

## **CAUCE Awards of Program Excellence – *Mad People's History* at Ryerson University**

### ***Abstract***

Digital Education Strategies (DES) in The G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education, and the School of Disability Studies in the Faculty of Community Services, at Ryerson University, have collaboratively designed and developed a ground-breaking online course, *Mad People's History* (CDST504). *Mad People's History* is the first known undergraduate level online course that deals with the history of madness from the point of view of people who were, and are, deemed "mad." The course also addresses how mad people have viewed madness over the centuries. This course fills a gap in the history of psychiatry by examining the diverse perspectives of people diagnosed as mad, insane or mentally ill. This is a different approach from the history of psychiatry, which has, to date, focused primarily on the medical perspective. The course looks at the evolution of mad people's history over the centuries and the progress that has been made in self-advocacy.

The subject matter expert and instructor, David Reville, has taught this course in the Ryerson classroom since 2005. It was first offered online at The Chang School in Winter 2010, and has since been offered in Fall 2010 and Winter 2011, and will also be offered as a workshop in Spring 2011.

## **Program Description**

### **1. Value/Service**

The course materials for *Mad People's History* have been designed to increase awareness on the topic of madness and to provide the mad community with a voice. By giving mad people a voice, the course acknowledges that they are contributing members of society and uncovers biases that a person described as "mad" can't play a role in society. Ironically, however, many of the people the instructor interviewed hold important positions in society.

The instructor brings history to life in this course. He has gone over psychiatry archives and found a number of outdated artifacts and examples of misinformation, which are presented to his students. Not surprisingly, most medical histories of psychiatry do not cover issues such as mistreatment of patients. There are no known textbooks that capture the experience or content found in this course, nor is there a significant amount of literature documenting the feelings, experiences and realities of mad people in such a way as to bring psychiatric artifacts to life in the way they are brought to life in this course.

Storytelling, through text, images and video, is the main teaching strategy of this course, with first-hand accounts playing an important role. The instructor, David Reville, is himself a consumer-survivor-ex-patient, and he seeks to tell his story and that of others in a compelling way in order to engage students in the issues that are central to these stories. To do so, the instructor makes use of, for example, images from his travels and of artwork created by survivors. He also exposes students to materials typically seen through the mainstream perspective, such as recognizable artifacts and music, and examines them from the mad community's perspective.

The storytelling approach has proven to be highly engaging and has motivated students to participate in critical online discussions on issues related to madness. The course discussion board was very active with over 2000 posts in Winter 2010, which far exceeds the typical participation of most online courses. In their discussion board postings, students displayed critical analysis and supported each other through peer-to-peer learning.

One vehicle for discussion, and one of the most compelling pieces of the course, has been the custom designed videos that were developed by DES and David Reville. The video *Introducing Mad People's History* serves as an introduction to the course, while the video *Self Labeling and Identity* presents learners with the stories of 12 Toronto activists as they discuss how they identify themselves. *Self Labeling and Identity* uses a combination of first-hand accounts, on location shots and art, which work together to provide context that might otherwise be difficult to convey through text alone. The effectiveness of video as a learning

tool is supported by student survey results. The majority of respondents strongly agreed (89%) that the videos in the course contributed to their understanding of the use of storytelling to challenge ideologies and present more inclusive versions of history, society and culture. The majority of students also agreed or strongly agreed (89%) that the videos motivated and engaged them to further discuss the issue(s) in the Discussion Board. One student commented, "The videos bring the course alive and put a face on many issues that have long been ignored."

The videos have generated widespread interest outside of the course. As of March 15, 2011, *Introducing Mad People's History* and *Self Labeling and Identity* have had over 1270 and 3344 views respectively on the social media website YouTube. Comments have been positive and highlighted the importance and impact of this work. A viewer of *Introducing Mad People's History* posted on YouTube, "I'm thrilled to see a new approach. Bravo to all involved. We need a fairer, more honest history that hasn't been psychiatrized." A viewer of *Self Labeling and Identity* posted on YouTube, "Thank you for bringing this important message to the web and the awareness it can bring to the situation."

The online resource materials created for this course have been integral to many other projects. In Spring 2011, The Chang School and the School of Disability Studies will offer a workshop entitled *Talking Back to Psychiatry*, which can be described as a spin-off of *Mad People's History*, as it uses some content from the course. The workshop investigates the history of the consumer-survivor-ex-patient movement, following the movement's development from the late 60s to the present. Both the online course and the workshop attract an array of participants, including a number of consumer-survivor-ex-patients. In some cases, a different course delivery format can be beneficial and more cohesive for certain types of learners, as online learning may not be for everyone. A workshop is a good option for those who have time constraints or would prefer an informal teaching style versus a more formal 14-week course. What is important here is to note the flexibility in how the materials from *Mad People's History* can be used.

Finally, this course has also inspired an exhibit of student art, entitled "This is Madness!" The exhibit features paintings, sculpture and other media produced by the students of *Mad People's History* and an upper-level liberal arts elective called *A History of Madness* (DST500), which is offered through the School of Disability Studies. The exhibit was most recently shown at the Oakham Café, at Ryerson University, in February 2011.

## **2. Complexity**

The online course development process at The Chang School is a team effort, involving a subject matter expert, instructional designer, academic coordinator, program director,

copyright specialist, web editor, video editor, developer and other parties, as required. The instructor worked closely with our instructional designers and a video production editor to transform the wealth of original classroom materials for *Mad People's History*, based on stories of himself and other members of the mad community, into an engaging online learning experience, which stimulates dialogue and shared learning.

Although planning was important in all aspects of the course development, the videos in particular required additional project coordination. A lot of effort went into producing the videos. Arranging the interviewing for *Self Labeling and Identity*, deciding whom to interview and which questions to ask the subjects, were important considerations in achieving the best result. Added to this was the work involved in arranging for permission to film images of materials, such as survivor or student artwork.

As mentioned earlier, the videos developed through this course have also been shared outside of Ryerson University. In an effort to bring attention to the subject matter and the course, a public relations firm was hired. The result of this was that *Self Labeling and Identity* was featured in an article for the Toronto Star called "Mad professor? Sure, and he's full of 'mad pride'" in April 2010. Further to such efforts, *Self Labelling and Identity* has also been placed on The Chang School's YouTube Channel and was entered into and selected for the National Screen Institute's online film festival in Fall 2010.

*Self Labelling and Identity* has also drawn international attention. For example, the Australian "consumer" run resource centre, Our Consumer Place, has placed a link to this video on its website: <http://ourconsumerplace.com.au/glossary>. In addition, a delegation from Scotland visited The Chang School for a first preview of this documentary. The delegation included: Dr. Stephen Tilley, Honorary Fellow, School of Health in Social Science, University of Edinburgh; Adrienne Chalmers, psychiatric survivor, working on *Mad People's History*, the film; Kirsten McLean, Community History Worker, working on Oor Mad History survivor archives project; and Jim McGill, psychiatric survivor, Oor Mad History. The School of Disability Studies and David Reville are pursuing opportunities to increase awareness to the topic of madness in Scotland.

With the effort involved in the design and development of this online course, it was important to gauge the effectiveness of the rich media that we produced. To do so, we ran student surveys, in Winter and Fall 2010, with specific questions that would capture the student experience with the online course materials. The responses were positive. The majority of survey respondents agreed (89% in Winter 2010 and 100% in Fall 2010) that they felt the course provided them with a valuable learning experience. The majority also agreed (89% in Winter 2010 and 100% in Fall 2010) that they would recommend this course to others.

### **3. Ingenuity and Innovation**

This course is unique because it is the only known undergraduate course in the world that focuses on madness from the mad person's perspective. The online community that an instructor creates before discussions emerge is important. One of the objectives of the course is to recognize the lived experience of madness as a fundamental form of human knowledge and to take the mad person's standpoint on social history. The instructor brings real-life experiences of himself and others to the course and these experiences bring to light the issues faced by mad people. The storytelling approach, therefore, provides context and encourages students to participate in the class discussion with their own prior knowledge and experiences. The instructor asks students to examine the ideas discussed in a more complex way, looking for their impressions and experiences in the discussion board. He also provides students who may feel oppressed with the opportunity to have a voice themselves. Storytelling gets their voices out, develops awareness and enables them to discuss the major course topics at a higher level.

The Chang School recognizes that online learners are different from classroom learners. Therefore, this course, like all of our online courses, was developed using a team approach. The team approach is desirable, because a lot of components as well as the expertise of a number of different team members are required to develop a rich online learning experience. For instance, one important role is that of the instructional designer, who looks at the pedagogical design of the material, as the presentation of the content is just as important as the content itself when engaging the online learner.

*Mad People's History* was developed with the principles of adult learning in mind, as well as guidelines based upon Chickering and Gameson's Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. Adult learners are characterized as students having work and life experience; having a purpose for their learning; being self-motivated to learn; learning according to readiness; and viewing the learning process as a social process. The majority of students enrolled at The Chang School are working professionals, who enroll in courses that provide them with learning that they can apply in their work. In addition, it was important for us to design an online course that would stimulate critical thinking, a form of higher thinking, in learners. The instructor allows students the opportunity to critique as well. For example, students are provided the opportunity to critique portraits of "mental illness" in contemporary mainstream movies and books from the mad person's perspective. The materials in this course, i.e. the artifacts, videos and images, provide engagement and motivation for learners so that they are not passively receiving the knowledge, but, rather, are active participants in their learning.

The videos, *Introducing Mad People's History* and *Self Labeling and Identity*, both found in

the introductory module of the course, provide such engagement through storytelling, using elements such as sophisticated graphics, music and a green screen. Indeed, it is more engaging to have a story told first-hand, with the emotions and expressions of the speaker visible to the viewer, rather than merely reading about it through text. On a final note, the use of multimedia not only engages learners in this course, but also enables us to tap into the stories of survivors and produce material that, in the end, itself becomes archival because of who the subjects are.

#### **4. Innovation in Delivery**

The School of Disability Studies at Ryerson University is a unique part of the Faculty of Community Services as well as a strong partner in Chang School course developments. This course is being offered online to adult learners through The Chang School, and enrolled students include both degree-bound students and a small number of non-certificate students. Because it is delivered fully online, the course is available to students worldwide. Clearly, the subject is a global and emotional issue, as demonstrated by the strong positive student response.

The flexible online delivery model developed by and used at The Chang School lowers the cost of course delivery to the institution. It minimizes the use of institutional space and resources, as there is no added cost to the institution for use of a classroom. The material itself is available to students online, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, thereby increasing accessibility to quality education by allowing students to continue working full-time, and eliminating the need for them to travel in order to upgrade their knowledge and qualifications.

The online course delivery also supports the development of a very robust learning community. It breaks down the barriers of geography and accessibility, which are presented by conventional classroom courses. In other words, survivors from all over the world can theoretically participate and contribute to the course.

Both the online course and the workshop attract an array of participants from multiple disciplines. As an example, we can examine the type of participants that have enrolled for the upcoming workshop. Of the participants, 31 are self-identified as psychiatric survivors. Ten of the participants are members of survivor-run initiatives, while another two are members of the Empowerment Council at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). The Council acts as the voice of the patients. Five of the survivor-participants have had their fees subsidized by the Canadian Mental Health Association and Accent on Ability, a survivor-run charitable organization. Seven participants are George Brown College staff, who treat and support students with mental health issues. This is the first time that The Chang School has brought so many survivors and external professionals into one of its classrooms.

### **5. Profile of Continuing Education**

Ryerson University and The Chang School have a reputation for reaching into the Toronto and wider community, particularly with the Faculty of Community Services degree and certificate programs and the students who graduate from them. With a focus on collaboration, innovation and flexibility, Ryerson strives to further enhance its expertise and profile by working with partners both internal and external to the Ryerson community in order to develop and deliver high quality online and hybrid courses. The Chang School is one of Canada's leading providers of online credit courses and certificates. We have over 70,000 annual enrollments. As part of its mandate, The Chang School has collaborated with a dozens of groups and organizations within and outside of Ryerson University to deliver external workshops and courses, in addition to its own 1,400+ classroom, online and workshop offerings. Our collaboration with the University of the West Indies (UWI), and the Daphne Cockwell School of Nursing at Ryerson University, to design and develop UWI's Post-RN degree in the Carribean is an example of such a partnership.

The collaboration between The Chang School and the School of Disability Studies at the Faculty of Community Services was an opportunity to diversify and increase the type of students who would be eligible to take the course, *Mad People's History*, moving beyond just undergraduate degree students. This collaboration also enabled The Chang School to deliver the course using a different delivery format from the classroom, through the expertise of DES, who have a portfolio of over 220 distance courses, in online course design and delivery.

The course *Mad People's History* is an exceptionally unique offering, drawing upon the survivors and resources found within the local community around Ryerson University to tell this previously untold story. One of the benefits of reaching into the community is that it creates a stronger relationship between the university and the organizations, institutions and individuals around it. Both the online course and the workshop attract an array of participants from multiple disciplines. The professionals attending the workshop are getting to learn from survivor activists in an environment where everyone is a learner. This is how the course *Mad People's History* and its spin-off, *Talking Back to Psychiatry*, have enhanced the profile of continuing education in the community.

## **References**

### *Course Overview of Mad People's History*

- See a sample course outline at The Chang School's website:  
[https://de.ryerson.ca/de\\_courses/templates/ce/outline.html?c=270EDD69788DCE200A3B395A6DA6FDB7](https://de.ryerson.ca/de_courses/templates/ce/outline.html?c=270EDD69788DCE200A3B395A6DA6FDB7)

### *Introducing Mad People's History*

- See the video on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKBFYi6A6pA>

### *Self Labeling and Identity*

- See the video on YouTube:  
<http://www.youtube.com/user/ChangSchool#p/u/18/pxbw7dDMX60>
- See the video in the National Screen Institute's online film festival: [http://www.nsi-canada.ca/self\\_labelling\\_and\\_identity.aspx](http://www.nsi-canada.ca/self_labelling_and_identity.aspx)

"Mad professor? Sure, and he's full of `mad pride"

- See the article online at The Toronto Star:  
<http://www.healthzone.ca/health/mind%20%20mood/mental%20health/article/802820--mad-professor-sure-and-he-s-full-of-mad-pride>

"Labelling mental illness"

- See the article online at the Toronto Star: <http://www.thestar.com/videozone/802819--labeling-mental-illness>