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CO-CONSTRUCTING LEARNING AND TEACHING EXPERIENCES: A TDG ON DEVELOPING GENDER SENSITIVITY OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

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Higher education in a Globalized World

• to nurture students with the commitment to values that appreciate diversity and a commitment to serve
• cultivating gender sensitivity among students is to prepare them for a globalized world with the awareness of how gender, together with other social factors, has been shaping people’s lives in different cultures and places.
• it is to equip them with essential 21st century values and attitudes that accord them the rights to become tomorrow’s global citizens.
• the ability to be reflective and reflexive about the relations between the self and the world is what a global citizen should possess.
A Teaching Development Grant Project
Working with Women –
Knowledges and Skills for social workers
Background of the TDG Project

- to develop teaching materials for social work education that targeted at Chinese students which have both local relevancy and practical values is pertinent in view of the following reasons:
  - women are always the majority of users of social welfare services;
  - a wide range of target groups – single mothers, new arrival women, women on social welfare, racial minorities, carers of the frail and ill health - have been served by social workers in the past two decades;
  - there has been a lack of gender sensitivity in social work practices resulting in less effective intervention;
  - many of the women service users are deprived and vulnerable pointing to the need to empower them but unfortunately, most of the existing services are remedial targeting at immediate problem solving.
Background of the TDG Project

The project content included three parts:

- developing gender-sensitivity exercises
- video production on understanding divorced women and women who are receiving social welfare, and social workers’ perspectives and work strategies
- video production on skills of running support groups that empower women by using single mothers as an example.
Developing gender-sensitivity exercises

• Sensitivity to diversities has always been considered necessary for universities graduates who are facing a globalizing world.

• One of the social divisions – gender – has to be attended to particularly where traditional definitions of masculinities and femininities have been dominant.

• Gender sensitivity is the awareness of how gender, together with other social factors such as age, class, ethnicity, disabilities and sexualities, has constructed young peoples’ relationships with others, choices of career, aspiration for the future, and most of all, shaped their understanding and expectation on themselves.
Developing gender-sensitivity exercises

• The TDG project was designed in a way to be fully integrated with the teaching and learning of the course Gender and Social Work.

• Class exercises that are interactional and can strengthen students’ gender sensitivity are necessary tools to be developed.

• It was a co-construction process of teaching and learning when the students were ‘teaching’ and the teacher was learning from what and how they ‘teach’.
Developing gender-sensitivity exercises

• The steps involved
  • grouping of students into four to five.
  • They were invited to develop a class exercise which can facilitate the development of gender sensitivity. They were encouraged to be creative in developing exercises which can be games, role plays or in any other formats which have high applicability and therefore, utility values in the local context.
  • The students, after designing the exercises, conducted them in class. All students were invited to feedback on the design and the possible impact of the exercises.
  • Reflections were also collected about the awareness of gender and its impact on the self.
Developing gender-sensitivity exercises
The Handbook on Gender Sensitivity Activities
Developing gender-sensitivity exercises
The Handbook on Gender Sensitivity Activities

- Part I – Introduction (about what gender sensitivity is; why gender sensitivity; the process of co-production of the exercises/activities; how to use the Handbook)

- Part II – the activities/exercises

- Part III – useful materials (about definitions of terms; references)
Developing gender-sensitivity exercises

The Handbook on Gender Sensitivity Activities

• An example of the exercise
  • Watching the mass media (p. 20)

• The objectives are
  • examining the media representation of women’s images
  • analyzing how media representation has constrained women/men’s understanding of themselves including their images and behavior
  • critically examining the roles of the mass media in reinforcing gender stereotyping

• The steps
  • Dividing the participants into small group; giving them some local newspapers; inviting participants to identify titles, subtitles, pictures that suggest gender stereotyping; reporting to the whole class about what they identified;
Developing gender-sensitivity exercises

The Handbook on Gender Sensitivity Activities

- group discussion on
  - Is reporting on female more than that on male?
  - What are associated with female and male respectively?
  - For example, what about pictures, words associated with sexuality, incidents that involve women/men?
  - How do you understand the differences in reporting?

- After conducting the exercise in the class, feedback from classmates was invited.
- It was found that students enjoyed this exercise very much.
- During discussion, they shared the discovery that female actors were reported much more than male actors among entertainment news reports.
- Participants were also interested to explore the gender differences in reading newspapers such as the parts they read more.
- There was a rich discussion on the social construction of gender in the mass media.
Another example: **Childhood memories**

- sit back and take deep breaths
- silently reflect back to your childhood, to the first memory you have about when they discovered you (as males or females) were different from the opposite sex;
- observe where you are, what is happening, who is involved, what is being said, who is giving you the message, about what it means to a boy or a girl
- after a few minute, return to the present
- ask participants to open their eyes and **DRAW** their first memory of being different as girl or a boy (a series of pictures or just one picture which represents their first memory of differences as a girl or a boy
- pair up with the person next to them, explain the meaning of their pictures to each other
Developing gender-sensitivity exercises
The Handbook on Gender Sensitivity Activities
Video production on understanding divorced women and intervention strategies

• interviewing two divorced women who have been living on social welfare and their social workers

• The four interviews were recorded in a DVD. The contents were transcribed and questions to discuss were proposed
社會工作訓練教材
（供教師使用）
婦女工作 - 社會工作知識與技巧

第一部份:
單親服務社會工作員

及

單親女士訪談

作者：洪雪蓮博士
Video production on skills demonstration

- Support group has been proved to be effective in empowering the vulnerable groups and in particular, the disadvantaged women in the west.

- Its application in the local context is developing.

- A video on skills of running support group for women using divorced women as an example was produced.

- Four students were involved in conducting the role playing.
Video production on skills demonstration

• The role playing of the four parts of the support groups, including:
  • commencing a group,
  • storytelling,
  • identifying differences and commonness in stories,
  • developing themes of concern for discussion

• Four social work students enrolled in the Gender and Social Work course playing the roles of single mothers
Conclusion

• This TDG project has made a valuable contribution to the development of training materials for working with disadvantaged women.
• The products of the Project included a teaching kit which is composed of two handbooks/manuals and two DVDs.
  • The Handbook on Gender Sensitivity Activities
  • 2 DVDs
    • The first DVD consists of interviews with two experienced social workers and two single mothers who have been receiving social security benefits. The second DVD recorded a role playing of four parts of a support group for divorced women.
  • A manual on working with women – social work knowledge and skills
    • The transcripts of interviews, suggested questions for discussion, and the details of the support group model are provided in the manual.
Conclusion

• The teaching approach that informed the project has significant implications on future pedagogic practice.
• The co-construction of teaching materials together with students is a novel experience for many students as well as the Investigator.
• Social work education has long emphasized the cultivating of values and developing of the ability to self-reflect in addition to imparting knowledge and skills.
• The integrating of creative ideas and experiential, participatory and reflective skills into learning will definitely strengthen the ability of students to acquire knowledge and skills, and develop reflexivity in practice.
• Though this TDG project was developed in collaboration with social work students that target at social work teachers, the strategies to co-construct learning and teaching experiences by teacher and students can definitely be applied to other disciplines with modifications.
Thank you
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