



**The Group as a Psycho-Educational Medium for the Teaching of Anti-Racist Practice on Social Work Trainings.**

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## The Group as a Psycho-Educational Medium for the Teaching of Anti-Racist Practice on Social Work Trainings.

*'Social workers must not just talk about anti-oppressive practice; we have a duty to make it real. If we don't challenge oppression, no-one else will.'*

*(Anonymous social worker, 2014)*

### Abstract

*This article discusses the anxieties that lead to resistance to anti-racist and culturally sensitive reflection and engagement on social work trainings. It briefly discusses a culturally diverse social work training and the anxieties described by the students that hindered the integration of the teaching of race and culture during the training. The article then contrasts this with another more successful training experience on another social work course at a different university with a similar level of cultural diversity by the use of the group as a psycho-educational method to manage the student's defences and avoidance of the difficult and painful knowledge required to enhance reflexivity when it comes to issues of race. It discusses how the role and skills of the seminar leader can manage the student's defences through the use of group dynamic processes and concepts as psycho-educational tools; thereby deepening the observational and reflective skills of the social work students during their training in preparation for their future work within diverse settings and in line with the social work competencies and regulation requirements.*

*Keywords; Culture, Group Analysis, Infant Observation, Psychoanalysis Social Work Education, Race, Seminar Group.*

### Introduction

The aim of this article relates to my experience of the dissemination of the essential but, none the less, 'difficult and painful knowledge' (Britzman, 1998) regarding enhancing anti-oppressive skills as an educator to the students on social work trainings. In so doing I use the example of how I was more able to effectively achieve this via a group psycho-educational method, based on group dynamic theorists such as Foulkes (1948) and Bion (2013) when addressing one of the most challenging

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aspects of anti-oppressive practice in social work education, which I have experienced to be the issue of race of culture.

This was experienced initially during my training as a social worker in the late 1980s when race was firmly on the agenda as a need to be addressed during training placement and assignment. This was a painful time with a great deal of acrimony and upset amongst the student body and attribution of blame to the lecturers. Many years later, when I started my first academic post at a university that had 85% of the student body coming from African, Caribbean, Middle Eastern and Asian backgrounds, there was a lack of discussion and engagement around issues of race within the curriculum which was not represented in the assignments and dissertations that I marked. I felt this was a great loss given the level of diversity given the student demographic. Additionally, when I perused the modules and module outlines that I had inherited, issues of race were not apparent on the programme and I questioned if this was a defence against the pain of such a sensitive but essential area of social work education.

I was concerned that the students were not being adequately equipped to work in multi-cultural communities and had not benefitted from their experiences of training with other students from diverse backgrounds. Their experience of training amongst other students with diverse backgrounds was not being used as the obvious educational resource it could have promised to become.

Social work students need to acquire and demonstrate skills in the area of anti-oppressive practice effectively and in line with competencies and requirements as is evident from the social work practice frameworks: The National Occupations Standards, The Health Care Professionals Council, The Professional Competencies Framework and The Standards of Proficiency for Social Work Education. These frameworks, coupled with my observations and subject area discussions, suggest that the latter two require a more in-depth and reflective approach (Hughes and Pengelly, 1997, Fook, 1996) to issues of anti-oppressive practice in order to equip social work students to work more effectively in diverse settings.

This article, therefore, engages with the management of group dynamic processes in an example of a seminar group as an effective psycho-educational method of the teaching and training to support the management of such a difficult and painful area in

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social work education. It will discuss experiential seminar group approaches to learning and teaching and explore theories of relevant group dynamics and then illustrate an application through discussing an example from an infant/young child seminar group.

There is a discussion of the importance of relationships between the students, educators and the institution and an exploration of how a group analytic understanding on behalf of the seminar leader as a psycho-educational method can enhance student learning, to enable the management of the dynamics of the seminar group process and the dissemination and acquisition of such 'difficult and painful knowledge'. Such knowledge places great demands on the students, the educators and the institution to manage and facilitate such sensitive learning, as all are on a challenging psycho-educational journey that will inevitably unsettle established defences and world views.

In a previous university post where I was the chair of the diversity committee the social work programme did not provide experiential seminar spaces as part of the educational strategy, which denied the students an opportunity to engage with other in a contained space on important areas of social work education which included ensuring the integration of anti-oppressive practice including the issue of race as an essential part of their learning. My subsequent enquiry from the students confirmed that the students felt that they were not given sufficient opportunity to reflect and talk together and to engage in role-play and modelling that were related to matters of race. These claims were highly consistent with research in this area; see Mildred and Zuniga (2004) and Torres and Jones (1997).

The following are quotes from some of the students about their experience, which led me to conclude that contained seminar space could be a powerful strategy to address their learning needs:

*"As a white person who is not experiencing racial issues personally, then it is easy to see it as less important."*

*"I have had personal experiences of seeing how racism affects people and I do not think that on the course this far I have been adequately taught."*

*"I would like more of an opportunity to talk about working with racism as a social work student, as once we all qualify, racial, cultural and religious issues will often be at the forefront of our work."*

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A group dynamic informed experiential seminar group as an educational method and strategy could be an effective psycho-educational tool to enhance student learning on such a sensitive and essential aspect of social work education. (Dalal, 1998; Foulkes, 1953; Abercrombie, 1970; Fook, 1996). This psycho-educational method, however, does not exclusively apply to the teaching of anti-oppressive practice so could also be applied to other areas of the social work curriculum and education in general, but the issue of race and culture will be used to demonstrate the psycho-educational group method in this discussion.

### **The Challenge of Teaching Race and Culture in Social Work Education.**

The term 'race' is a complex and challenging concept to define, often having the very rationale for such a categorization debunked (Lewontin et al., 1984) and that it is felt to be better understood as a socially constructed concept (Williams, 1999) existing in our minds and social structures and not in our biology. Race, in my experience, is commonly synonymous (but not exclusively given the treatment of travellers, the Irish and Eastern Europeans) with skin colour and is a signifier that points to a whole social system (Wilson 1996) that relates people who have physical characteristics which identify origins in Africa, the Middle East and Asia and who suffer racism as a consequence. This is by no means an attempt to detract from the hate and discrimination experienced by other ethnic groupings but who are white. I would argue, however, that the first level of race and vulnerability to racism is "colour coded" (Dalal, 2002) which is visible and more obviously the target of conscious prejudice and unconscious processes, such as, projection and projective identification.

Race and racism, according to Davis (1992), should be seen as everybody's issue and as part of giving the students and faculty a sense of being part of the solution and not part of the problem. Learning together and from each other reflexively during a well-managed, psycho-educational group experience can be a powerful method (Dalal, 1998; Foulkes, 1953; Abercrombie, 1970; Fook, 1996). Providing such an environment can enable students to listen to each other's views in a constructive way should serve to reduce resistances, which would link to the necessity to create an understanding of group processes on behalf of the seminar leader for this process to

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happen. A similar space, I would argue, should be provided to faculty staff to enable them to develop the skills and confidence to facilitate such group learning.

This view is supported by Nagda, Spearman et al., (1999) who describe the most crucial factors in the implementation of the teaching of anti-oppressive practice in terms of the development of curriculum as faculty knowledge and commitment but they argue that this is sometimes hampered by resistance. Mildred and Zuniga (2004) define resistance in terms of “group process, student readiness, a reflection of a larger socio-political context and the facilitation of student learning and engagement.” Torres and Jones (1997) raised concerns about the level of education the faculty members had in terms of working in a multi-cultural social work setting.

Other authors have suggested specific interventions, for example, Lee and Green (1999) felt that social workers and social work educators needed specific practice and reflection, otherwise known as ‘praxis’, to make the connection between the thinking and the doing in anti-racist practice. Further, that there is a need for curriculum design and sensitivity within the climate of a classroom. How faculty educators manage and model issues of race can have a positive effect and outcome for the student’s development, which would require an understanding of group processes on behalf of the faculty members.

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### **Group Defences**

Teaching on issues of race is an emotional process that requires skilled management, particularly when it occurs in a group context where powerfully destructive forces may be unleashed leading to a defensiveness and the deployment of group defence mechanisms in terms of basic assumptions (Bion, 2013) resulting in a lack of reflection on behalf of the students which can hamper learning and development. This would

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confirm that there is a need for a safe and supportive environment in which students could reflect on issues of diversity and what they bring to the seminar group.

Nagda et al (1999) felt that there was a need to start where the students were at and begin to build up their understanding from this point. They advocate the need for faculty to undergo training and be prepared by having a very good level of self-awareness around these issues, including the ability to recognise the vulnerability of students and, indeed, the vulnerability of untenured staff that may elicit criticism from the students relating to the students' anxiety given the painfulness of this particular topic. Education on race awareness and teaching may raise issues of shame, shock, guilt, defensiveness, fear and anger in the students, according to Van Soest (1994). These last two points are highly consistent with my own experience during a period when I was on a temporary contract at the previous university described at the beginning of this article where I attempted to raise issue of race, which left me feeling ostracised.

### **Personality Development and the Group**

Foulkes (1948) stated that group is the psychological unit and the individual is the biological unit. All infants are born into groups; humans and groups develop simultaneously. Bacha (2009) describes human groups in evolutionary terms that is "the group produces the human". She believes that as we are born into a pre-existing society that this comes to constitute the self – what we are born into is broadly what we become. "Society comes before the individual. From birth we take in culture and are not born into a pre-existing self but come to constitute the self."

In a group context, others see us differently and give us perceptions of the world that we could not make on our own – a multi-mirrored approach. This is a reciprocal process that goes back to our infancy and the relationship between the infant and mother. The need to relate is innate, beginning in our very earliest days (Stern, 2000).

### **The Matrix**

Individuals bring with them an unalterable inheritance, which Foulkes (1964) calls the 'Foundation Matrix', which is relatively static, altered by the slow processes of cultural and biological evolution, suggesting that a group has a psychic system with both stable and static aspects in addition to dynamic ever-changing aspects that are intertwined with each other as interacting mental processes of the 'Personal Matrix', that is the range of family and cultural influences that shape them, which he sees as subject to

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change in the group. Thus, a Foundation, Personal and Dynamic Matrix is always in operation within the seminar group. The group grows by what it can share and this sharing is by communicated through language.

The Foundation Matrix, according to Stacy (2003), is determined by an individual's biological constitutions and predispositions and even more importantly social factors, even before the individual enters into a group to create the new phenomena in terms of Dynamic Matrix. The Foundation Matrix is largely unconscious and what it consists of may often be accepted without question. On the one hand, there is a privileging of the group as a psychic system and on the other, the privileging of the genetically and culturally-determined individuals as constructing the group. Therefore, it is a case of the group over the individual, or the individual over the group. The consideration then is a matter of choice between figure and ground of the individual over the group.

What these theorists have in common is that the group is an organism over and above the individual members, that is several minds acting unconsciously at the same time in a manner that is common between them in terms of a 'field effect' with group members pushing and pulling consciously and unconsciously co-creating each other's characteristics (Friedman, 2014). The group will construct and communicate via group-specific phenomena, such as Resonance and Mirroring. The Dynamic Matrix is the medium in which they meet, communicate and interact. During this "interactive process" the individual is under constant construction by an on-going communication.

The Matrix is a background to the individual but is, nonetheless, still a construct. The individual is a nodal point within this system, who reacts and responds within the total network. So "it is with the individual suspended in the group matrix" (Foulkes, 1964) which Foulkes "...saw as a hypothetical web of communication, that draws on the past, present and future lives of the individual members, conscious and unconscious, verbal and nonverbal, to become the dynamic core of group development" (Nitsun, 2014); ...and as an aspect of overlapping "matrices" including the social unconscious (Bacha, 2009), which organises the individual, who is a node of the matrix, and organised by the social "to the core".

Recognizing the full impact of the social world and treating the individual without giving attention to their network is not enough (Nitsun, 1996). The group, has more opportunity for an analysis of 'different configurations' of how a person relates in their



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environment. Within this paradigm, it is more useful to think of the students in the seminar group in terms of the Personal and Foundation Matrix they bring in to the group and what is co-created between them and the seminar leader in the field effect of the Dynamic Matrix that has Resonance for the whole seminar group.

### The Seminar Group

What anxieties and states of mind do the social work students bring to the seminar group and how can anxieties generated in this experiential component of their training best be managed? From a group analytic perspective, the seminar group can be seen as a complex set of interacting processes between the seminar leader, the students and the institution, all interdependent to make it work. What then are the psycho-educational tools available to social work educators with a commitment to the anti-racist project?

I argue that Dynamic Matrix of the seminar group, if managed well, will give students from different cultures and 'racial' backgrounds opportunities to become less defended in order to listen to themselves and others and see things from different points of view, in a much more multi-faceted and multi-mirrored way (Foulkes, 1948), benefiting from group specific phenomena, in addition to the expertise and experience of the seminar leader

### Group Development and Group Learning

Nitsun (1989) compares the early stages of a group's development to the first twelve weeks of infancy, which will require careful holding by the seminar leader. At this early stage, the infant is in a state of "unthinkable anxiety", which he equates with the development in the group. The role of the seminar leader is crucial at this early stage, given the level that the group will be operating, that of a new-born at the mercy of terrifying states of mind (Klein, 1959b). These levels of anxiety can stir up difficult feelings and states of mind previously experienced by group members at early stages of their lives and there is a need for firm holding (Winnicott and Khan, 1965) by the seminar leader during this fragmented, anxiety ridden period, whilst the group develops into a cohesive unit and, like an infant when appropriately held, is less paranoid about survival. Dynamic administration in the form of boundary setting and sensitivity on behalf of the seminar leader is essential at this stage of the group, given the level of anxiety about trust, aggression and disintegration.

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6 Abercrombie (1970) described free and associative discussion in the seminar group  
7 as an effective psycho-educational tool. By encouraging a wide range of associations  
8 and stimulus, the students influence each other in the discussion and reflection.  
9 Although this is not a therapy group, it does involve the management of complex  
10 emotions and defences, enabling different reactions to similar situations as the student  
11 learns to take up the role of a social worker. In this sense, the aim of the seminar  
12 group is un-learning and re-learning as it relates to observation, counter-transference  
13 and cultural assumptions. "The aim is to help students to become aware by personal  
14 interaction of their habitual ways of thinking and behaving and to modify them if it  
15 seems desirable" (Abercrombie, 1970).  
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### 22 **The Group Norm**

23 The development of the Group Norm is an essential part of the process of developing  
24 a working seminar group (Foulkes, 1984). An important aspect of the role of the  
25 seminar leader is providing the group with appropriate holding and intervention  
26 (Winnicott and Khan, 1965), particularly at the early stages when the seminar group  
27 may be at its most vulnerable (Nitsun, 1989). This vulnerability is likely to manifest in  
28 blocks in communication in terms of unconscious defensive manoeuvring on the part  
29 of the seminar group. Such defences can be managed, which supports learning  
30 through an understanding of group specific phenomena such as:  
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- 36 i. Resonance – communication that transcends verbal, conscious  
37 communication and takes place, instinctively and intuitively, occurring through  
38 words, actions, symptoms, affects or fantasies. A resonance reverberates  
39 throughout the group enabling group members to connect with material that  
40 strikes a chord with their own experience (Foulkes, 1984).  
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- 43 ii. Mirroring – reflects the group member's positive and negative aspects of  
44 themselves against the background of the group. They are then able to see  
45 themselves as seen by others, which offers insight and growth (Pines et al.,  
46 1982; Pines, 1984).  
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- 49 iii. Exchange - involves the conscious and unconscious ways in which group  
50 members share information and experience, give and take up space, including  
51 turn taking and generally be together within the group context (Foulkes, 1984).  
52 It is the experience of "other than" and an encounter with something that is  
53 different and new (Thornton, 2004).  
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- iv. Location of Disturbance – the location of disturbance cannot be confined to an individual person in isolation of their social context. The group analytic experience localises the interactions stemming from the blocks in communication in the here and now of the group experience that is directly observable and can be accessed and subject to intervention by the seminar group leader and the other seminar group members (Menarini, 1996).
- v. Condenser Phenomenon/Amplification – which occurs when the group pools its associations, which discharges unconscious material by loosening group defences. (Foulkes, 1964).

**Case Reflection on a Social Work Training: An Infant and Young Child Observation 10 Session Seminar Group as a Module on an MA in Social Work Programme.**

Core aspects of the BA, MA and Step Up to Social Work programmes at the university where I am currently Programme Lead for the MA in Social Work, have seminar and experiential group components to the learning. These involve work discussion and infant observation seminars that are group based with up to eight students and a seminar leader for an entire term.

The MA in Social Work is a joint program with the Tavistock and Portman NHS foundation. The joint partnership also includes the University of East London, which is located in a much more deprived part of the city, being densely populated, with a high level of cultural diversity.

On a weekly basis for 10 weeks, a student presents a case from their work placement on the Work Discussion Module of the course, or an observation of a child on the Human Growth and Development Module, which is then discussed and processed by the seminar group with the aim to deepen reflective practice, enhance observational skills, increase understanding of organisational dynamics and management of, often, painful and complex material. The seminar group experience is, therefore, a fundamental and powerful psycho-educational tool during this process but the ability of the seminar leader to manage complex group dynamics is an essential part of the process given the level of anxiety and the group defences against such anxiety (Bion, 2013, Steiner, 2003, Hopper, 2012).

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An example of the resistances to learning that surface during the process and the skills needed by the seminar leader to manage the dynamics of the group to enable and enrich the learning experience for a multi-cultural student group is illustrated below:

### **Seminar Group Composition**

The membership of the group included a British born, Bengali woman Paveen; a man from Cameroon Victor; a man from Nigeria Brian; a woman from Nigeria Helen; two British born, Nigerian women Lolade and Natalie; and a woman who was white British, Clare. The seminar leader, myself, is black/dual heritage British.

### **Seminar Group Session 1**

*When I arrived in my role as seminar group leader for the first infant observation seminar group at the Tavistock Clinic for the MA in social work students, there was a sense of quiet and foreboding in the group. There was an atmosphere that felt defensive amongst the students. The group seemed to have unconsciously elected a leader, Lolade to confront me.*

*I immediately wondered about the defences in operation. From a psychoanalytic perspective in terms of 'basic assumption – 'fight/flight' (Bion, 2013) and/or a 'Psychic Retreat' (Steiner, 2003) and from a group analytic perspective the 'Location of Disturbance' (Foulkes, 1984) leading to a "No Entry System of Defences' (Williams, 1997) already operating in the group that would seriously hinder professional development for the students if they were unable to taken in what was on offer in terms of learning opportunities. The function of these defensive postures served to manage unbearable anxiety, to the detriment of the group's primary task (Miller and Rice, 2013) which was to learn from experience and the experience of learning from one another in a group context.*

*Lolade told me that, "We do not like being in this establishment because it is so psychodynamic and you are one of those psychodynamic people." I asked what she meant by this. She told me that there was an anxiety that they were being psychoanalysed and "You are one of them." Lolade took the opportunity to tell me that she was, however, not scared of me.*

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*It was clear I was outside of the group and the group were in a 'Psychic Retreat', 'Basic Assumption' mode and the 'Location of Disturbance' in the group was being acted out in Lolade's relationship with me, whilst the other group members remained passive.*

I was given an experience of what it felt like to be 'the other'- a malign and dangerous other at that. I did not think at this stage the fact that I was of a person of colour held much currency for the group. I was simply 'other'. Mindful of my role to provide a holding and facilitating environment to enable containment of the group's anxieties, my intervention was to point out the role of the reflective aspects of the observation and that this was an opportunity for them to understand child development through observation and group processes. I pointed out that given the diversity of the group there was an important learning opportunity that we could harness to think very multi-culturally about child development and about observation.

#### **Seminar Group Sessions 2 to 7**

Indeed, the presentations of the children in the group related very directly to a rich multi-cultural environment and approaches to childcare. This included children of mixed 'race' couples and the children of parents who were not born in the UK. Therefore, the children that were being observed were being brought up in a UK context but from multi-cultural environments. The issue of culture was pivotal in terms of reflection and related to the skills we were attempting to enhance in the social work students in preparation for them to work in diverse communities. The group did, to some extent, respond to the containment offered and took up the offer and the opportunity of reflecting in a very multi-cultural way about the advantages this offered. However, they were still very tentative towards me and suspicious of the process and the institution.

#### **Seminar Group Session 8**

*A creative opportunity presented itself when Lolade talked about her observation of the child of a Nigerian woman who was living with relatives. There was discussion in the group of why she was not living with her own mother, who was living in the UK. There seemed to have been some conflict in the family because she had not allowed her own mother to give*

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5 *the baby the very first bath, which was in line with cultural expectations.*  
6 *There prompted a discussion in the group about this cultural phenomenon.*  
7 *This woman seemed to have defied this cultural expectation and was*  
8 *ostracised in her own culture because of this. Helen and Natalie said that*  
9 *they recognised this phenomenon and were concerned for the mother.*  
10 *Clare said she had never heard of this before. Brian said he recognised it,*  
11 *but seemed slightly critical of the mother for breaking such a cultural taboo,*  
12 *resulting in Lolade to tut and role her eyes at him. My own impression was*  
13 *the same as Clare's as this phenomenon was not recognisable to me also,*  
14 *and seemed like an extreme response to what in UK cultural context did*  
15 *not seem to have much importance, thereby demonstrating a significantly*  
16 *different cultural understanding between group members. There was then*  
17 *a moment of tension and difference in the group that I used to help the*  
18 *group to notice the usefulness of the different cultural understandings.*  
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28 This configuration if managed well had the potential to enable 'Resonance' in the  
29 group about the struggle to manage cultural expectations in a dominant UK context,  
30 which prompted 'Exchange/Reciprocity' about mothers within different cultural  
31 contexts. This is demonstrated in what happened next in the group after I pointed out  
32 the potential offered by the configuration, which is described below:  
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37 *Clare made reference to the disrespect about grandmothers and mothers*  
38 *in law in UK culture and how they were often the butt of cruel humour for*  
39 *their alleged interference in family business, which extended to television*  
40 *shows and jokes often being made at their expense. This seemed*  
41 *recognisable by all of the group members including myself, but Helen,*  
42 *Brian and Natalie indicated their disapproval of this aspect of UK culture.*  
43 *The group spoke about the way that this just seemed to be accepted as*  
44 *part of UK culture but in other cultures this was a serious taboo that could*  
45 *lead to being severely ostracised.*  
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52 The group seemed more engaged and much more interested in each other's  
53 experience. This also demonstrated that 'Mirroring, Exchange and Resonance' was  
54 occurring in the group in terms of comparisons and questioning amongst the group  
55 members about their own cultural assumptions and how culture was transmitted in a  
56 wider, more dominant, UK culture, down different generations.  
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There was less focus on me as an oppressive other and more interest between the group members about each other and each other's interpretation of their respective cultures. The group members were emerging from a 'Psychic Retreat' and were, indeed, benefiting from relationships with each other to enhance their skills in preparation for their work as social workers in multi-cultural settings.

### **Seminar Group Session 10**

*A 'Condenser Phenomena' became apparent via a challenge made by one of the men, Brian, who was brought up in Nigeria, about Lolade's understanding of Nigerian culture, given that she was brought up in the UK. Lolade initially seemed to respond defensively and said, "Are you saying I don't understand my Nigerian culture?" His response was, "You sound like an English girl with your accent. I wouldn't know you were Nigerian until you told me your name." I believed that there was still some tension between Brian and Lolade from session 8 relating to cultural attitudes towards mothers and mother-in-law and what seemed to be some sense of having a greater claim over Nigerian Culture.*

My intervention at this stage was about whether it was possible that equal value could be given to experiencing being Nigerian and brought up Nigeria and being Nigerian and being born and brought up in the UK, and whether there could be an atmosphere in the group of curiosity about difference and sameness that could be harnessed for everyone's benefit whilst also mitigating defensiveness. This seemed to assist the group and I felt possibly averted what could have been conflict and 'Malignant Mirroring' between the Brian and Lolade

### **Discussion**

This article has attempted to address the dynamics of the dissemination of difficult and challenging knowledge in social work as it pertains to race and culture and how defensiveness on an organisational and group level can hinder such learning during social work education. It is important to recognise that a great deal is being asked of the students to potentially deconstruct some of their previous ideas which may be embedded in their own family of origin and community in line with UK social work values and as have been outlined by the registration bodies. This is, therefore, an

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emotional and psychological process that needs to be managed through the teaching, as students engage with the Dynamic Matrix (Foulkes, 1957) of the educational institutions, as well as the rest of the multi-cultural student body, in their transition to become qualified social work practitioners.

Tatum (1992) talks about the need not to overwhelm students and to recognise that students may have multiple identities, meaning they may be reluctant to consider aspects of their identity that potentially gives them privilege if they have suffered discrimination previously themselves. I would add that this has the potential to 'psychically ghettoise' students preventing them from reflecting in a more sophisticated way about complex cultural issues. This was evidenced at the beginning of the seminar group in terms of the group needing an oppressive other that prevented them from learning from experience and from each other. A positive group norm had not, therefore, been developed at this early stage of the group and the students were focused on their suspicion of the institution and the seminar leader and not the potential that they offered each other for learning in the group.

The seminar group progressed against the background of a holding and containing environment, which enabled the development of a positive group norm. An understanding of group defences and group specific phenomena/process dynamics, 'Mirroring', 'Exchange/Reciprocity' 'Resonance and Condenser Phenomenon', throughout the group enabled a powerful and rich learning experience for all the students.

The psycho-educational group skills and methods required to mitigate defensive group dynamics and the development of a positive group norm are the 'Holding' (Winnicott, 1960) and the 'Containment' (Bion, 2013) supported by an understanding of group defences and group-specific phenomena (Foulkes, 1948) on the part of the seminar leader. The application of these skills and methods have been illustrated through this seminar group's journey and how the group moved from a defensive position and were enabled to develop a positive group norm of how to engage with cultural difference in a reflective way. Although beginning in a very defensive and anxious state (Nitsun, 1989) requiring a malign outsider to hold itself together, the seminar group moved to a state of being more open and able to make use of a powerful experiential learning method. At the later stages of the group and as a consequence of the development of



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a positive group norm, the seminar group seemed less, what I would term, 'psychically ghettoised' and far more reflective, which was in line with the primary task and aim of the infant and young child observation seminar group on the social work training.

In my role as seminar leader recognising group defences, group specific phenomena and unconscious processes strengthened my ability to contain and hold the group. By not retaliating in the first instance about being represented as "one of those psychodynamic people" and also the realisation that my self-representation as a person of colour had little currency for the seminar group, I was better able to understand and therefore manage why the group, at that moment, needed me to experience what it felt like to be an outsider.

### Conclusion

There is a need for group dynamic training for lecturers in social work to assist how they teach and manage teaching based on the description of the seminar group process discussed above. The provision of contained experiential seminar group spaces, such as the seminar group experience discussed above, with the management of group dynamics and unconscious processes by the seminar leader has been shown to loosen defences and enabled a fuller and more fruitful engagement around race and culture by the students. This helps the student prepare for their future work within multi-cultural communities and to develop competencies in anti-racist social work in line with registration requirements. Encouraging group experiential approaches to learning and teaching can contribute toward curriculum development, not exclusively on the issue of the teaching of anti-racist practice but for social work education in general.

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