most from hearing them. Digital storytelling offers an opportunity for dissemination to a much wider audience.

Finally, one student provided insight how the course material was used in his present practice:

> I used a portion of the training package that we created for "ableism" recently in my present work setting (a disability services organization). It acted as a wonderful tool to

introduce the concept of ableism to my colleagues and provided a framework in which I was able to contextualize social service practices within this particular organization. The digital story that we created in the class relating to ableism was used to demonstrate the impact of some of these ideas, but also to act as a tool to demonstrate relational knowledge and commitment (at least for myself) to the work that we are presently engaged with in this organization.

Anti-oppressive Teaching Process

The instructors purposefully modeled anti-oppressive practice in designing the course and facilitating the learning such that participant's diverse voices were heard, shared and embraced. One respondent articulated:

The celebration of diversity of style by the facilitators, their embracing of the process and respect for each person in the process and their unique process. Their example showed this is how you embrace, learn from, and appreciate diversity. Seeing everyone's work was such a powerful demonstration of this.

Likewise, another student stated:

I think the class met its purpose – i.e., to have a conversation about diversity and oppression – and was unique in that it challenged students to determine their own learning by being taught in a way that engaged students in a process to help better understand oppression. I was taught through this course not just about content, but also how to better reflect and participate.

The group work dynamic that was emphasized in the class seemed to have helped students to think differently about issues of oppression, diversity, and social justice. In addition, this format contributed to a greater understanding and practice of collaborative, shared learning. For example one learner stated:

Not only as member of the group did we need to discuss how the subject matter related to all of us individually, we needed to develop some discussion/consensus around how the subject matter related to us collectively. Often these discussions happen in a standard seminar but seldom do they engage group members to the point where they feel compelled, on an emotional and social action level, to produce something collectively for a wider audience.

Also important to note is the fact that, although the course was structured to be held from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., during the storytelling component of the course, learners often arrived before 8:00 a.m. and finished after 5:00 p.m. This demanded flexibility of the instructors. Instructors observed that this appeared to be the compelling nature of the creative process. Alternatively, the extended time required might have been due to the added process of creating the digital stories in a group versus individually. It is also interesting to note that many students who finished their digital stories early collaborated with and assisted other students with their digital stories. Students also had the anonymous option of having part of the evaluation of their digital stories

based on group feedback. While this was met quite negatively at the start of the course, without exception each student agreed to be evaluated by their peers. These decisions on the part of the students, we believe, speak to the atmosphere of collaboration, respect and reciprocity that was created in this course.

Some students also made additional comments about the course, describing, for example, the logistical aspects of the course or that it did not meet their specific learning needs. In particular, many students commented on the need to enhance the intended learning outcomes for each component of the course, which could be achieved by, for example, allowing for more time to discuss the content of course material. As one learner articulated, "I was able to process the information concerning my group's story but little else. It would have helped to take time to discuss issues relating to social justice and oppression which were raised in the stories." Improving the course to suit the learning needs of the students is significant and will be taken up in future planning of this course. Other students may have had concerns about the content of the course or may not have found the course structure and requirements to meet their particular needs. It could be the case that those who did not respond to the opportunity to provide written feedback on the course fit into this category. A limitation of this research therefore is the absence of comments from the non-responding students in the class. All reviews of the course favoured collaborative methods for this particular subject matter with the exception of one student who advised they would have preferred a traditional lecture style course. No other comments were received that demonstrate displeasure in the course material and lecture style.

Conclusion

Many of the comments made by students focused on the importance of the storytelling component of the course and how it impacted their overall learning. One reason for such a focus on the digital story aspect is that it was new to many students. Likewise, it could have been the primary contributor to their overall learning in the course.

Sharing stories can be a transformative process. As a pedagogical technique we are able to learn with each other through the story that is being told. By hearing the story and watching its images this acts to move viewers more deeply than simply reading words on a page, and the dynamic of storytelling creates an opportunity to reflect on life experiences, our perceptions, and find deep connections with the subject matter (Silence Speaks, n.d.). As a result of the utility of storytelling for personal development, it can be concluded that this strategy could be used effectively within the discipline of social work. Without considering student comments on their own learning, the process of digital storytelling itself is a radical humanist approach to social change. In addition, it is a form of anti-oppressive practice and a process of personal healing. The act of creating digital storytelling holds significant potential for individual and group empowerment by honoring different experiences and knowledge. As a teaching tool for social work students, though, it has even greater utility for the profession.

With regard to learning, findings from this study show that the format of and the activities related to the course helped with students' overall learning of concepts and ideas. Students provided some evidence that the course helped them to think about oppression and diversity in an applied sense, to reflect on how oppression and diversity impacts their lives and the lives of their colleagues, and to challenge their own biases and perceptions of the various forms of societal oppression. An interwoven theme emerging from the learners' evaluation speaks to reflective social work practice. The teaching process, the course structure, the process of creating

a digital story, and integrating all of the components into a guide was shown to provide rich insight into the bridging of theory and practice.

The utility of storytelling was highlighted as students formed relationships between their learning and their own social work practice. Essentially, providing the foundation for which students can begin to be aware of the various forms of intersecting oppression that impact them and potentially could impact their future clients.

Based on the descriptions of their own learning, the combination of teaching strategies used in this course met the objectives of the course with regard to overall student learning and proposed requirements. Students gained a more clear understanding of their personal self as it relates to oppression and diversity, reflected on these aspects in their personal and professional lives, identified major characteristics of the various forms of oppression, and were able to explain why they were important considerations for social work practice. Furthermore, students demonstrated capability in developing a multimedia resource to raise questions about a particular form of oppression – all of which were required components for student learning.

A final point relates to the use of arts and multimedia technologies in education and practice. Students, through this seminar course, were given an opportunity to reflect on the use of arts and technology in practice, both as a tool for teaching and as a tool to address issues of oppression and social justice with their client populations. As the profession progresses, it will be necessary to incorporate technological advances in education and practice, as well as arts-based media, in social work curriculum. This class helped to begin to bridge that link for this particular faculty of social work.

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