Why not teach "diversity" to public sector managers?

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Abstract

Purpose – Equality and diversity are generally positioned as special interests, marginal to the mainstream of social policy teaching and learning. The purpose of this paper is to make the case for shifting equality and diversity out of the margins and into the centre of education for mid career public managers, and offers practical methods for doing so.

Design/methodology/approach – The current EU policy framework requires public services to go beyond eliminating discrimination, and to promote equality. The paper suggests that while this offers great opportunities for advancing the cause of social justice, the cultures that predominate in public policy may lead to loss and failure. Academic research and experience demonstrate that these changes are highly complex, touching on issues that are integral to our sense of who we are, and how we relate to each other as educators and students, and as enforcers, beneficiaries and implementers of these policies. The paper touches on deeply held emotions, showing that more exploration of appropriate pedagogical methods is needed.

Findings – The paper finds that only by raising issues of equality and diversity to mainstream social policy teaching and learning is there likely to be a shift in thinking and commitment that will encourage integration of equality measures within management and leadership of public.

Originality/value – The paper offers three dimensions of pedagogy for enabling public service managers to engage with diversity and the equality agenda within educational contexts, and offers three illustrations of pedagogic processes that support this learning.

Keywords Professional education, Equal opportunities, Public sector organizations, Managers

Paper type Technical paper

Introduction

Why should "diversity" be included in management education for public service managers? Our focus in this paper is the case for inviting students on management education programmes to engage with the messy cluster of issues relating to power, difference and equality in organisations. Accordingly in this paper we will use both "diversity" and "equality" to signpost an approach that is concerned with power and difference, and contested ways of understanding "equality". While our general argument relates to all areas addressed by current equality legislation, the primary focus of this paper is on gender. Our approach is informed by the recognition that the issues relating to each equality area are specific, intertwined in their lived reality by individuals and communities that increasingly intersect.

Initiatives to introduce diversity and equality within public sector management education are timely. The year 2007 has been designated the European Year of Equal

Opportunities for all. In 2005 the European Commission published its strategy framework to promote equality and non-discrimination in the EU, to inform people of their rights, to ensure that discrimination is tackled, to celebrate diversity and to promote equal opportunities for all in the EU. Yet as we will demonstrate the goals of equality and diversity are contested, interpretations in different contexts vary, and levels of implementation are uneven. Moreover despite legislation and two decades of equal opportunities polity and practice there continues to be substantial lack of representation, equality and diversity in positions of authority and decision-making throughout the European public sector. Education programmes for managers of public service offer important opportunities for exploring the reasons for this lack of progress, the role of public service organisations in leading and enabling change, and how to sustain positive initiatives that have been developed.

The terminology of equality and diversity initiatives and how it is used in specific contexts reflects the conflicted history and complex nature of the agendas involved. "Diversity" and "equality" are signposts to strategies for equalities policies and interventions that are distinct and adapted to changing political contexts. Yet while each is associated with specific ideological principles and operational models at local level, the terms are often used interchangeably by practitioners and managers, in public services, to legitimise their own interpretations and practice (Newman, 2002a). Thus for example "diversity" may be used as a generic term as way of signalling a more up to date and acceptable approach to "equality", or "gender" a more acceptable way of referring to working towards women's equality.

Public service has played and continues to play a leading role historically in developing and modelling equal opportunities initiatives in employment and service delivery. The European public sector has explicit values about equalities, and these are rooted in an ethos of public service (Hartley and Rashman, 2003). Yet in the current political context public service staff and managers are at the sharp end of powerful challenges to this ethos, both in relation to their employment practices, and the services that they deliver. These challenges arise from changes in the social and political environment, and the changing forms of delivery of public services. Increasingly commissioning and delivery of services is through partnerships with third sector organisations, and local communities. Capacity to work with diversity and with competing values and priorities is necessary for these partnerships to work (Page, 2003).

In the policy environment, business values are held in tension with public service ethos, and marketisation is introducing fundamental shifts in the resourcing of public services and in their relationship to local communities. In the social environment, a variety of different agendas relating to citizenship, family values and equal rights are enacted and reported daily by the media within European Union member states. Public service managers have to make difficult decisions concerning allocation of scarce resources in contexts where fundamental social norms and values are called into question by new legislation and complex social change. For example, in Great Britain we have seen reports on the introduction of stricter controls to restrict access to public services for economic migrants, alongside exploitation through the practices of unscrupulous employment agencies (UNISON, 2007). Public sector low paid women employees are taking trade unions and public authorities to court for not implementing equal pay (*The Observer*, June 18, 2006). New legislation requires elimination of

discrimination in services and employment for lesbians and gay men, but this has been contested by Catholic adoption agencies (*Guardian Unlimited*, April 3, 2007. How should the rights of lesbians and gay men for access to adoption services be interpreted in relation to the rights of the child? How should equal pay to which women are entitled be resourced? Is it right to deprive economic migrants of public services, or to take on responsibility for immigration controls?

A further set of challenges is presented by expectations of public service organisations to be equal opportunities employers. Public sector organisations employ a diverse group of staff and serve a diverse community of citizens, and therefore offer an important resource for examining the realities and challenges of implementing policies designed to promote equality and diversity. It might be argued that public services should reflect the proportions of women and men, and black and minority ethnic groups in the workforce as a whole, in the community which they serve and within society overall. Yet representation in employment and in political decision-making continues to be unequal, while outsourcing of services and recent pay agreements has in some cases exaggerated divisions between employees (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2007; ETUC, 2007). At senior level, research suggests that the introduction of performance cultures through the modernisation agenda produces workplace cultures that promote traditional masculine leadership qualities values and discourages diversity (Broussine and Fox, 2002). This is a concern for equality in employment, but also for access to services that do not reflect the needs and priorities of local communities. If public policy makers and managers responsible for implementing equalities legislation are not representative of the diverse society and cultures they are there to serve, they will not find it easy to serve their diverse communities, or indeed to work in partnership with voluntary sector organisations rooted in these communities.

Directives to implement changes that are highly contested touch our lives deeply and are complex in their implications – often little understood. Understanding diversity and equality requires understanding and appreciation of difference and power, and this may radically challenge values and assumptions underpinning professional identity, and ways of relating to service users and citizens. We argue that by raising the issues and bringing diversity and equality to the centre of mainstream social policy teaching and learning we can offer opportunities for exploring complex ethical dilemmas raised by equalities legislation in a context of social change, and for enabling managers to challenge guiding assumptions within a relatively safe environment.

In management education programmes we suggest that equality and diversity should be explored at personal, institutional and the wider societal levels. On a personal level we might aim to enable greater tolerance and appreciation and understanding of different needs, demands and personal qualities, in their cultural context (Vogt, 1997). At an institutional level we might aim for understanding of how attributes associated with different social groups are differently valued and of how inequalities are reproduced through and embedded in institutional cultures and practices. At societal and cultural level we might aim to explore systemic inequalities and divisions that militate against understanding and inclusion.

In the next section we introduce the EU legislative framework and consider research findings into the impact of equalities and diversity policy to date.

The European legislative framework: contested interpretations

One of the originating principles in the Treaty of Rome was the commitment to equal pay for women. This established sex equality as a fundamental principle of EEC social policy, and established the basis to which member state domestic legislation would have to conform. Following this, The Equal Treatment Directive 76/207/EC implemented the principle of equal treatment in relation to access to employment, working conditions and vocational training and required that there should be no discrimination on grounds of sex.

The Treaty of Amsterdam 1997 greatly extended the legislative framework and provided a major advancement in the promotion of equality and the prevention of discrimination at EC level. It empowered the European Council to take appropriate action to prohibit discrimination based on sex, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. In the year 2000 two major equality directives established a common minimum level of legal protection against discrimination on a much wider set of terms to all citizens within the EU, and that put into effect an extension to the principle of equal treatment. The Race Equality Directive (2000/43/EC) aims to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of racial and ethnic origin in the areas of social protection, including social security, healthcare, social advantage, education and access to and supply of goods and services, which are available to the public (including housing). The Equality Framework Directive (2000/78/EC) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation.

The enactment of these directives has enforced a gradual move towards the creation of a consistent and comprehensive basic floor of legal protection against major areas of discriminatory behaviour and treatment. In both directives the concept of equality is similar. As research into the impact of gender equality initiatives demonstrates, the ways in which EU directives are interpreted and implemented is informed both by national legislative frameworks and by local context (Rees, 2005; Walby, 2005). Interpretive approaches offer an alternative to positivist, rationalist models of the processes through which policies are made and enacted (Newman, 2002b). These approaches would seem to be vital to understanding the complex processes through which equalities legislation will be interpreted and enacted by local actor in local contexts (Hill, 2002).

The importance of legislative frameworks should not be underestimated. They provide statutory rights and protection and impose obligations and responsibilities, which can be enforced. Moreover they legitimate initiatives within organisations and wider society to work towards equality. However, we live in societies that are rooted in inequality and in which the development of equality issues and anti-discrimination policies and legislation are relatively recent. This is reflected in research findings documenting experience of discrimination within the EU (European Commission, 2007). How then has legislation been interpreted in local contexts? What have been the factors that have influenced local results? We will now turn to the experience of public services within the UK and Norway, the country contexts of the authors of this paper, and draw out some of the specific challenges for European public sector managers that this legislative framework presents.

In the UK recent legislation has introduced significant changes in equalities legislation and policy. The scope of legislation has extended to cover religion or belief,

age, and sexual orientation, as well as gender, race and disability. Alongside this there is an expectation of integration in policy implementation. The introduction of integrated equalities frameworks for implementation is now underway in many public authorities. A further significant shift is a positive statutory duty for public authorities to promote equality of opportunity, as well as to eliminate discrimination, in the field of Race, Disability and Gender. The legislation shifts the approach to equality and discrimination away from an individual litigation approach to one that requires public authorities to be more pro-active and to take responsibility for addressing the systemic dimensions of inequality. While these changes will encourage new forms of practice for implementation and for evaluation of impact they do not provide a common basis for interpreting equality. The legislation requires organisations to publish and set their own goals, within the framework provided, but does not predefine what these might be. Interpretation will therefore be determined by the outcome of local negotiations.

In contrast Norway, together with the other Nordic countries, has long been regarded as being at the forefront in promoting gender equality. Gender equality and gender discrimination, are regulated by the Norwegian Gender Equality Act, coming into force in 1979. This legislation prohibits all discrimination on grounds of gender, and its explicit purpose is to enhance gender equality in all areas of society. In order to achieve such equality, a system of quotas for women has been established to enhance their recruitment into leadership positions. The Act, however, is contested, and attitudes towards gender quotas are most negative amongst the male top leaders of the private economy sector. And while 80-90 per cent of women who hold leadership positions support most kinds of positive action procedures, the equivalent percentage of men is about 60 per cent (Teigen, 2005, p. 11).

EU directives, UN and Council of Europe resolutions and subsequent national legislation in EU member states for implementing equality offer promise but rely on informed and committed leadership, and adequate systems to support learning and implementation and understanding (Breitenbach *et al.*, 2002; Rees, 2005; Walby, 2005). Public service managers therefore have an important role to play in interpreting the scope of legislative requirements, in local contexts. In the rest of this section we explore some of the challenges in taking up this role for managers of European public services. We will do so through the lens of research into one specific equalities area- the experience of UK public service initiatives to promote and implement women's equality.

Problematising gender equality and change: learning from UK public service initiatives

In the 1980s and 1990s UK public sector organisations were at the forefront in developing and promoting equal opportunities employment policies, and services adapted for local communities. Over this period, the drivers for implementation changed as the modernisation agenda was introduced and business values and practices gained precedence over redistributive social justice as an ethos for public service. "Managing diversity" was increasingly introduced alongside equal opportunities policies in the UK. This approach with its focus on valuing individual difference was experienced by many as a welcome antidote to the categories of fixed identity embedded in equal opportunities policies. However with its focus on market driven business objectives it cannot replace policies that attempt to address structural inequalities in society (Mason, 2002).

Equal opportunities policy and practice developed unevenly, and strategies for implementation of legislation were driven by local political priorities. Research studies conducted at the end of the first two decades of equal opportunities in relation to women's equality in Great Britain were critical on two main counts (Breitenbach *et al.*, 2002). First, the inadequacy of the operational systems for implementation, in contrast to other more highly prioritised policy areas. Second, the model of equal opportunities itself did not address the systemic dimensions power and inequality. Potential for engaging with both of these criticisms appear to be offered by "gender mainstreaming". This was introduced within the European Union in 1997 by the Treaty of Amsterdam as a means of integrating equal opportunities within the "mainstream" of the policy process and decision making in public (Rees, 1998).

Reviews of gender equalities practice in organisations have been predominately negative in their assessment of the outcomes at macro level. Yet this picture, while true, contrasts uneasily with the experiences of complex change processes, the setbacks and achievements that make up the local experiences of equalities practitioners of the 1980s and 1990s (Itzin and Newman, 1995; Riley, 1990; Scott, 2002). Postmodern perspectives on organisations offer radical alternatives to linear models of change associated with equal opportunities policy and practice. From these perspectives organisations are sites of difference, conflict, flux, fragmentation and power contestation (Hatch, 1997; Linstead *et al.*, 2004). Gender intersects with other social identities as they are enacted and performed within inequality regimes (Acker, 2006).

Feminist research on the potential and results delivered by gender mainstreaming tend to be more positive than for equal opportunities and diversity management initiatives. For example Walby's international study of gender mainstreaming finds that it has developed new forms of political practice and alliances, specialised gender machinery in government and gender expertise in organisations and civil society (Walby, 2005). Rees' study of the implementation of gender mainstreaming within the European Union finds that results are uneven, and interpretations are diverse (Rees, 2005). In other words, analysis of the effectiveness of equalities legislation and practice needs to take into account and engage with the political agency of actors involved, and the complexity of the contexts in which they are situated. How the legislation is interpreted is likely to be determined by specific political, temporal and institutional context and climate and by individual actors within contexts in which they are situated.

Research into the impact of equal opportunities and diversity policy initiatives on women's inequality in public sector organisations in Great Britain note that investigating the reasons for limited impact of the policies and the difficulties in sustaining achievements made has been a source of learning for those involved. One aspect of this learning has been to critically appraise the ways in which change processes that underpin equal opportunities policies and practice have been theorised. Public service managers are increasingly tasked with responsibility for integrating equality within the mainstream of policy for service delivery and employment. Problematising the nature of change and the associated concepts of power, gender and leadership may be helpful to managers of public services equalities activists, and researchers, in explaining why equality is so elusive, and in illuminating the nature of the changes that have been achieved. In the next section we explore the pedagogical challenges and opportunities this offers to management educators.

Pedagogical challenges and opportunities

An important role for management educators is to offer opportunities to their students to find their own agency, in relation to equalities and diversity policies.

At a recent conference for equalities practitioners and researchers in Bristol, a senior policy and equalities manager was asked to elaborate on the effectiveness of a Head of Service who has succeeded in integrating equalities into her service planning. She reflected:

> Champions are not enough, and neither are requirements and procedures. What is needed is a manager in a position of authority who understands the issues and is committed to implementation; robust procedures, systems of accountability and sanctions for managers; and an informed local community who will raise hell if the community plan does not address their issues.

We offer three dimensions of pedagogy for enabling public sector managers to find their own agency in taking up the challenges and opportunities for promoting equality within their practice.

First, situate current equalities policy and legislation in their temporal and historical contexts of struggle for social justice, and in the context of changing relationships between the state, citizens and business. Offer an invitation to explore where the legislation came from, the needs it seeks to address, and the purpose and spirit of the initiative. Equipped with this knowledge, managers may be better able to engage with local actors and to work with them to devise creative strategies.

Second, introduce students to thinking tools that enable critical exploration of the models of change process and of leadership embedded in approaches to equality and diversity, within a safe environment. This approach offers a radical critique of the tendency to view equalities and diversity issues as a separate, specialist topic. Instead, equalities initiatives become a lens for studying the complexity of change processes and of the leadership processes adapted to promote and encourage change. Moreover, change is understood a dynamic, emergent, messy process, in contrast to the linear models of planned externally driven change advocated by legislation (Shaw, 2002; Stacey *et al.*, 2000). Gender is seen as a dimension of power, permeating organisation and leadership process, and performed by individuals (Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Gherardi, 1995; Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Mills and Tancred, 1992). Within leadership theory, the concept of leadership as enactment and process in relation to others is offered alongside traditional notions of heroic strong macho individual leaders and their associated attributes. These new ways of conceptualising change and leadership co exist alongside traditional notions that continue to be promoted through policy and legislative process (Broussine and Fox, 2002). In this context research that offers alternative ways of thinking about diversity, equality, leadership and change has much to offer to managers who are likely themselves to be experiencing dissonance between the way they would like to take up their roles, and expectations of colleagues and peers within their work setting.

Third, invite students to explore their own response to the spirit of the legislation, the meanings that they bring to it, the current and past experiences that it evokes and how to make creative use of these as they work with colleagues to take up their responsibilities for implementation. Pressures to be seen to support legislation allows little room for exploration of individual responses, and somewhat paradoxically the requirement to be seen to promote diversity allows little room for diversity of interpretation. Managers value the opportunity for reflection on workplace experience

in an educational setting. Critical reflection on gendered dimensions of workplace experience can offer a useful resource for critiquing theories about leadership and change espoused in management texts (Adler and Izraeli, 1994; Bravette, 1996; Marshall, 1995; Sinclair, 1995; Wajcman, 1998). But for this to take place methods and frameworks are needed that enable this exploration to take place and that enable students to find their own agency in relation to equalities policy and practice. While we would argue there is no one strategy for creating such an environment, there are principles and practices that can be adapted to context.

Participative inquiry offers one such legitimating framework and a community of practice within which such practices are tested and developed, in academic and work contexts (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). Creating and sustaining an environment within which inquiry can take place, and parallels explored between work contexts and experiences of learning on the programme, is not an easy task. Some of the challenges are explored elsewhere in this volume.

In the section below, each author of this paper offers an illustration of methods she has developed create opportunities for students to experience diversity as a resource for learning. Each illustrates a dimension of pedagogical practice that we suggest is worthy of attention within any context. We offer them as an invitation to engage in debate, an opening rather than a complete statement.

Illustration 1: creating forms of delivery that can accommodate complex lives

In this illustration, Chrissie describes how blended learning and flexible forms of delivery of her Masters in Public Administration programme accommodate the multiple demands on the time and energies of her students, and support participative learning.

The course is intended for middle and senior managers and professionals working across the range of public services. In reality our course participants are mature busy professional public service managers with years of managerial experience and a multiplicity of skills. The course attracts roughly 50 per cent men and women and a high proportion of black and minority ethnic managers. Many are parents, some are single parents and almost all are responsible for other dependent family members as well as the home and household. In other words they are not typical of younger post-graduate students who may have relatively "freer" lifestyles and lesser home demands. They are usually several years out of formal education and arrive at the programme tired after their working week.

We have devised forms of delivery that seek to take these needs into account. We offer return to study workshops, and the programme is delivered on a part time basis one afternoon and evening per week. Emphasis is placed on the use of technology to access information and for discussion. Action learning sets offer a more informal form of mutual support. These are facilitated by the course participants and do not necessarily take place in the university. A residential weekend early in the programme is held outside the university, and is intended for course participants to begin to get to know each other, to appreciate different ways of learning, and to begin to discuss and analyse issues, which may be difficult as well as sensitive. Throughout the programme emphasis is placed on participative and interactive discussions and the linking of theory to practice. Course participants are encouraged to value what they can learn

from each other and to exchange views, which may be controversial within the safety of an academic programme:

Student feedback indicates that this pedagogic approach does enhance participation of students and enable them to value each others' contribution to learning:

> A very special part of the course for me is sharing issues with colleagues and knowing that they understand them. They have either been through that experience or are about to (second year course participant).

> We enjoy the interactive case studies and when we are put in the position of having to adopt a particular role and argue our position and defend it and challenge our course colleagues (first year course participant).

Our aim is to provide course participants with the opportunity, tools and confidence to learn from discussion of sensitive issues, which may be outside their comfort zone and to create an environment within which exploration and challenge is possible.

Illustration 2: using fiction as a medium for exploring diversity
In this illustration, Birgit describes the surprising ways in which students engaged with a reading of a Utopian novel, and made use of it to explore clashes between their values and assumptions that might otherwise have been too dangerous to voice.

For several years I was teaching Nordic literature to high school classes of immigrant students, each group being highly ethnically diverse. My students in this particular group came from for example Germany, Lithuania, Sri Lanka, Somalia and Great Britain. Usually, discussions over fiction would be polite yet not overly enthusiastic. In the excerpt we read of Holberg's "Niels Klim's journey to the World Underground", the main character Niels is arriving in the land of "Cocklecu", where gender roles are turned upside-down:

> The power of the habit [...] had made (the men) believe that it was nature that had decided that the women should have all the power, and that the men ought to sew, bake, mend, wash floors, and get beaten. The women defended this custom by stressing that the men were better suited for heavy labour. It seemed that they were predestined for lowly and hard work (Holberg, 1741/1997, p. 91).

It was surprising to see the spontaneous and emotionally charged reactions that these students had to their reading of this Utopian novel:

> No, no, no. A society is not supposed to be working like that.

The guy at the row by the door explained with intensity. He *knew* this:

> No?

> This is just not right. It is unnatural.

> I agree.

Another joined in:

> It is not good. It ought to be the opposite should we have the possibility to lead good and right lives.

> Yeah!

The 20-year-old woman sitting by the wall agreed, but, with calm disgust continued:

> This describes a society as horrible as the other way around!

This short extract had deeply affected the students, and brought about unease both in the students living in societies where traditional gender roles were clearly defined and in students coming from societies where these norms no longer held. The reasons for this may be found in the specific qualities of Utopian fiction. Since the literary Utopias give us concrete and detailed descriptions of life in societies where specific ideals are put into practice, they can elicit shock or amusement in any group of people. (Mathisen, 2006, p. 423; Levitas, 2001, p. 87; Kumar, 1991). Mathisen (2006) suggests that we react so strongly on reading Utopian fiction because it confronts us with our beliefs about right and wrong. It makes us get in touch with our moral intuitions.

Utopia questions phenomena otherwise regarded "natural". But by placing potentially difficult material in an imaginary world, Utopia creates a necessary distance from the socio-economical and political world we live in. It thereby provides a safe ground for discussion of delicate matters. My students exposed through their reactions certain normative bases connected to conceptions of how the good life and the good society looks, not easily accomplished by more traditional means of having the teacher ask what they think about morals and how people ought to organise themselves. For more thorough reflections though, it was necessary to prepare questions for plenary discussions and group work. It seemed to me that this reading helped open up the class, paving the way for similar discussions on specific topics such as children's upbringing and how different generations ought to live together.

Using this method may well help to make the students more aware of their own normative basis, as well as exposing different views in otherwise seemingly homogenous groups. Experiencing this in the classroom may make the public servant better equipped to cope with diversity in his or her practical work situation.

Illustration 3: inquiry as embodied learning

In this illustration Margaret describes how feminist theory can legitimate gendered experience.

Most of our public sector Master's programme students are women. They are commissioners of public services, quality and audit managers, and heads of service, with a few in independent charitable sectors. I am very aware of the gendered dynamics within the student group, and in relation to academic staff. I notice that the process of establishing my authority in relation to female students is complex and takes place over time. Nothing is said yet I experience a certain ambivalence and challenge from some of my female students. This process of reciprocal testing and its competitive edge between women is interesting to me, how do women enact gender in relation to each other? How might this be different to how women enact gender in relation to men? How might the experience between us in the here and now enrich learning about their leadership in their organisational roles?

Some rather prickly dynamics were enacted in the early sessions of one of my tutorial groups, with whom I meet on a regular basis. I had a sense that both students and I were unsure of each other, and having difficulty relating to each other in role. A palpable shift occurred at a later tutorial session. At the beginning of the session I invited students to share current preoccupations and news. I let them know that I was

tired, and that this might manifest in the way that I led the session. To my surprise one of the more challenging students picked this up and stated that I had modelled a way of leading that she had adopted since she had been coming to the programme. Sharing vulnerability in a work context was not part of her workplace culture. Competition and the need to demonstrate one was in control would normally rule out showing emotion. Other students joined in and described how their understanding of their own leadership had begun to change during the module. One stated that she had come to understand that owning up to "not knowing" rather than "having all the answers" could be a powerful positive act of leadership; others affirmed this and told their own stories. It was as if in reflection they were beginning to see themselves as leaders in a new and different way.

In the discussion that developed we began to explore assumptions about what constitutes "leadership" and to make links with research literature on how these constructs of leadership might be gendered. It was as if the complex dynamics between us had begun to offer a resource for learning, linking to our different experiences and strategies for taking up authority as women in leadership roles in work based contexts.

On reflection

These illustrations point to three facets of learning from diversity. Each we would argue is essential for making difference and its associated cultural norms and power inequalities available for learning within the classroom – the third dimension of pedagogy we identified. Each was developed within the context of the programme offered and the qualities and needs of tutors and students. The first concerns modes of delivery that enable diverse students to attend and to establish relationships within which learning can take place. This requires creativity and political skill, in contexts where modular structures predominate and undermine the continuity offered when a single cohort of students learn together over a period of time. In the second, science fiction offered a medium for students who held conflicting cultural norms to explore these norms together without direct confrontation. While these students were not public service managers we suggest that the method offers a useful and unusual one for exploring difficult issues raised by equality legislation for public service managers and leaders of equalities initiatives. In the third illustration the tutor worked in the here and now to enable students to link the qualities of relationship experienced in the classroom with their ambivalence about their own leadership in the workplace, drawing from theory about gendered leadership in organisations.

Managers need a place of inquiry to explore the assumptions embedded in public policy and in their own practice, and to learn how to engage in collaborative inquiry with others. Where this concerns equality and diversity, inquiry is likely to trigger strong emotions, and this can create anxiety and vulnerability for students and staff members (Page and Sanger, 2007; Sinclair, 1995, 2005). In order for learning from diversity to take place a strong holding framework is needed that offers a "container" for these emotions and within which inquiry can take place. This holding framework will need to take a form adapted to local context - and will operate on practical, conceptual and relational dimensions. The holding frameworks described in the three illustrations were each appropriate to the context in which they were offered. They contributed to creating a territory within which students were able to engage with difficult issues in their own way, and at their own level. They encouraged students to

learn in dialogue with each other, as well as introducing students to new conceptual frames. Through these processes students arrived at new ways of making sense of their own experience, and were able to access theory in ways that held meaning for them.

Conclusions

It is generally accepted that engaging with diversity and equality is no longer an option for public service managers. Indeed as we have shown public service mangers are required to do more than eliminate discrimination, but to promote equality in certain areas. Yet the concepts of equality and diversity are elusive, contested and complex. There is as yet no shared vision for an equal society, or consensus on an agenda for change. On the contrary, research and experience tell us that despite an abundance of toolkits and codes of guidance, there continues to be confusion about how to interpret legislative requirements.

Nevertheless, the legislation raises complex ethical dilemmas for managers of public services. These managers are frequently required to reconcile conflicting sets of values and priorities in a context of reduced resources and constant change. Although the European Commission, governmental and non-governmental organisations offer a range of tools and guidelines to tackle discrimination and to promote equality there is inevitably inconsistency in application and disagreement as to how to interpret them in practice.

A key challenge posed by current legislation is how to integrate equality and diversity into service quality, how to mainstream it within the policy process. Related to these are the challenges posed by increasing inequality in pay and conditions, and by organisational cultures that can reproduce the very inequalities that they are seeking to eliminate. Engaging with these challenges will require managers to move beyond thinking about equality and diversity as specialist arena designed to meet the needs of those who do not fit an unproblematised norm. Rather, they need to engage with a transformational change agenda, so that they can engage with diversity as an integral part of organisational life.

We have argued that management education for public service managers can and must engage with this agenda, by offering conceptual tools and developing pedagogic processes that encourage and enable critical inquiry. We have argued that inquiry should take place within three dimensions: the contested agendas embedded in the legislation and struggles from which they emerged; the relationship between conceptual frameworks for change and equality and agendas for change; and the meanings and emotions brought by students to the equality and diversity agenda. We propose furthermore that pedagogical methods for this inquiry need to take account of modes of delivery that meet the practical needs of diverse groups of students, the medium in which difficult issues can be explored, and to engage with the relational dynamics within the classroom.

Management educators also need to find their agency in contexts that may reward or devalue their contribution. They too need thinking tools for integrating diversity into their teaching, resisting the temptation to "park" the issues in a special interest session. Their role is to provide opportunities and the means for our students to take up their own agency by exploring their individual responses to these issues, to introduce the skills of inquiry within their management roles and to be uncomfortable!

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