Teaching about Diversity Fund

Final Report

Project Name: Mad-Positive in the Academy: From Conference to Curriculum
Date: December 5, 2014 Submitted by: Dr. Kathryn Church
Year of Funding: 2013/2014 academic year

Project Abstract (max 200 words)
Your abstract of your findings should include enough detail so that rationale, methodology and outcomes are clear. Use plain language as this abstract will be posted on the LTO website.

Student mental health is a topic of increasing concern on university campuses. In Canada and elsewhere, task forces are engaged in developing new guidelines for policy and practice. Most reinforce a dominant medical (psychiatric) and professional service provider point of view about appropriate responses. In other words, the crisis tends to be interpreted as one of “not enough counseling services” for individuals who need help. This project challenges the dominant view. Drawing from an international dialogue of academic-activist practitioners hosted by Disability Studies at Ryerson, we offer an alternative conception that we speak of as Mad-positive along with potential pathways for collective action. The final product is a series of web docs (short films) that foreground discrimination as a regular feature of classroom interactions and campus life, address what it means to be Mad positive and suggest strategies for being a Mad ally. The films (approx. 10 minutes each) are intended to stimulate discussions with a range of audiences.

Summary of Work Accomplished (max 1500 words)
Describe the study rationale (including supportive literature), project methodology, outcomes and potential application of outcomes.

The broad context for development of this project is the increasing concern and attention focused on mental health on University campuses across Canada. All campuses are currently in the process of redeveloping guidelines for policy and practice; here at Ryerson, the Mental Health Task Force has been engaged in a similar exercise. Within this context, there is a tendency to privilege the medical/professional point-of-view and overlook student experiences, as well as the views of people connected to other relevant social movements (Aubrecht, 2012; Wolframe, 2013; Russo & Beresford, 2014). In the School of Disability Studies, we recognize a significant, if somewhat hidden community of mad-identified students on campus who are looking for a reflection of their own experience in curriculum. By mad-identified, we mean a growing group of people who self-identify using the reclaimed term mad, which acknowledges the longer historical trajectory of the term madness. This term also links one’s identity to the mad movement, also known as the consumer/survivor/ex-patient movement, which is a social and political movement of people who have directly experienced the psychiatric system (Reaume, 1994; Lewis, 2006; Costa et al. 2012; Russo, 2012; Jones & Brown 2013; Shrader et al., 2013). For these students, it is empowering to see others engaged in work worldwide with mad-identified partners and community groups, to ensure their perspectives help shape future research and teaching.

Unlike other emergent projects, our goal is not to increase mental illness awareness or manage student bodies on campus, but rather to complicate, query, and open-up for
discussion different ways of thinking that are not readily available within the dominant discourse. Students are invited to bring a critical lens into discussions of mental health that tend to prioritize bio-medicalization and clinical professionalization over human rights, equity and social inclusion. We are, for the first time, offering a different entry point into familiar dilemmas and moving beyond the existing curriculum. This series of web docs (or short films) we have developed clarifies what a mad-positive perspective entails - frequently misunderstood or dismissed as anti-psychiatry - and how it can be used to re-imagine inclusive classrooms and post-secondary environments for students with psychiatric disabilities.

Fostered within a disability studies framework, an independent stream of mad studies is gradually becoming recognized as a legitimate form of knowledge (LeFrancois, Menzies, & Reaume, 2013; Russo & Beresford, 2014) that needs to be integrated into existing teaching materials and shared across disciplines. Ryerson has a unique resource in the School of Disability Studies. Our School is infused with and has advanced this perspective through the work of mad-identified scholars and students. The School of Disability Studies, which has long taken the lead in accessibility throughout the University, hosted a ground-breaking event in this area entitled “Mad-Positive in the Academy: An International Dialogue on Practice” in 2012. Those in attendance were scholars and community-based advocates whose work is at the cutting edge of mental health, formal education, and social movements. We have capitalized on this event’s momentum.

Using footage taken from 19 filmed interviews (roughly 7 hours of footage) with individuals in attendance at this event, we have developed a series of three web docs and accompanying cross-disciplinary teaching tools for each. The video products are in the final stage of production and will be rolled out one at a time, beginning in April 2015. The videos center around three topics:

1) What does it mean to be “mad-positive”?
2) What does it mean to be a mad ally?
3) Discrimination and stigma

We anticipate the broadest possible reach for these tools which advance an emergent form of knowledge as a contribution to the intellectual community. The web docs amplify the voices of people who are not generally heard in the classroom and make their experiences available as a legitimate form of knowledge for both formal instruction and in community-based forums. These videos share participants' understandings of what it means to be mad-positive and how they actively work to create mad-positive spaces within the academy. Rather than beginning from theoretical concepts, participants spoke from programmatic and lived experience. Therefore, these web docs are all grounded in the practice dilemmas participants have faced and the activist strategies they employ in their everyday work in partnership with or as members of the mad community. These resources will be shared with faculty both within Ryerson and at other universities, colleges, as well as with community groups, locally and internationally.

Within the term of the grant, the deliverables are as follows. The web docs were created using a multi-stage collaborative process; feedback was collected throughout, from both local and international audiences. First, the PI and research assistant sorted through transcripts from the seven hours of filmed interview footage and arranged the content thematically. An initial rough cut (30 mins. in length) was twice screened, first for a small group of contacts in England, and next for a larger group of contacts in Scotland. The RA
took detailed notes during the discussions following these screenings in order to capture audience responses. Applying this feedback, the PI and RA worked with the videographer to develop a second cut of the film. This second cut was then screened for a small group locally. Their feedback initiated the decision to split one film into three shorter (10 min. long) films and aided in shaping the final cuts.

Our videographer is now working to fill green screen spaces with relevant content, in order to complete the three web docs. We will continue to track feedback through online surveys and evaluation forms as we publically screen the web docs and as they become incorporated into classroom teaching. Links to online surveys will be provided to instructors in conjunction with accessible teaching tools. These tools will include a suggested reading list and a discussion questions for each web doc, as well as a tip sheet for educators. This work built on our local partnership with the Sam Gindin Chair in Social Justice and Democracy. It also consolidated and extended our international network.

**Evaluation of Project’s Success (max 600 words)**

Explain how you know that the project was successful (Include evidence of rigorous evaluation.)

Our multi-stage collaborative process for developing the web docs allowed us to screen various cuts of the film and incorporate valuable feedback into our final products. Feedback was collected during group discussions with the audiences following three screenings, one local and two international. As a result of the final screening, we have selected to create three web docs instead of one. This was made possible by using the TDF grant funds to cover the expense of additional time with the videographer. Another source of funding was located to cover the expense of hiring one RA on the project. International screenings were scheduled around other prearranged events, allowing the PI and RA to capitalize on existing travel expenses. In this way we were able to expand on our original proposal. Also as previously stated, we will also continue to collect feedback on these offerings as the project rolls out.

**Transferables (max 500 words)**

List and describe knowledge gained in this project and how that knowledge could benefit faculty members in the Ryerson community.

The three web docs and the accompanying teaching tools developed through this project will become valuable resources for faculty and other educators offering course content related to mental health. The tools are designed for flexibility in use across disciplines here at Ryerson and by other universities, colleges and community groups, locally and internationally. Testimonials attached to the original grant proposal spoke to the interest of various local and international partners to utilize these tools in their existing courses. This has been reaffirmed through a collaborative process of screening rough cuts and receiving feedback from a number of our contacts. The web docs are made accessible with closed captioning and teaching tools are offered in accessible formats.

**Media or Publication (max 500 words)**

List any media attention your project has received internally from Ryerson or externally. List any publications or conferences you have attended where data from this project was presented. Confirm that you acknowledged or will acknowledge the grant’s contribution to your work in media, publication or conference presentations.
Conferences:

Church, K., Landry, D. and Ng, W. “‘What is this mad-positive stuff anyway?’: Using a web-doc to cross the border from medical problems to social action on mental health matters”. Presentation to the Ryerson Faculty Conference, Teaching without Borders. Ryerson University, Toronto, ON: May 22, 2014.

Publications:


We have acknowledged the contribution of the TDF grant in both our conference presentation and publication.

Financial Summary

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<th>Budget Item</th>
<th>Amount budgeted</th>
<th>Amount expended</th>
<th>Balance remaining for this item (if any)</th>
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<td>Videographer for transcription of the interview footage, video editing, green screen animations, and planning meetings +HST</td>
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<td>RA to help develop webdoc, teaching tools. Collect and track feedback, arrange screenings. 64 hrs x $28/hr + 18%</td>
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