

Experiences of small group teaching and learning: Gateways to professional formation on the Master of Social Work.

The Master of Social Work team at University College Cork is currently researching the key processes of professional formation within small group teaching and learning. The paper will present early findings from phase one of the research which consisted of open-ended questionnaires completed by final year students and a review of relevant literature.

The core themes that have emerged from the findings include the value placed by students on small group interaction which facilitates self-awareness, self-evaluation and perspective-widening in a supported learning environment. Student accounts indicated that the benefit of this approach to learning demanded time and commitment by staff and students to develop trusting relationships which enable students to become comfortable with the process. These experiences foster the formation of professional values, integration of theory and enhanced awareness of use of self.

In the presentation, we consider how we can sustain these key formative processes and preserve a qualitative approach to social work education in the current climate of austerity within Higher Education in Ireland and internationally. Our research identifies opportunities for innovation and considers whether there are ways in which actions could look different, but where the same processes are supported. The first step to programme adaptation is the identification of essential processes which need to be protected if we are to meet our responsibility as educators for professional formation. This research forms the basis on which to make informed decisions about programme adaptation and development.