An Inquiry about One Peer-Driven Curriculum to Train Peer Coaches: Reflecting on Power, Privilege and Supporting Each Other's Recovery

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A Brief Description of the Inquiry

1. How recovery from a mental illness was addressed in the training – as a truth (a one-size-fits-all) or as multiple perspectives (making space for everyone's world view of their unique recovery journey)

2. What was the role that the curriculum played in developing a concept for multiple perspectives of recovery in preparing the people who were trained

The Written Curriculum

The written curriculum used the concept of peer coaches to facilitate peer support. The idea of coaching addressed relationships where the person who was being coached had the final decision-making authority. Peer coaching is a model that intentionally creates more egalitarian interactions.

A Brief Description of the Inquiry

- Interviewed a few peers who were trained in a curriculum about delivering peer support services after a disaster
- Focus was on power and privilege issues in the coaching relationship; and social change
- Was qualitative, unstructured and

  'co-constructed' to share as much decision-making as possible with people being interviewed
- Was not intended to: show cause, develop facts, typical responses, look at trends, generalize to other peer curriculums or build theory

Shortcomings of the Inquiry

- Interviews happened 5 months after training
- I thought the trainees had had the chance to provide support to other peers (practice)
- I expected that people were aware that recovery from psychiatric disabilities was possible and expected
- The actual content of training varied by trainer, rather than what was covered in the written curriculum (which I was familiar with)

What the Inquiry does not suggest:

- That the curriculum had problems
- That there were problems with the trainers
- That there were problems with the trainees

My Interpretation of the Inquiry

- People didn't seem to have a clear concept about power differences and how to apply equal relationships
- Everyone interviewed felt that they benefited from the training, i.e., were empowered, felt they mattered and could make a difference
- Needed more training (which was provided at a later date)
- People continued to grow and learn (differences between the interviews and reviewing the transcripts 2 months later)

When we think of peer work:

- There is an assumption of equality.
- There is an assumption that peers are safe with peers in ways that we're not safe with other people – because we've 'been there'.
- That we instinctively 'know' how to create relationships that are equal, respectful and mutually responsible.

So, How Peer is Peer?

Definition of Peer

A peer is "a person of equal standing with another" Encarta

How Peer is Peer - in practice?

○ **What are some frequent power imbalances between peers?**
  - key holders vs. no keys
  - more experience 'in recovery'
  - better insight into 'recovery'
  - more contact with 'reality'
  - access to funding for program
  - designated as the 'expert'
  - my truth is better than your truth

What are some more examples of power imbalances?

The Concept of World Views

A world view is a person's highly personal way of looking at almost everything about life, the world and human beings.

It influences:

◇ <u>how</u> we believe

◇ <u>what</u> we think and believe

◇ <u>actions</u> with and toward others

◇ <u>colors</u> how we interpret experiences

The Concept of Multiple Perspectives

'Multiple perspectives' is the awareness that each person has unique world views. It is the willingness and ability to come together with mutual responsibility and mutual respect so both people grow toward living the life of one's choice.

Importance of Multiple Perspectives

- Each person's world views/narratives/stories hold the sacred essence of her/his being

- Western thought teaches privileging positions of Truth, truth, truths over lesser Truth, truth, truths, which can dismiss and diminish one's world views

- Using multiple perspectives opens possibilities for respecting everyone's highly personal world views – not better or less than someone else's

Okay – What does Multiple Perspectives really mean? And, why should I care? I know my truths!!!

- When we practice trauma informed care, we are aware that many people have experienced trauma.

- Many of us believe that denying self-determination and choice can traumatize or even re-traumatize.

- One of the strengths of peer work is that we understand each other better than non-peers. So, we assume we're safe with other peers.

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Sanctuary Harm
(Silver, 1984)

◇ Harm that happens when someone who has already experienced trauma is traumatized in an environment that he or she expected to be safe and supportive.

◇ Peer environments are supposed to be safe. It's important that we avoid subtly harming each other.

◇ One form of harm can be limiting other peers' ways of thinking (world view) about their recovery.

'Recovery' - Who's: Perspective? Power? Privilege? Journey?

RECOVERY COMMUNITIES	DEFINITIONAL PROCESSES	EVIDENCE/ BASED POLICY	AGGREGATED 'INDIVIDUALS'	UNIQUE INDIVIDUAL
• Traditional Medical Model • Trauma • Addiction/ Co-occurring Disorders • Psychiatric Rehabilitation • Independent Living Movement • [Children/Family Members] (Davidson *et al.,* 2005)	• Process of recovering • Regaining something lost • Restoring health • Exceeding former state of being • Regaining something of worth from a prior state of no value (Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 2001)	"... The process in which people are able to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities. For some individuals, recovery is the ability to live a fulfilling and productive life despite a disability. For others, recovery implies the reduction or complete remission of symptoms. Science has shown that having hope plays an integral role in an individual's recovery." (p.5) (New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003)	• "Abuse or trauma narratives" • "Biological" • "Combination of biological/ environmental" • "Spiritual or philosophical" • "Political" • "Spirit-breaking" (Jacobson, 2001)	Gives 'voice', including deconstruction, for the *perspective*, the *power*, and the *privilege* supporting each individual's rights and abilities to self determine, choose and drive her/his *unique* recovery *journey.* (Donovan, 2006)

Donovan, L. (2006). Hurricane Katrina Disaster Peer Support: 'From Disaster to Recovery'. Paper presented at the Second International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Urbana-Champaign, IL, May 4-5 2006

Brief Overview of Recovery Choices

- Recovery Communities – often have peer pressure and conformity

- Definitional Processes – individual's understanding of what recovery means to that person – may not be aware of alternative approaches

- Evidence Based Policy – influences and limits recovery services and systems

- Aggregated 'Individuals' – subtly influences choice by eliminating nuances

- Unique Individual – the person's choice based on self-knowledge

Taking Back Our Power Through Informed Choice

How can we offer support (mutual respect) while increasing awareness of the wide range of things that one can use to help recover or go beyond recovery?

What happens when someone's recovery values clashes with ours?

What Makes Sense to Each of Us?

- Where do we assume change happens? (What changes for someone to succeed at recovering?)
  - In the person?
  - In the environment?
  - Combination?
  - Something altogether different?

- Is changing someone's world view easy? (Does the model fit the worldview or does the world view determine the recovery approach?)

How Multiple Perspectives Can Increase Peer Cooperation and Collaboration

- When we are aware that everyone has worldviews and that there are many variations, we can let go of the need to 'privilege' one's truth or world view over someone else's.

- We can negotiate solutions that work for both of us.

- We can develop collaborative decisions that allow for individual journeys.

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What Would this Vision Look Like When there is Intentional Equality?

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How Would Training and Curriculums Be Different?

- Training needs to explicitly address power and privilege
- Appreciating differences
- Engaging self
- Teach skills of critical thinking
- Teach skills of critical self-reflection about power and privilege
- Include instruction about building alliances
- Practice, Practice, Practice
- Supervision