An Exploration of Care Leavers as Experts by Experience in Social Work Teaching in the UK and Epistemic Exploitation

Abstract

OBJECTIVES: This paper explores the participation of care leavers in social work education, possible links with epistemic exploitation, and how to alleviate these. THEORETICAL BASE: This paper sets theories of epistemic exploitation within the context of oppression in the UK, identifying care leavers as a marginalised group and considering their experiences of oppression. METHODS: This paper uses a mixed methodology approach with elements of appreciative inquiry, participatory observations and reflective accounts from an educator's perspective working with care leavers as experts by experience within social work teaching. OUTCOMES: Experts by experience in social work education are a crucial part of student learning, bringing several benefits and developments to social work practice. Care leavers bring a nuanced position from lived experience and can offer insight into children's social work. There is potential for this involvement to become exploitative if there is insufficient preparation and a lack of meaningful understanding for the students, the EbE's and educators. SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS: This paper offers a different lens when considering EbE involvement in social work education, inviting the reader to consider the role of EbE's, how this is developed within education, and to provoke consideration of the meaning behind this practice, to ensure that there is purpose and reduced tokenism or exploitative consequences.

Keywords

Experts by experience, participation, care leavers, social work education, epistemic exploitation, epistemic injustice

INTRODUCTION

The participation of those who are working with or have experiences of working with services is an integral element of social work practice. Participation and co-production are fundamental across the UK in social work education, practice, government policy and regulatory guidance. This article explores the participation of those with lived experience of social work involvement, commonly known in the UK as Experts by Experience (EbE) within social work education, specifically those who have experience of being in local authority care, Care Leavers[1], alongside the concept of epistemic exploitation[2] (Berenstain, 2016). This article will consider the safe practice of co-production and EbE involvement, by exploring the historical context of participation within social work and the expectations within regulatory guidelines, using existing literature to highlight the strengths within current involvement of EbE's across England. This will be balanced alongside some criticisms of current practice

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[1] The term Care Leavers is within UK legislation the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 which defines a Care Leaver as someone who has been in local authority care for at least 13 weeks or more passing over their 16th birthday.

[2] Epistemic exploitation refers to is the exploitative use of someone's knowledge, usually from a marginalised group, based on their lived experiences of oppression.

with EbE's and views around anti-oppressive practice. Epistemic exploitation will be outlined within the context of England, outlining the history of oppression in England and connections with the use of EbE's, and in particular oppression experienced by those who are care experienced. Using observations from the classroom and anecdotal feedback from both EbE's and university lecturers, this paper will consider how the use of EbE's might be exploitative and will make recommendations on how to minimise these risks to create safe learning spaces for EbE's, students and educators.

HISTORY AND CONTEXT OF PARTICIPATION IN THE UK

Participation of service users became a key part of social work education and teaching across the UK and Europe at the turn of the 21st Century at a time when movements for equality for marginalised people and communities became more mainstream (Fox & Videmšek, 2022). In 1990, the NHS and Community Care Act instituted the requirement for service user involvement in service planning and delivery. This made way for an ongoing acknowledgement that service users' involvement was key in health and social care practice. As legislation such as the Human Rights Act (1998) and the Children Act (2004), provided clarity on the importance of autonomy in people lives, it also invited social workers to consider their role and partnership with those with which they are working.

Partnership and participation with children, young people and their families who are working with statutory services is encouraged within Local Authorities across the UK. In 2007, the UK Government outlined a commitment to improve the wellbeing and outcomes for children and young people, particularly those who were in public care (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). This included the statutory requirement for every UK local authority to create Children in Care Councils, to "give children in care a forum to express their views and influence the services and support they receive" (Department for Education and Skills, 2007:7). This shift into ensuring those who are experiencing services have their voices heard is reflected within frontline practice.

Models such as Signs of Safety (Turnell & Edwards, 1997) place emphasis on working with families and empowering them to take ownership of the safety plans that statutory services are implementing. Similarly, within systemic family therapy approaches to social work, families are encouraged to voice their lived experiences and perspectives and practitioners may take a position of alliance, whereby families are the experts in their own lives (Madsen, 2007). Power and empowerment are central to the discussion of co-production and participation, as they signify a change in the power within the relationships and seeks to align both parties in a balanced partnership (Hartworth et al., 2021). The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) encourages co-production across social work practice and advises that for this to be successful and meaningful, "the principles of equality, diversity, accessibility and reciprocity" (SCIE, 2013:7) should be followed.

As with all elements of social work practice, participation and co-production needs to be reflected in the education of social workers and embedded in social work teaching. This has been mandated within the UK for over twenty years (DoH, 2002). Social Work England (SWE) was established by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and further legislation set out in Social Work Regulations Act 2018 when it became the regulatory body for social work within England. SWE sets out the compulsory regulations for social work education and training. These standards need to be adhered to by all social work qualifying programmes across England, to ensure that the education provided offers students high quality training and

to improve social work practice across the board. The Qualifying Education and Training Standards Guidance (SWE, 2021) states that those with lived experiences should be part of the ongoing quality and effectiveness of the programme, and their views are incorporated into the programme design and delivery (Regulation 3.2, 4.5). It had been considered that social work qualifying programmes that did not involve those with lived experiences were "not providing a balanced education" and this could lead to "stunting the growth, development and improvement of future service provision" (Tyler, 2006:386).

LIVED EXPERIENCE AND CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION

EbE involvement in social work programmes across the UK can vary greatly, with some involvement being limited to admissions, guest teaching whereas others are involved in co-design of programmes and modules within courses. There has also been an argument for EbE's to be involved at a more senior level within social work programmes, and that this collaboration seeks to create a structural culture shift (Hatton, 2016).

Across literature, there is an overwhelming support for EbE involvement in social work education though it has been argued that practice of EbE involvement in the social work courses would gain from having a stronger theoretical lens and supports for further research to take place (Reith-Hall, 2022). Those with lived experience offer a different perspective in the classroom, where they bring their reality which students can link with theoretical and academic perspectives (Anghel & Ramon, 2009; Geregová & Frišaufová, 2019; Happell et al., 2022; Hughes, 2017; Reith-Hall, 2022; Winn & Lindqvist, 2019). This provides students with a holistic learning experience and offers them a sense of how services work for those who need support and how to ensure they can bring positivity to their future careers and roles. Students are able to develop their empathy and understanding of those who find themselves in crisis, and where they can challenge their own preconceptions of those who use services (Anghel & Ramon, 2009; Geregová & Frišaufová, 2019; Hughes, 2017; Winn & Lindqvist, 2019).They are introduced to people with lived experience, as the experts, and would become social work practitioners who were able to see the "true benefits" of participation and working alongside those they are working with in their care planning and decisions (Tyler, 2006: 386).

However, there may be another side to involvement of EbE's in the classroom as tokenistic with stories and experiences exploited for the benefit of meeting regulations and expectations. Tokenism is the involvement of EbE's at a symbolic level where there is a lack of influence on practice or services, and an absence of meaningfulness within their involvement (Geregová & Frišaufová, 2019). EbE's may be given the opportunity to have a voice and be heard, though it could be that this has no influence over change and EbE's do not make the decisions, the power here remains with the educators (Arnstein, 1969). If the involvement of EbE's is done in this way, then this limits the outcome to no more than box-ticking and a false representation of involvement. This could be the result of those working with EbE's having limited understanding as to why EbE involvement is crucial and the underpinning principles (Hatton, 2016; Reith-Hall, 2022.; Tyler, 2006). At worst, the involvement of EbE's might become epistemic exploitation and this paper will move to consider this face of participation.

THEORETICAL BASE AND CONTEXT

Epistemic exploitation
Epistemic exploitation is the exploitation of the oppressed knowledge, stories, and experiences to benefit the oppressor (Berenstain, 2016). Berenstein explains this concept

exploring the intricacies around Black and Brown people educating White people about the experiences of racism or women teaching about misogyny and gender injustice. She highlights the notion of how marginalised groups can feel compelled to educate their oppressors, and that this can result in "unrecognised, uncompensated, emotionally taxing, coerced epistemic labour" (2016: 1). This approach to understanding experiences of those who have been oppressed is seen as a normal step towards gaining knowledge and a way to break down societal discourses, though this is at the expense of those in society who have less power. It could be argued that those who "are oppressed are uniquely positioned to know certain things that others who lack the same standpoint do not" (Dunne & Kotsonis, 2022: 345) and that the *insider perspective* is key in understanding oppression and creating change. Berenstein notes that although there may be a genuine request of curiosity, with the right intentions, questions can also be fuelled with "bias, microaggressions or harassment" (2016: 3). It is understood that experiences of oppression and 'isms' can result in symptoms of psychological trauma and this re-telling or re-living of experiences can leave emotionally exhausted, or at worse, return them to a traumatised state. This where practice can become exploitative, as the recognition of this impact is not always seen or understood by those who are asking the questions. Berenstein highlights that marginalised people are once again the ones to "bear increased cognitive and emotional costs that take a cumulative toll on their mental and physical health" (2016: 5).

Berenstein goes on to explore ideas around *gaslighting* and *testimonial injustice* as a way to challenge the credibility of the lived experiences and the realities of those who have experienced oppression. The concept of *gaslighting* is understood to be where one's reality is challenged by another, and that they are told their experiences are not real. Though typically understood as a psychological concept, there is an argument for this being a sociological experience. She argues that this is embedded in structural and institutionalised inequalities against marginalised group to control their realities and therefore reinstate power and disregard their lived experiences and realities (Sweet, 2019). Similarly, *testimonial injustice* is a notion that a person is not see as reliable or with integrity due to the prejudices held by others, therefore the dominant narratives and discourses remain in line with the oppressor (Fricker, 2007).

This also considers whether different marginalised groups are considered more credible than others, depending on how they are perceived and the power status in society. There has been an acknowledgement of how oppression across marginalised groups can be seen as hierarchical though as Audre Lorde notably argued against this (1983). The Equality-of-Oppression paradigm supports that equal attention should be given to marginalised groups, and that there are equivalent experiences for both individuals and society (Schiele, 2007) however it is argued that this has resulted in a 'increasing denial...suppression....deflection' (Graham & Schiele, 2010).

Oppression in the UK
When exploring epistemic exploitation and links with participation in social work teaching in England, it is important that we hold a lens to the powerful discourses of oppression across the UK and Europe. Oppression exists in our society across different areas of social construct, for example race, gender, ability, religion, and age. Oppression is where there is not only power exerted over those seen to be different to the dominant, also where those who are seen as 'othered' are viewed to have a lower evaluation of worth, experience rejection and exclusion from areas of society and/or their realities are denied (Nzira & Williams, 2008).

Despite the long history of oppression across the UK and Europe, it appears that systemic change and the eradication of oppression is a continued battle on a global spectrum. In recent years, there has been a shift of the dominant narrative, whereby marginalised groups voices have become louder on a mainstream platform.

The murder of George Floyd by US police in June 2020, influenced conversations across personal and professional worlds. Across organisations, schools, universities, communities, and governments there were conversations about the racial injustice for Black and Brown people, as well as institutionalised and systemic racism and white privilege. Following on, in March 2021, the murder of Sarah Everard by a police officer in London, UK, brought a mainstream dialogue where women's voices were dominant as many spoke out against violence against women and misogyny in society. Women and those assigned female at birth, started to challenge the dominant male discourse and instead, spoke around education for young men to work towards erasing gender inequality.

The voices of those who feel oppressed by society are becoming louder. This appears to be echoed across the world, as we saw the increase of protests, changes to organisational policies and an increase of awareness on social media. There have been some noted benefits, as the language starts to change and those in privileged positions start to notice injustice and power dynamics. This shift in the global discourse around racism and oppression pushed those in social work, and social work teaching to realign the lens onto anti-racism and anti-oppressive practice both within the content and teaching approaches (Thyberg, 2022).

Within systemic social work practice, John Burnham and Alison Roper-Hall offers terminology to help practitioners consider these different aspects of identity, experiences, and power dynamics, developing a mnemonic Social GGRRAAACCEEESSS (2012)[3]. Whilst all forms of discrimination are equal (Graham & Schiele, 2010), not all differences are the same and there is 'differences among the differences' (Burnham, 2012:146). For example, religion can be discriminated against and people from these groups can experience oppression by wider society as they may not be able to access areas of society and can feel excluded, though their religion may not have a clear visual clue. Burnham describes differences as existing on a continuum of the 'visible-invisible and voiced-unvoiced'(2012:146) depending on the extent to which they are observed by others and highlights the importance of consideration when thinking about people's identities. In the context of oppression within the UK, those marginalised groups that sit within society, both visible and invisible, voiced, and unvoiced, can feel as their lived reality is not accept within the dominant discourse. The lack of acceptance of this voice, experience and worldview sits at the heart of epistemic injustice.

Care Leavers within UK society, hold characteristics which are both invisible and unvoiced. It is argued that those who are care experienced are seen through a "problem-lens"(Bakketeig et al., 2020) and are likely to be stigmatised by their experience of being in care and presumed to be unlikely to achieve. There are societal assumptions that care leavers are expected to have poorer outcomes though this is not evidenced within statistical data (Hartworth et al., 2021). Those who are care experience are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system, develop mental health problems, more vulnerable to substance misuse and other health complications (Harrison et al., 2022; Power & Raphael, 2018). As with other oppressed

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[3] The mnemonic was jointly developed by Burnham and Roper-Hall and in different forms has become an embedded part of systemic practice since the 1990s. The mnemonic stands for Gender, Geography, Race, Religion, Age, Ability, Appearance, Class, Culture, Ethnicity, Education, Employment, Sexuality, Spirituality, , Sexual Orientation (Burnham, 2012).

groups, the negative narrative around those who are care experienced, comes from a dominant discourse around power imbalances and those who exert power of them. People who are care experienced continually speak of having very little control over their own lives and that professionals continue to hold power over them, feeling ashamed of their care status and the stigma that is attached (Ridge & Millar, 2000). This discourse may continue to play out into adulthood, as there is likely a mistrust in authorities leaving Care Leavers feeling excluded from societal spaces, undervalued in society and their existence is hidden. This highlights how Care Leavers can be sidelined in society and their experiences as Care Leavers needs to be seen through this lens of an unvoiced and invisible marginalised group within UK society.

This argument for Care Leavers being recognised this way has become a national conversation, as local councils across the UK begin to recognise care experience and Care Leavers as a protected characteristic which acknowledges the discrimination and oppression, in the same way that other marginalised groups do, and needing additional protection. Across the UK, this movement has extended for all local councils and the UK Government to recognise care experience as a protected characteristic, alongside others outlined the Equality Act (2010)[4]. Seeing those who are care experienced, in the same way we perceive marginalised groups (Who Cares? Scotland & Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2018) which acknowledges the complexity of their positions as EbE's within social work education and the risk of epistemic exploitation.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research is to reflect on how care leavers contributed to teaching as EbE's on this particular programme, the impact on students, EbE's and educators, and how current practice could be improved. Using the literature above as a base for understanding theoretical contexts of participation, oppression and epistemic exploitation, the author has used a mixed methodology approach combining elements of an appreciative inquiry (AI), participatory observations and self-reflective accounts.

AI allows a focus on "exploring the possibilities instead of the problem" (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2018: 624) and brings more attention to the strengths identified rather than the negatives. Kumar et al notes that AI "communicates concepts like hope, potential, positivity, dream, engagement, co-design, enjoyment, thriving and life-giving" (2023: 1006) . By completing reflections through this lens, it leans away from problem-based methodologies, which can bring limitations such as being solution-focused rather than exploring the meaning (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2018). Bringing together this methodology with participant observations, whereby the author reflects on their observations of EbE's and students in the classroom, as well as considering the author's own experiences in the classroom. This means that the author was able to become part of the research setting and these reflection on the sessions and recalling observations have been key (Gray, 2004).

It is important to note the limitations of this research as it is based within the author's own observations and "a high degree of personal interpretation" (Gray, 2004: 255). It is therefore important to acknowledge potential bias and objectivism. To further this research, interviews

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[4] There are currently nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010: Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage and civil partnership, Pregnancy and maternity, Race, Religion or belief, Sex and Sexual Orientation.

with EbE's, students and educators could unpick experiences of those participating in the teaching sessions and bring differences in their perspectives.

These observations took place as part of a pre-qualifying masters programme which was focused on the training of children's social workers. The teaching sessions sat within two modules on the course, which had already been designed by the University team and the request was for EbE's to design these sessions, to compliment the learning for students and to provide a rounded holistic experience. The EbE's participatory role was to co-produce and co-deliver teaching sessions, where their time and contribution would receive a fair monetary payment.

EbE's in this case were care experienced and continued to work with care leaving services in the UK. The recruitment for EbE's took place with a leaving care service and the allocated personal advisors[5] within the service. The call was for any care leaver who may be interested in the education of the next generation of social workers, and were open to sharing their experiences, perspectives, and stories to contribute to teaching. It was important that people did not feel obliged or coerced into this role, and that there were clear expectations set out. To do this, each person was contacted individually, to discuss what an EbE role looks like on this programme, the expectation of involvement and payment which would be provided (Anghel & Ramon, 2009; Fox & Videmšek, 2022; Hughes, 2017).

Barriers that created difficulties in EbE participation and recruitment were also due to the organisational structures and limitations. For instance, transport, childcare costs, and payments that do not affect benefits can create very difficult obstacles to overcome and need to be held in mind by both educators and the wider University systems (Tyler, 2006). Due to university regulations, those who did not hold Right to Work in the UK were unable to participate, which meant EbE's needed to either be British Citizens or have the appropriate immigration status to work in the UK. This did limit the pool of EbE's, as a dominant group of care leavers in this particular service were those who had entered the UK as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and may have been awaiting decisions about their claim. A Care Leaver was unable to participate in the teaching sessions, as they had a young infant who for insurance reasons could not be in the teaching venue and the individual was not able to access childcare. They were offered to contribute virtually, though they found this to be too intimidating, so chose to no longer participate. It was also important to acknowledge some would find it difficult to speak in front of a group of people they do not know, as this can be overwhelming and intimidating, therefore opting to not take part.

Once a group of EBE's were in place three planning sessions took place with a group of with a view of co-producing and co-delivering three teaching sessions. These sessions focused on the following themes:
- The child's world: living through abuse and neglect.
- Communicating with children and young people
- Trauma, recovery, and resilience

In the planning sessions, EbE's were encouraged to speak openly and authentically of their experiences of social work and social care systems. These sessions took place online along with the EbE lead who would be facilitating the teaching sessions. These sessions tended to focus on the EbE's negative experiences of social workers and a disillusioned view of the

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[5] Personal Advisors have a statutory role within leaving care services who provide advice, guidance, and support to care leavers (16 – 25year olds). This role is set out within UK legislation; The Children Act (1989) and the Children (Leaving Care) Act (2000).

services they have been exposed to. There was a strong narrative from the EbE's to create change in the system, to create better experiences for those who find themselves in similar situations, and that by contributing to teaching, they could have an influence on future qualified social workers (Horgan et al., 2020; Hughes, 2017).

Two EbE's took a more active and participatory role in the co-design and co-delivery, and between them attended the three teaching sessions. Both were asked to arrive early, to have a brief check in prior to the students arriving and again had a follow up debrief after the sessions. Their personal advisors were aware of their involvement and were available to be contacted should the EbE's require any follow up support. Following these sessions, the EbE's have been involved in the validation and design of upcoming programmes, and in the assessment process for new students.

Within the programme, there were approximately 35 students who were present in the teaching days. The demographic of students is mixed, though heavily female dominated. The ethnography of the cohort is mixed, with a slightly higher percentage of Black and Brown students. The students vary in age and have come to social work education at different stages in their professional development, some from previous experiences of working within statutory services such as health, education, or criminal justice. The specific comments on the ethnographic makeup of the group seems appropriate, to acknowledge the differing power imbalances in the room. Most of the students appear to be part of a marginalised group in society and may have had different experiences of oppression or have worked with those marginalised groups in a professional capacity prior to their social work training. In all three sessions, there was at least one other educator in the room, who supported the sessions. Preparations took place with the students at the beginning of the teaching module, where they were advised of EbE's joining the teaching spaces and being part of the co-design. Students were advised to have a compassionate and curious teaching space, to recognise the power imbalances within the room and respecting the perspectives that the EbE's will bring. The terminology used continued to be Experts by Experience, and students were not specifically advised of the EbE's position as Care Leavers, though this was shared by EbE's in the teaching sessions. The term EbE has been purposefully used to provide equality in status and to support their positions within the teaching team (Geregová & Frišaufová, 2019). Though it is also noted that this blanket term does not acknowledge the variations in experiences of services (Hughes, 2017).

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Students shared their appreciation and gratitude for the EbE's in feedback to the teaching team, noting how it was helpful to have these different perspectives within the classroom (Anghel & Ramon, 2009; Fox, 2020; Geregová & Frišaufová, 2019; Hartworth et al., 2021; Hughes, 2017). Students appeared to be engaged with the learning, interacting well with EbE's, creating an inclusive space for them and on the most part respecting their boundaries with questions. Hughes (2017) connects the involvement of EbE's to adult learning theories whereby involvement can enable transformative learning for students.

During the sessions, it was noted that at times, EbE's chose to share powerful stories of their own experiences and challenged positions in the classroom. EbE's shared their own speculation that they may have experienced more trauma from being in care and working with social workers, than living with their birth families, who they were eventually removed from. They seemed conflicted in that they knew they were exposed to significant harm and agreed

with the decision-making by services at the time, they felt the experience of being in care also left them feeling harmed and abused.

This personal testimonial is seen to be valuable within the classroom, as it can bring transformative learning, where students are exposed to life stories that could be seen as privilege to hear (Hughes, 2017; Mezirow, 2003). However, it is also argued that EbE's involvement is only perceived as valuable when testimonials are shared, rather than their opinions or judgements being their expertise (Hughes, 2017). As previously noted, the benefit of participation is well documented in the social work literature, but there is a tendency for educators to "inflate the credibility affixed to testimonies' (Dunne & Kotsonis, 2022: 8)which can create additional pressures on EbE's whilst overlooking the potential harms they experience (Dunne & Kotsonis, 2022).

In these observations, it was noted that discomfort within the classroom arose when students appeared to challenge or disagree with the EbE's perceptions or opinions, especially when their spoke of their frustrations around their own experience with social workers. Anghel and Ramon (2009) discuss this clash is expected, as the students would hold their positions as social workers in a positive light and have solidarity with this institution they belong to. The link here with epistemic injustice is clear, as the EbE's experiential knowledge was challenged, and students felt able to question this. It could be that due to the stigmatised attitudes held around Care Leavers, there is a prevalent discourse which minimises the credibility in their knowledge base (Happell, Warner, et al., 2022; Okoroji et al., 2023). Both EbE's reflected that though they had enjoyed the experience, they were left feeling emotionally exhausted and noted an unexpected emotional impact from the sessions (Anghel & Ramon, 2009; Fox, 2020). Despite the focus of the sessions not being on the details of their own lives and specific experiences, both EbE's felt that the conversations about how to work with children and/or young people experiencing trauma and the impact of trauma, abuse, or neglect, left them feeling vulnerable and exposed. This identifies the link between a fear of re-traumatising those with lived experience for the benefit of social work education, causing psychological impact by participating in discissions of oppressive systems as the oppressed in the room (Berenstain, 2016; Fox & Videmšek, 2022).

When the EbE's were debriefed, it did appear that there was a balance of emotion, as they also hold a great sense of achievement and empowerment, where their perspectives in the room on the whole were validated and the knowledge, they hold was given worth (Anghel & Ramon, 2009; Fox & Videmšek, 2022; Geregová & Frišaufová, 2019; Hughes, 2017). The dialogue between the EbE's and the educators before, during and after the sessions allowed ongoing learning and development. Involving students in this dialogue could bridge the gap that may be between these three positions in the room, strengthening collaboration both in social work education and into wider social work practice (Reith-Hall, 2022).

Anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice is essential within social work, and it is important that students are able to have a safe space in the classroom to explore these concepts. When EbE's come into the room with differing experiences and perspectives of statutory social work systems, there is a need for this space to be a safe environment for all. Despite EbE involvement courses continue to be taught through the lens which caters to the dominant identity (Boatswain-Kyte et al., 2022) and social work education continues to be taught from a position that supports social work systems. This may be at the expense of those with the lived experience of being oppressed by that very system.

As educators, it is important that this role is to facilitate learning and balance the different perspectives (Boatswain-Kyte et al., 2022). It is important that students feel safe to express themselves and look deeper into perspectives. However this cannot be at the expense of criticising EbE's lived reality nor denying the existence of that reality. To achieve this, students need appropriate preparation when entering the teaching space, reminded of their values as student social workers and anti-oppressive practice. They need to encourage to phrase questions with compassion and empathy, reminded that EbE's are not there to be challenged or judged. The responsibility to create safe spaces for EbE's lies with the educators, lecturers, universities, and institutions. As Dunne and Kotsonis (2022) note, it is the "moral duty to exercise extreme caution and moral sensitivity to safeguard against" risks of epistemic exploitation and negative consequences on EbE's.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

To move forward, the following recommendations are being made with the intent to improve the practice of working with EbE's in social work teaching and to promote the working with those who are care experienced.

Care Leavers as EbE's can bring an authentic lens on how they have experienced children's social care across services, usually having been involved with partner agencies such as health, mental health, education, family court, and possibly others such as police, criminal justice systems or hospitals. It has been argued that Care Leavers should also be considered as a marginalised group therefore the risk of epistemic exploitation is as present as with other marginalised groups. It is important or educators to bring this lens to their work with Care Leavers as EbE' as a starting point.

The findings demonstrate there is a clear need for educators to develop strong links with local organisations or services as part of the recruitment process for EbE's. This allows the opportunity to create mutually respectful relationships with those wishing to participate, and to ensure that the recruitment process is anti-oppressive. Opportunities for co-production need to be presented in a way that does not place burdens, force personal testimony or where there is an expectation to participate. Recruitment for EbE's should not be cherry-picked and opportunity should be given to hear the different perspectives, not solely the ones that necessarily aligned with social work involvement. Educators need to consider the barriers that can prevent EbE's, particularly care leavers, from participation and how these can be overcome. The starting point is to consider the logistical factors, such as payments, transport, and childcare. There needs to be flexibility in the working partnership, with the Universities and educators creating flexible pathways for those to overcome obstacles to participate.

To minimise concerns of epistemic exploitation, choice is key. EbE's need to feel they are able to participate in a way that feels authentic and safe to them. To achieve this, principles of empowerment and anti-oppressive practice needs to be central in practice. Teaching content needs to be co-produced, with an acknowledgment of the power dynamics that may be at play, and conscious attempt to bring balance. As demonstrated within the observations, regular planning sessions and check-in's with EbE's have been important in being able to have wider discussions, and to bring focus to the content that EbE's feel is important to develop. It's noted that providing a debrief space for EbE' after sessions were particularly valuable, to ensure they feel emotionally supported and contained. This reaffirms the need for connections with the services who are supporting them and in particular a link with their personal

advisors, who may also offer support outside of the teaching partnership as way to acknowledge the emotional labour and exhaustion that may come from their participation.

Whilst in the room, issues of epistemic injustice can be reduced by ensuring students have preparation including preliminary discussions around why the use of EbE's is important and again, acknowledge the power imbalances within the classroom and how students can address these both individually and as a group. Exercises such as developing questions and considering the language used can be a useful way to help students understand the experience of EbE's within the room.

CONCLUSION

This article has considered the history of participation in England and the UK, alongside the history of oppression, exploring the concept of epistemic exploitation and how this needs to be considered when working with EbE's in social work education. It has been noted that the importance of EbE involvement lies in the significant benefits this brings to all those involved; students, educators, EbE's and future provisions.

The focus on care leavers has offered a space to consider the nuanced experience that they bring to teaching, recognising their position in society and to work towards altering the dominant discourse that surrounds them. This article has linked how EbE involvement can become exploitative if there is not sufficient understanding and preventative work done. The recommendations made are not an exhaustive list of how to reduce risks and create safe spaces and is a part of the ongoing dialogue that needs to continue within institutions alongside EbE's. A key message is for educators and universities to consider the implications on any EbE they are working with and ensuring that there are active responses to minimising any harms on EbE's through their participation. It is important to enter into co-production with a lens on epistemic exploitation, to ensure that the participation of EbE's is safe and inclusive. This article has highlighted that this moral responsibility lies with educators, as social workers fighting against social injustice and promoting anti-oppressive practice within participation and social work education.

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