



# Review of the anti-racist standards within anti-oppressive practice

## Executive summary

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### Acknowledgements to;

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# REVIEW OF THE ANTI-RACIST STANDARDS WITHIN ANTI- OPPRESSIVE PRACTICE.

## **Who commissioned the report and why**

The anti-racist practice standards were originally developed and formalised in conjunction with the Anti-Racist Development Forum, a coalition of programme providers and local practice teachers in the South West region. This forum, now more recently known as FREDA (Forum for Race Equality and Diversity) believed it was timely to review these standards (described below). The reasons for this are also outlined below in the introduction.

## **Who we are**

The research group at the start consisted of the following members;

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# Introduction

Anti-racism, seen within a context of social work's broader mandate to promote anti-oppressive practice, is integral to the value base underpinning social work education and training. The importance of integrating anti-racist practice into social work education has been recognised by a range of regulatory and training bodies including the General Social Care Council (GSCC 2002) and the Training Organisation for the personal Social Services (TOPPS 2004) now Skills For Care.

At the University of Plymouth, the anti racist practice standards comprise a core component of the BSc (Hons) Social Work Degree. Rather than seeing anti-racism as just one component of practice, the standards were developed in 1996 with the aim of integrating anti-racism into the whole of social work practice (Butler et al 2003). It was further envisaged that they would form a key component of all teaching, learning and assessment in Social Work and notably they have assumed a particularly high profile in practice learning and assessment throughout the South West and beyond. Indeed the standards have been cited as 'good practice' by the Department of health (DOH 2000) The Anti-Racist Practice Standards were originally developed and formalised in conjunction with the 'Anti-Racist Development Forum' (now re-named FREDDA -Forum for Race Equality and Diversity) a coalition of programme providers and local practice teachers in the South West.

Following an informal review conducted locally by a Local Authority Social Work Education co-ordinator, (Curry, 1996) there was a concern that students were not addressing anti-racist practice sufficiently within their portfolios. As the population in the South West is predominantly white, there appeared to be a general lack of understanding of the issues facing Black and Minority Ethnic,(BME) individuals and groups, coupled with a belief that Racism was 'not a problem here'. However, research conducted in Cornwall (Anti-Racism, project 2004) demonstrates that Racism is still an active concern in this region.

The standards, however, do not represent a definitive account of how anti-racist practice should be taught and assessed in social work practice.

Racism is an evolving concept and understandings of this phenomenon are shaped by social and political developments as well as scholarly debate. For example the Chairperson of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) in England recently referred to the evolving nature of Racism in Britain (CRE 2004)

Therefore it was anticipated that the standards would be subjected to ongoing review in order to assess their relevance for Social Work in a continually changing social, political and policy environment (Butler et al 2003) For example, more recently we have witnessed the emergence of new forms of racism (Bhavnani et al 2005), the adoption of a range of new anti-discriminatory legislation and further theoretical developments in the area of anti-racist practice and education (Heron 2004; Sakamoto & Pitner 2005; Thompson 2006; Williams & Soydan 2005) . At the same time, various critiques of anti-racist practices have also been identified. Humphries in her paper, 'An Unacceptable Role for Social work: Implementing Immigration Policy' (2004), critiques social workers who defend an anti racist practice perspective, advocating that no amount of anti-discriminatory practice will remedy an immigration system that is inherently racist.

The article 'From ridicule to institutionalisation: anti-oppression, the state and social work' (McLaughlin, 2005), highlights the use of Anti –Racist practice (ARP) as being 'Ideologically driven and oppressive' by political zealots who intimidated colleagues and students, by not allowing any deviation from an anti-racist doctrine. He expands the criticisms further by stating that the demands of ARP left the proponents free to decide what constituted racist behaviour or language. Therefore through their dictates they were being oppressive in their behaviour.

Looking at 'words not actions' he identifies that on its own the changing of language and vocabulary does not make any real changes .For example, dropping the phrase 'Third World in terms of Developing World does not alleviate those suffering of hunger'. The debate about whether changing language can alleviate racism led to jocular critiques in the tabloid press ridiculing governmental policies. The 'top down approach' of ARP by social work academics and professionals was seen as being 'divisive' and created a backlash opening the door to those on the Right of the political divide to fashion the phrase 'Political Correctness' as a means of trivialising the debate.

Healy (2005) identifies ARP as the extension of radical social work. She identifies two main critical viewpoints. First, the awareness of Anti-oppressive practice in high risk cases has been used to justify minimal intervention. This has resulted in little acknowledgement of the positive use of power in some social work interventions. This could lead to tragic circumstances arising, such as Victoria Climbié.

The second critique is the oppositional stance of ARP, the use of the word 'anti', denotes that we are fighting against a powerful ideology. This stance is in itself problematic. It does not allow for the grey areas of social work practice. It positions people into preconceived notions of, 'us and them' as well as 'enemy or ally'.

Therefore new frameworks for understanding identity, difference and diversity have been developed in social work (Fook 2002; SCIE 2005; Treacher 2006). All of these factors potentially impact on how anti-racist practice is conceptualised, taught and assessed in social work.

# Research Design

## **Rationale for the review**

**Firstly:** In light of FREDA revising its remit in order to adopt a more inclusive stance on diversity, the forum recognise the need to review the existing standards in order to ensure that they were consistent with this broader focus. “There is no single experience of racism. Minority groups are as divided by nationality, class, sex, faith, age and so on as is the rest of the population” (Loha and Malik 2006) .

**Secondly,** the introduction of new equal opportunities legislation and the proposed ‘Equality and Human Rights Commission’ (EHRC) are symbolic of a new political and social context for thinking about anti-racism and diversity. Therefore there is clearly a need to critically examine the existing anti-racist practice guidelines to judge their ‘fit’ with these new legislative and administrative requirements. For example, both the Race Relations (Amendment Act 2000) and the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) now require all public bodies to promote good race relations and equal opportunities. The CEHR in turn will act as an umbrella organisation that will absorb the functions of all existing commissions, including the Commission for Race Equality and the Disability Rights Commission, in an attempt to ‘mainstream equality’.

**Thirdly,** feedback from students enrolled on the Social Work Degree suggests that they are experiencing confusion and anxiety in relation to how the standards are currently used as an assessment tool in their practice. Similarly some staff and agency supervisors have raised concerns that the students may be using the standards in a tokenistic manner and treating them as a ‘tick box’ exercise. As we have just reached the end of the first cohort of students onto the new social work degree, this review is timely in this respect.

**Lastly,** recent theoretical developments in the area of identity and difference, in particular the recognition that identity is multi-faceted and changeable, have alerted teaching staff to the need to ‘rethink’ how contemporary theoretical frameworks for examining identity resonate with the practice guidelines. As Pascal (2006) states ‘categorising people into different races promotes the idea of separation. The word race still has connotations of a hierarchy’. (Pascal 2006 pg 11)

## **Aims and objectives of the project**

- To review and if necessary revise the current anti-racist practice standards in terms of their relevance for teaching, learning and assessment in contemporary social work education.
- To evaluate this review process
- To produce and disseminate good practice guidance in respect of teaching, learning and assessment of anti-racist practice.

As part of the review the objective was to elicit the views and perspectives of the key stakeholders who have an interest in the standards. The involvement of all stakeholders was seen as crucial to the review. The stakeholders included;

- Recent graduates who were assessed on how they had evidenced anti-racist skills, knowledge and values in their portfolios,
- Practice Learning Supervisors in agencies who oversaw the learning opportunities students received,
- Service Users and Carers who had an input into the teaching and assessment of students,
- Academic staff who were directly involved in teaching,
- Practice Learning Managers who managed the students learning opportunities
- Practice Assessors who observed students and gave formative feedback on their practice.

The reference group responsible for carrying out the review began to meet in February 2006. An agreement was reached that the research would focus on stakeholders' views on the usefulness of the standards as a teaching, learning, supervision and assessment tool and whether the standards helped develop students' anti-racist practice.



# Method

The first stage of the research employed a quantitative research method in the form of a web survey. This enabled the analysis of data and statistics to become the framework for more in depth exploration of themes raised from the web survey.

Qualitative research methods such as interviews /focus groups are often used in conjunction with quantitative research methods, to understand the meaning of the data .Subsequently, the second stage of the research employed qualitative research methods in the form of focus groups and interviews to understand, in more depth, the meaning of the results from the web survey.

**First stage,** Following a pilot to refine the questionnaire, the research group sent out an email survey to all final year students, academics, practice learning managers, placement agency supervisors, and practice assessors .In total 220 surveys were sent . This was to identify potential issues arising from the use of the anti-racist practice standards in teaching, learning and assessment. It also gave respondents the opportunity to register their interest in participating in the follow up focus groups, providing more qualitative feedback on the themes and issues raised.

First the respondents' personal details were taken and their role identified before exploring the anti-racist practice standards in terms of: 'Awareness'; 'Usefulness'; and 'Importance'.

Overall the questions used were quantitative in nature employing the Likert scale questions, (1932). This is a type of psychometric response scale widely used in survey research, allowing respondents to specify their level of agreement to a statement. Ten of these questions also incorporated an open ended answer allowing the respondents to provide qualitative responses. Of the 220 respondents, 58 responded giving the research an overall response rate of 26%, of which 34% were recent graduates.

**Second stage,** From the survey we set up eight focus groups/1-1 interviews in total. This incorporated all stakeholder groups – including the service users and carers' consultative group. Some of the themes included; awareness of the standards, the relevance of the standards, and ideas about appropriate teaching, learning and assessment practices for anti-racist social work. Focus groups were chosen as a

data gathering method because of their capacity for eliciting a range of views via the group dialogic process (Krueger & Casey 2000). Therefore there was flexibility to follow the feedback and explore important themes raised at the time of the discussion. In recognition that not all individuals feel safe to 'speak out' in group contexts, participants were also offered the option of an individual interview if this was their preference.

We acknowledged that it would not be possible to obtain a representative sample because of the elective nature of participation and the fact that the stakeholder groups are not stable populations. However, we suggest that the validity of this study partly relies on its 'catalytic' authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In other words, its validity must be judged by its potential to contribute to knowledge about practice learning in social work.

# Findings

The findings of the survey are provided in full detail in the main report using tables and narrative to explain the results. The transcripts from the focus groups and completed questionnaires are also available as appendices. We therefore only provide here a brief summary of the findings leading to the conclusion, common themes to emerge and finally our recommendations.

## **The role of the standards**

It became evident that there was some confusion surrounding the use of the standards in terms of the weight being afforded them by those involved in the students assessment, teaching and practice learning. This led to an inconsistency in their usage, which had a direct and at times negative impact on the students.

## **Prejudice and Racism**

It was acknowledged that students need a safe environment in which to explore their prejudices freely. However it was questioned as to whether the course provided this. For some respondents, there was a lack of 'connectedness' between teaching, assessment and practice learning.

The general consensus was that although racism was still of particular concern in the South West, issues of prejudice relating to disability, class, poverty and gender also need to be addressed. Although all forms of prejudice and oppression were considered important the focus on racism within the standards and the lack of integration within the programme as a whole was evident in the students inability to transfer issues connected to race to other forms of oppression. If students, practice supervisors and others working in the social work programme were treating the standards as a 'bolt on' and focusing specifically on racism, as has been suggested, then more innovative ways of bridging this gap between theory, application and other forms of oppression needed.

## **Self-Identity**

There seemed to be a general consensus that a real understanding and application of self-identity in portfolios is missing. We have identified this specifically in the

recommendations because of new theories on identity that are being put forward . There are limitations to identity –based standards, and students need to explore their relationship to service users within the notion that identity is fluid and not fixed. Most contributors saw it as very important that students have an understanding of who they are in relation to the service users they are working with.

### **Power Inequality**

The importance of being aware of power inequalities was raised by several respondents as an issue for students to understand both at personal and structural levels. Issues of power inequality closely links with the importance of self-identity and prejudice. However it was highlighted a number of times as an issue that is often overlooked or not clearly explored at both a personal and structural level i.e. limited awareness or acknowledgement of power differences, not just between social workers and service users but also between students and staff.

### **Developing student learning and understanding**

Several suggestions were made in terms of different pedagogical tools and methods that could aid student learning, including the use of role play, discussion groups, video or other visual aids and reading material.

### **Integration Issues**

It was suggested that at present there is little or no integration between the standards and the teaching within the programme. It was suggested that practice supervisors need to be included in any training offered in relation to teaching and assessing student development in this area. This would help link practice with theory more effectively.

### **Language Review**

Considerable discussion took place around the language within the standards. More clarification is sought around some of the terms used and the need to up- date the language was recognised. Also a recognition that new legislation will impact on the way diversity is addressed nationally and this will impact on Social Work Education.

# Summary

To conclude, the standards were generally seen as a helpful tool although there was some variation in how they were used, for example a teaching tool, assessment tool, learning guide or marking criteria. Whilst no one wanted to see the standards completely removed there were a number of issues raised about the lack of integration within the programme both in terms of how the standards were applied and between the various elements of the course, with each element currently being seen as separate to the next. There was also considerable discussion relating to issues of prejudice, self-identity and power inequalities which was seen to be a crucial aspect of social work training but one in which there were currently many inconsistencies and failings. It was felt overall that better integration, improved and updated language, clarity of expectation, increased consistency between those using the standards, improved teaching and learning opportunities and more guidance to students and professionals should be an essential part of the standards review.

## **Themes to emerge**

### **(From both the survey and the focus groups)**

- Traditional categories for getting people to define themselves are no longer valid. 'Pinning down ethnicity to a simple label does not reflect the diversity and richness of identities'. (appendix A:1) This has led to repetition and tokenism within portfolios, not enabling students to 'engage in the debate'.
- The format of the standards needs to change to make the language more accessible, improve the clarity and to update them.
- They are seen as potentially useful teaching and learning tools if used to do direct teaching and make the link between theory and practice. However, currently there is a lack of integration/connectedness between practice and teaching and assessment across the whole programme.
- The standards are not embedded in the heart of the programme, different levels of commitment from teaching staff were identified and different interpretation of the standards by practice learning staff/teachers / assessors has not achieved a safe place for students to explore issues.

- Lack of universal understanding of how to assess portfolios against the standards exists, coupled with differences in peoples' understanding. There is a need for consistency.
- More clarity is needed on how they should be used as an assessment tool to avoid tokenism, as a tool for marking, as a guidance for identifying strengths and weaknesses, and a benchmark for minimum standards.
- The standards themselves do not really provide practical learning opportunities although they do provide a good framework.
- Important features to keep are
  - (a) Addressing the specific impact of racism
  - (b) Referring to literature from a wide range of perspectives
  - (c) Discussing cultural identity and self definition. All of which could be linked to specific teaching;
  - (d) Sensitivity to oppression and transferability of ideas (but language needs to be changed to be clearer).
- The standards as they are do not enable students to demonstrate good anti racist practice. Students are unable to make the link between racism and other forms of oppression i.e. transference of learning.
- The standards do not facilitate assessment of the students' ability to 'engage in the debate' and has led to a tick box process. There are concerns that the standards do not support the students' development and emotional understanding of racism/ prejudice/discrimination.

# RECOMMENDATIONS;

## Overarching;

- A. The principle of holistic assessment. (1.1 , 1.2 , 2.3 , 2.6)
- B. The principle of 'engaging in the debate' to be central to learning outcomes recognising that we learn most when we are active participants in our learning. (1.3 , 2.1 , 2.3 , 2.4 , 2.6 , 2.7 )
- C. Providing safe environments for students to explore and discuss their understanding and learning which reflects the notion that the 'whole person' learning involves the head, the hand, the heart and the soul. (1.1, 1.3 ,1.4 , 2.1 , 2.3 , 2.4 , 2.6 , 2.7 )
- D. Consistency of message across the whole programme including teaching, practice and assessment. (1.2 , 1.4 , 1.5 , 2.2 , 2.3 , 2.4 , 2.5 , 2.6 , 2.7)
- E. There needs to be a review of the language used. (2.2 , 2.5 , 2.6 , 2.7)
- F. Regular review of 'standards'. (introduction to research)

## 1. **Assessment:**

- 1.1 Assessment should be holistic in line with the underlying principle of holistic assessment of practice learning within the BSc (Hons) Social work programme at the University of Plymouth, not mirroring competency based assessments of previous programmes.
- 1.2 New learning objectives need to be developed to enable assessment to track student development towards these learning objectives.
- 1.3 Assessment should reflect the level of understanding and the students' ability to '**engage in the debate**', recognising power imbalances and inequalities. To move away from any format that could be used as a tick box process.
- 1.4 Feedback and assessment should come in many forms and from many sources to ensure assessment is not tokenistic.
- 1.5 Consistency of marking should be a programme objective.

## **2. Teaching and learning:**

**Racial Equality and Diversity must be promoted and embedded into the heart of the programme. This must include;**

- 2.1 A learning environment that encourages students to **'engage in the debate'** and discussion in a safe environment to develop their understanding.
- 2.2 Consistent integration of knowledge to underpin good practice in relation to Race Equality and Diversity in all modules.
- 2.3 Learning opportunities and resources that support and promote Race Equality and Diversity.
- 2.4 To encourage and support students to develop a sense of their own and others' identity/culture whilst recognising identity/culture is complex and fluid.
- 2.5 Terms and language need updating and to be brought in line with the changes seen in the last 10 years.
- 2.6 To develop an understanding of 'why' racism exists on a micro and macro level and its impact for practice.
- 2.7 For teaching and learning to support the complexity of a holistic approach so other inequalities associated with gender, disability etc are not sided lined.



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