

BLACK AND WHITE ISSUES IN TRAINING GROUPS: A PSYCHODYNAMIC APPROACH

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Over the past ten years, there has been great demand for Equal Opportunities training. As an independent trainer I have received requests from Social Services Departments, the Probation Service, alcohol, drugs and HIV agencies, counselling courses taught at all levels, and from all disciplines within the National Health Service.

In contrast to the early eighties when in many organisations, Racism Awareness Training as it was known then, was mandatory and generally problematic, training now appears to be more voluntarily pursued, less openly resisted, but nevertheless still fraught with political and personal difficulties.

The aim of this chapter is to set out and review a model of training that I have been using successfully in Equal Opportunities and Race work, using a psychodynamic analysis to aid the discussion of some of the group processes involved.

The chapter will also highlight some critical issues and crucial concerns in understanding black/white relations as part of the Equal Opportunities framework.

It is of immense importance to state at this point the great influence of 'macro' processes on this work I am about to describe. The ever-present and ever-shifting structural and socio-economic-political influences as is demonstrated in institutional racism and other forms of prejudice, clearly impact on the way Equal Opportunities and Race issues are embraced. It would be very tempting to focus on this aspect of the subject as no one is spared from the effects of our political environment, but my intention for this chapter is to shift to an area we rarely give as much credence and concentrate on training which is geared to including and understanding the 'micro' processes of Equal Opportunities and Race, that is, the internal and interpersonal dynamics operating in its midst.

I need to explain what I mean by the term training.

Training in the context of the work I offer means facilitation of the needs of the organisation in the agreed area of Equal Opportunity. This is different from the very familiar didactic teaching methods used in other kinds of training. Change therefore takes place in an atmosphere of learning directly from each other. The teaching mode is facilitated through exercises which are experienced in couples, triads, small group and large group work.

Facilitation includes timely tutorial inputs given by me the facilitator which address the need to discuss and understand ideas conceptually. Frameworks are offered for closer examination of complex processes in black/white relations and video taped programmes relevant to the topic will sometimes be included.

UNDERSTANDING DYNAMICS AT THE REQUEST STAGE

Pre-transference Issues

A working relationship with any group generally starts at the request stage, or in some cases even earlier. A trainer's reputation (good, bad or indifferent), may precede her, thereby creating a pre-relationship even before any meeting takes place.

The organisation may as a result have pre-expectations about the quality, approach and style of the work on offer. In my experience, training in Equal Opportunities and particularly black/white dynamics, appears to carry with it unusually high expectations of the trainer and of its possible outcomes.

In counteracting this situation, I am very keen to know *exactly* what the team wants, in what form they want it, what are they hoping to achieve by having the training *now*, and how they intend maintaining any changes brought about as a direct result of the training. I am careful to stress to those who hire my services *my choice* to focus on the particular area of interpersonal and intrapsychic processes relating to difference, but by no means excluding the wider parameters of politics, economics and social inequities.

Up to now, no one has turned down this service, but rather, organisations have jumped at the chance of using it to get at the nub of team work addressing issues of difference, prejudice and oppression.

It is my belief that all conscious and unconscious inter-actions occurring before groups meet and training takes place, contribute to the pre-relationship dynamics or pre-transference relationship. As a result, I take careful note of the language used to describe training needs, the time and money allocated to the training and all early observations which inevitably form the pre-transference relationship. To demonstrate how important this transference relationship is for groupwork training, I will elaborate on a few of the examples given.

Blurring the Focus

Often groups which request training under the broad heading of Equal Opportunities, present these requests in a very confused manner. The person making contact may say, 'We are trying to address Equal Opportunities issues by trying to find out why black clients are not using our service.' This request would also include concerns about whether the agency needs to focus on particular groups or cast its nets wider to embrace all groups in the community it serves. Within this very same request the aims would extend to the needs of the team to examine staff working relationships in a racially mixed staff team. Sometimes the remit will be even further

stretched to encompass transcultural issues in counselling. And all of this in half a day's training!

Within this mishmash there are three distinct needs being raised. The first appears to be Equal Opportunities Training which covers policy making, service delivery, monitoring, funding and recruitment issues. The second request would be addressing mixed staff relations which could come under the heading of 'Working with Issues of Difference in the Workplace'. The last need is for training in Transcultural Counselling.

These three very different training needs should be tackled separately with more than half a day to each training session.

At this point my task is to try to understand what is going on for the organisation in the midst of all this confusion and even defensive muddle.

First of all, despite fierce denial by some, it is still politically shrewd and culturally fashionable to be seen to be pursuing Equal Opportunities Issues. The immediate pay-offs for the organisation are creating an acceptable face to the external world and a sense of security within. Guilt, shame and blame are temporarily absolved from the organisation's conscience, and everyone can sit back with an ease of mind that they have done the right thing.

Secondly, Equal Opportunities, Anti-discriminatory Practices and Racism Awareness, are merged to mean one and the same. The tendency to homogenise different parts of this complex area of work ('macro' and 'micro' aspects), suggests to me an unconscious fear of not allowing difference or separateness to exist even at this level. The parallels here with race inequality are several. For examples: 'blacks are all the same'; black people being seen only as victims and 'special' cases, and not allowing for differentness within same race groups (which incidentally, is a real internalised issue for members themselves within same race groups).

The pressure to focus means one will have eventually to see and face what is truly there, and we know that certain kinds of truths unearth primitive fears and anxieties leaving us feeling exposed and vulnerable.

I am suggesting that groups unconsciously attempt to manage this fear and prevent this exposure by lumping different Equal Opportunity needs together, creating a blur and an easy avoidance of the painful work of recognising and accepting difference.

We might remember ex-Prime Minister Thatcher's comment about 'being swamped' by difference in the form of immigrants from developing countries seeking residence in England. The implied threat of dilution to British culture, and even of annihilation are evident in her words. Could black/white issues in training create similar feelings?

Killing Time

Most organisations find it difficult to confront inequality and the specific concern of black and white issues. A hierarchy of needs with 'other important training areas', is frequently created as a defence against taking on board the importance of race prejudice, oppression and racism.

Training groups seem to think that one half day is sufficient to deal with issues of equality of opportunity and there is a sincere belief that all that is needed is to understand the language of Equal Opportunity and master, what I have come to believe is, people's notion of there being specific skills to acquire and clear recipes to follow. Inherent in this approach is an ignorance and arrogance that this area can be learnt quickly in a prescriptive way and at an intellectual (cognitive) level.

Denying the complexity of race and cultural issues and minimising the time necessary to attend to them, are effective ways of 'killing' off their importance and the challenge to the self.

We can further understand this defence in developmental terms. A person's or an organisation's attitude towards time can be equated with the attitude towards authority figures or feelings of being taken over and controlled. If the person or organisation has experienced excessively critical authority figures, or been made to feel powerless, a dismissive attitude towards time may result. Most organisations seeking training have either experienced pressures from the outside (political), or from their members within (personal).

Both kinds of pressures to meet what is difficult and challenging, have often led to feelings of powerlessness and therefore a grudging lending of time.

The discussion so far offers some explanation for the resistance, ambivalence, fear, and the tendency to put other areas of training above and in competition with the race component of Equal Opportunities training.

TRAINING – THE PSYCHODYNAMIC APPROACH

Since beliefs in racial difference are among the most irrational that men and women hold, it seems that the science of the irrational, psychoanalysis (that is to say, the science of which seeks to understand the sources of the irrational in the human mind), is one science to which we ought to look for their explanation. (Rustin, 1991, p. 61).

Psychodynamic analysis with its many theoretical influences can offer us the opportunity to understand human behaviours and interactions at a deeper level. The approach focuses more on mental forces operating within the psyche of individuals, groups and organisations, and is concerned with those processes contributing to growth, psychic development and stability.

The advantages therefore are that what we see in, and experience with others – and here I would like to stay with black/white relations – is influenced by a number of factors such as,

our histories, traditions, positions in society, value and belief systems, and the way these influences are incorporated into our entire makeup as individuals and in our different racial and cultural groups.

The psychodynamic approach which is used by a handful of trainers who are already familiar with psychodynamic and psychoanalytic concepts, offers a rare and refreshing approach to understanding human interactions and the irrational within the area of meeting and working with issues of race difference.

I have found the concepts within Object relations theory to be the most valuable and realistically appropriate amongst the various psychodynamic models. This theory is primarily concerned with interactional relationships between ourselves and others with whom we must learn to relate productively (Faibairn, 1963), as well as the interactional relationship between the ego and internal different parts of ourselves (Klein, 1952a; 1952b). Both aspects of the theory imply that there are attributes of 'goodness' and 'badness' *in* us, and *out* there, which we must learn to integrate and deal with maturely.

What is helpful for me as a trainer/facilitator in using this theory is that it enables participants to understand the hidden and complex process of putting onto others (projection) those unwanted bits – the badness – which cannot be tolerated in the self. In black/white relations this is an ever-present phenomenon.

The psychodynamic intention is then geared towards deepening participants' understanding of powerful unconscious processes which operate when meeting the unknown and unfamiliar. In black/white relations there is a lot of the unknown and unfamiliar which we manage in several ways to handle through, stereotyping, scapegoating, denigrating, idealising and so on.

An understanding of these processes enables participants to tune into their own functioning and begin to meet the 'shadow' side of their psyche which reacts to difference with ignorance, hostility, curiosity, fear, revulsion, indifference and even annihilation.

The core elements of this training model are:–

1. participants thinking about and sharing their own values and beliefs systems;
2. discussing openly their responses to working with people different from themselves;
3. highlighting the difficulties therein;
4. identifying responses in relation to the defences we employ to protect and shield ourselves from the unfamiliar;
5. exploring how these processes hinder and enhance various therapeutic encounters in the workplace.

The more time that is allocated to work on these issues, the more sustaining and truly challenging are the effects on group participants. For a start, individuals move on to having a better understanding of how the different Other – the black person as an example, is a figure constructed to be of service to groups of people who have historically held power and dominance over others.

Black and white participants can begin to have a deeper understanding of how the black Other must remain part of and party to the self-celebratory opinions of the dominant group. In such circumstances, they also see that no real exchange of views and feelings can be permitted to intervene by the black Other, lest the precarious power of the dominant group is threatened.

When participants begin to get a clearer picture of these realities in an atmosphere of safety and respect, they soon see parts of themselves in the process; and as with the effect of a true mirror reflection, there is a slow move towards understanding elements of the reality as part of their upbringing and present world.

A psychodynamic approach to Equalities Training is challenging, requiring a particular flexibility from the trainer. This involves developing a working rhythm with the group whilst being able to hover sensitively over difficult and resistant areas.

Coupled with my choice of model and theoretical approach, is a need to understand groups and group dynamics. Several models inform this understanding such as the works of Argyle (1969), Yalom (1975) Tuckman (1965) and Bion (1961). The training that I offer in Equal Opportunities and Race issues is run loosely along the lines of a task performance group using experiential modes of learning. The dynamic interaction between group members and their tasks, functions and roles creates a rich matrix in which group and individual learning take place simultaneously.

There is no intention on my part to create a therapy or psychoanalytic group atmosphere in these trainings. This would clearly be inappropriate. The task therefore is set out by the employer who, after consulting with employees is then able to negotiate with me the trainer. I am particularly interested in requests being made this way and not those imposed as mandates from on high.

CONTRACT MAKING

Training contracts with organisations vary from half a day to three consecutive days of groupwork with teams of either the same discipline and rank, e.g. probation officers only, or drug workers only; or whole agencies comprising of managers, management committee members and workers at all levels.

I will usually request that the employer set out in writing what their collective needs are for Equal Opportunities training. I also request information on how many staff are attending, their status, racial, gender, and age characteristics. I often find myself working with predominantly white groups and others with a handful of black and Asian members. It is rare to have the experience of facilitating a racially 'balanced' group or a predominantly black group. I also find it relevant to know if any members are openly gay or lesbian as a way of including them *more directly* in the programme. This is not to say that if there were no openly gay or lesbian members, this area of difference would not be addressed.

I usually work with groups I am given, and plan the training programmes accordingly. The choice of agenda with the different mixes of group participants will be discussed a little later.

Other aspects of training contracts sometimes include homework requesting participants personally to bring along 'live' case material where race and cultural conflicts are present. This material is utilised in the training to full effect, thereby giving participants a real (as opposed to an intellectual) opportunity to work on their own material.

I will sometimes request situational themes or vignettes to be sent along for me to study beforehand; the idea being to try to find a way of incorporating these themes into the training programme.

Generally, I study training requests very carefully to ascertain whether I want to take up the offer. My answer is partly dependant on such practicalities as the distance from home, cost and fees. I also consider whether the time allocated is adequate for the amount of work requested. Does the training feel like the team's need or management's need, and is it clearly stated? Am I personally motivated to accept this particular request?

Contracts with employers (including a 'cancellation' clause) are agreed formally with me offering in writing, clear objectives and intended learning outcomes of the training. A brief professional work profile accompanies the programme which is flexible, and a pre-reading list also follows. I usually state any requests I may have, for example, a maximum of say, 14 participants. I also request suitable semi-circular seating arrangements, and audio-visual equipment in good working order. I emphasise the importance of good time-keeping.

Local authorities in Britain have adopted different approaches to Equal Opportunity. London boroughs, for example, dealt with what was then a new subject in the late 70's and early 80's under the heading of Race or Racism Awareness Training. This was changed to Anti-Racism Training in the late 80's, and now Equal Opportunities, Anti-Discriminatory Practices, Working with Issues of Difference, and Equalities Training for the 90's. These changes were due in part to increasing understanding of the 'macro' structural context, and the need to bring about change structurally as well as intra- and interpersonally. Throughout the earlier period, the main approach to Equal Opportunity training appeared to be one of stamping out racism by modified cognitive behavioural approaches. This technique, which seemed like 'guilt-tripping', became a way of employing guilt induced responses in white people and focussed mainly on the imperialist past and black people's oppression.

There was an obsessive pre-occupation and focus on definitions of words like, race, racism, racialism, institutional racism, culture, black, and ethnicity. It was sadly interpreted by white participants that if they became fully conversant with the terminology, then there would be an acceptance and an automatic exemption from the 'terrible' label of being a racist. Overall, black people attending these courses received little in the way of understanding their own difficulties in working with issues of race and culture.

On reflection, the intent of these training sessions was mainly to educate white workers on issues of race. Racism Awareness, Anti-Racism and Equal Opportunity or Equalities training, all became synonymous with black and white relations and black/white dynamics, ignoring the rest of human racism, namely, anti-Irish racism, anti-Semitism, internalised racism and so on.

Whilst the pioneering and experimental nature of earlier race training should be acknowledged as a natural part of its growth process, these highly charged sessions fraught with hostility, ambivalence and resistance, were taken on at a time when black trainers themselves were learning how to deal with their own cultural wounds.

The behavioural approach encouraged an atmosphere of confession and shaming. Trainers felt they needed to be tough to get their anti-racist/anti-discriminatory messages across, and the majority of participants who dreaded these mandatory sessions felt attacked and demoralised.

PROCESS AND DYNAMICS IN TRAINING GROUPS

Beginnings

The dynamics and group processes within any work group are largely determined by the focus of the training agenda. A two day workshop for example, with an agenda which is clear and unambiguous such as, 'Understanding Black/White Dynamics In The Workplace' has, in my experience helped prepare participants for a specific focus on understanding relationships between black people and white people in the work setting. This focus has helped to avoid the usual competitive tendency to bring in other cultural issues and minority groups as a way of creating a hierarchy of oppression.

Conversely, an agenda with a wider brief, for example, "Working with Issues of Difference" or "Anti-discriminatory Practices in the Workplace", can create anxieties about which group/s will get more attention and which group/s will be included and excluded. As a trainer working with both agendas, I have often noticed more confusion, anxiety and competition in groups with wider briefs. The many ways in which participants deal with these feelings are expressed by the following dynamics:

Participants arriving late

Comments like, "this is only an excuse to talk about racism"

An immediate focus on, and pre-occupation with black peoples' plight with accompanying expressions of guilt

Food e.g. sweets being passed around during the session

Repeated requests for clarification of words used by trainer and of the group tasks

Use of phrases like, “I treat everybody the same, regardless”, “I see everyone as human beings regardless”, “I don’t see colour; people are people”

Reluctance to engage in small group work

Creating a hierarchy of oppression by discussing who is worse off

Questions raised “and what about the Irish?”

Retorts like, “and black people can be racist too”

Participants’ rescuing each other from discomfort

Participants having to leave early

Not being able to attend both days because of an important meeting

The trainer ends up doing a lot of talking

The above dynamics are not uncommon and therefore have created a need for me, the trainer, to set the scene fairly early on into the programme.

A useful way forward is in the negotiation of the group contract and the group’s aims. A contract which is agreed to give equal time to the groups addressed can be helpful. Clarification of the group’s aim can be reiterated after say, an opening round where individuals identify their personal needs. As the trainer, I would acknowledge what people have asked for, and state clearly what can be realistically achieved in the time allotted for the training.

An example of this can be seen in a situation where the request from a drugs agency was to provide a one day workshop on “Anti-discriminatory Practices in the Workplace”. The staff was interested in exploring cultural and racial prejudice amongst its team members and work with clients. In the opening round, requests for what people wanted from the day were very varied. Some white members wanted to know how to work with black members who automatically saw them as racist and as a result every difficult interaction with them or black clients was labelled racist. Some black members wanted to get clear guidance on how the manager and team as a whole would handle situations where white clients refused to see black members of staff. A lone Greek member wanted to concentrate on the needs of Greek Cypriot drug users, and another member wanted to address the needs of Gypsies.

I reiterated that it was impossible to allocate adequate time to all the needs of the team, and I enabled them to create a realistic agenda for the day. They unanimously agreed to work on staff relations in the morning, and to address the needs of their diverse clientele in the afternoon. The use of role plays highlighting racial conflict between black and white staff was a useful training tool enabling staff to get to the heart of the matter without personalising

individual staff difficulties. Role play also helped members to distinguish between racial prejudice and racism and to understand for example, that the refusal (an action) of white clients to see black staff is a form of 'political resistance', otherwise translated 'racism' by the act of racial discrimination. Black staff on the other hand automatically labelling all white colleagues as racists becomes 'racial prejudice', because it creates a *generalised* unfavourable view of white people which causes offence.

A clear rule of thumb with the above diverse needs being expressed within a training setting, is if they are not addressed, it would certainly lead to acting out behaviour such as, people leaving, or sabotaging by being brutal in their personal attacks or choosing to opt out of certain parts of the training programme.

A workshop type training can survive the flexible nature of negotiation of the group's agenda. In my experience, some contracts which are made in a more careful and elaborate way can make for an easier task of creating a set programme and working fairly closely to that plan.

As a black, female trainer, there are particular dynamics affecting how groups respond to me, and in turn, the consequences of these dynamics and how I might deal with them. On the one hand, there is much evidence from my work to indicate that groups meet the black trainer with an element of caution and even suspicion. Questions such as what is she going to be like, might be no different to the expectations of any other kind of trainer, but I have frequently felt that the legacy of past Racism Awareness Training approaches precedes my work. This is the legacy of 'the aggressive, confrontative, guilt inducing, and shaming approach', (quote from participants), which has left its indelible mark.

My approach in these situations is to prevent these fears from growing by acknowledging that they are quite common and understandable for the reasons just explained; and that in recognising the group's feelings, I have met them in their psychic place. My experience is that this simple act of meeting participants in *their* place is all that is needed initially in keeping things under control.

On the other hand, I can experience the group's idealisation of me because of my understanding approach to their fears and anxieties. I can be perceived as the good black caring female who is not like those other autocratic, aggressive trainers.

This idealisation can be 'held' by the trainer and worked with in the training programme with no negative effects. There are times however, when this dynamic can become all pervasive and stagnate any healthy interaction of challenge and change within the group. In this situation, idealisation has become a defence against feelings of any possible discomfort.

My role in this situation has been to articulate what is happening in the group without condemning or criticising. Enabling participants to move on has been aided by a quick lesson on how to give feedback constructively, and how to challenge sensitively. Participants have unfailingly warmed to the idea that feedback *must* give value to the receiver not release for the giver.

Another example of how the early dynamics is handled in my role as black female trainer, is concerned with an overzealous and guilt ridden stance white participants take up as they focus on the black participants oppression. In my experience of facilitating training groups, this position is usually adopted by white members who have labelled themselves the awful, horrible oppressors. They carry the responsibilities of a colonial and imperialist past like a heavy burden and bear their wounds and shame for all to see.

As a black trainer, I have come to expect this position being taken up by a few, and in some instances, a large majority of white participants. An interesting observation over the years, is the tendency for inner city whites who are more exposed to different races and cultures and thereby more challenged about their white awareness, to be more expressive and more open with their guilt. The opposite can also be said of this same group when they have moved through to a stage of identity development where there is no need to hang onto this legacy in a restrictive way. The attitude of suburban whites will invariably present as more entrenched in their racist and prejudicial beliefs because of the lack of exposure and challenge to their status quo.

It is very difficult in my role as trainer to handle the range of responses relating to white guilt. However, it has felt necessary to allow for some expression of this guilt, for to deny it has meant a pre-occupation with the accompanying shame. A shame culture that is allowed to persist in a training group induces confessions and a need for absolution to be made. This means that the black trainer and black participants alike, will be expected, or made to feel the need to offer forgiveness. This is unhelpful.

A positive way of handling these responses is to first of all acknowledge that these feelings are real and present in the group. It is also useful to encourage participants to talk about how they have come to have these feelings, thus providing a shared experience of human responses to cultural guilt and shame.

Guilt, and shame in particular, are 'Cinderella' emotions of which we have little understanding. It is of major importance to black/white relations and can be viewed thus: shame guards the boundary of privacy and intimacy, guilt limits the expansion of power. Shame covers up weakness, guilt limits strength. Shame protects an integral image of the self; guilt protects the self against hurt. We can see therefore the enormous investment in these feelings which overarches every aspect of black/white dynamics.

Acknowledging participants' feelings is important, but it is necessary to move the group forward. Remaining in this place of guilt and shame can become emotionally constipating and debilitating. It has therefore been important for me to stress the need for active and responsible ways of combating racial prejudice and bigotry.

Identifying and working with dynamics at the middle stage

The study of groups and group dynamics show that a group negotiates five important stages during its life cycle. These stages are, *Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, Mourning,*

(Tuckman 1965). These are not necessarily experienced in the order listed, but can fluctuate, hover or become stuck at any one point.

Groups addressing race and culture may be in any of the first four stages during the middle period. The earlier sections of this chapter have focused on the difficulties at the beginning stage of training groups and how these might be handled by the trainer. It is important to note that in some cases these difficulties can continue into the middle period, hence, creating identifiable problems with the group 'forming'. To examine more closely what can emerge at the middle period, the following two situations are discussed in some detail.

In the first example, a group of *primary health care workers* comprising the white female manager and white (English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Jewish,) staff, and other black (African, Black British, African-Caribbean, Asian, Mixed parentage or Bi-racial) members, came together with a brief of 'Working with Issues of Difference in the Workplace'. Dissatisfactions within this diverse multidisciplinary team – its storming – started to run very high after the lunch break on the first of a planned two day training.

The first morning session started very slowly with the group sharing what they wanted to achieve over the two days and any accompanying anxieties. An exercise enabled members to examine their different values and beliefs systems and its influence on staff interactions and work with clients. I sensed there was some major dissatisfaction with the new manager who was experienced as changing things too quickly. There was also a sense of the group fearing the power of two of its members who were union representatives and who seemed more at ease and confident in talking about equal opportunity issues.

In a 30 minutes exercise, this team was asked to split up into triads to discuss a time, or those times when they felt powerful and powerless in their multi-racial/cultural team. The brief was that they teamed up with two other members who were culturally different from themselves and who were not of the same status.

After ten minutes, I realised that several of the triads who were all in separate rooms were not engaging in the exercise. One white male who left his group on the pretext of using the toilet and who bumped into me in the corridor stated that I 'had come at the wrong time', and that I was, 'sitting on a powder keg'. He also confided that 'it did not feel safe working with such small numbers', and that 'it would be better to work in larger groups'.

It soon became clear to me that the other triad groups had become stuck, not because they didn't understand the exercise, but because they felt very unsafe. I interpreted this as the group's 'held in' murderous rage towards its manager and those members, e.g. the union representatives, who held power in one way or another.

After some deep thinking accompanied by a moment of mild panic, I decided to let the half hour run its course so we could discuss what did or did not transpire in the various groups.

There was a shuffling of feet back to the large meeting room and lots of uncomfortable silences, broken only after some gentle prompting on my part. The black members had

adopted a stance right from the start which read, 'lets *just* observe what is going down here...lets spot the one who is going to make an ass of themselves'. A few black participants appeared cautious of me in my role of black trainer and who, as one member confessed towards the end of the day, could have turned out to be her worst nightmare; an 'Uncle Tom', 'Aunt Jemima', or a radical separatist embracing Afrocentric, even Farakhanite views on race.

As members explored why this exercise on 'power and powerlessness' was difficult and didn't work, a number of complaints were heard. The Asian female staff felt left out and unhappy with the 'black' label. The Jewish staff felt displaced as a white person not fitting into 'in' groups. The Irish members were vehement in staking out their patch on race and anti-Irish racism, and the lone individual who was open about his gay sexuality insisted on sexuality issues being 'just as important as race' and demanded to know why we were avoiding it. The white male who had earlier bumped into me, commented on being working class and needing not to forget his roots despite his efforts to work his way up the ladder to becoming a professional.

On reflection, what was a simple exercise had become a catalyst for the group to hear its individual voices. These voices it would seem were being silenced in the agency by those who held power. The hierarchy of power and 'difference' was very clearly felt in this agency. People held resentments towards those who carried it more overtly and the group's resentments were being acted out in the paralysis experienced by the exercise. This agency also experienced a high level of staff sickness.

Being confronted with one another and their mistrust and unresolved anger, proved difficult initially, but as they had to stay (the half hour) with the discomfort of unexpressed feelings, they eventually were able to communicate with each other about their dissatisfactions in an atmosphere of relative safety provided by the training.

Working as a lone trainer with the above dynamics proved extremely difficult to manage with everyone desperately trying to stake out their claim. People's fear of being left out and feeling powerless raised intense feelings of inclusion and exclusion causing this group to split along racial and cultural lines.

This staff group experienced its storming through its dissatisfactions which were there at the forming stage. However, groups intent on sabotaging may also unconsciously storm as a defence to maintain the stuck status quo. The trainer must be aware of this dynamic and address it head on.

With this particular inner-city group, I chose to end the first day of the two day training on 'Working with Issues of Difference in the Workplace', by arranging a short exercise for its members to celebrate what they felt they had in common as a racially and culturally diverse team. The work on day two was geared to enabling them to build bridges in order to work effectively as a team, and I also suggested that they strongly considered regular fortnightly staff meetings with an outside consultant who could enable them to continue what they had started to achieve in the training.

My second example raises issues at the middle and ending stages of group processes and is concerned with a group of *twenty student social workers* in their final six months of training. This group had a fairly balanced ratio of black and white, and male and female members. My brief was to provide a two day training on 'Race and Culture in Counselling Practice.'

I was told briefly by the tutors that two previous attempts at Anti-discriminatory Practices training were unsuccessful, with devastating consequences of splitting the group racially and culturally, leaving the group with an air of suspicion and mistrust.

I realised from the beginning that I was taking on a difficult task, but was not prepared for the amount, and indeed, the intensity of negative feelings bordering on murderous rage (similar but more powerful than that of the first case example) which this group had been carrying for some time. On reflection I had taken on an anti-group, a 'sick' group. There was a sad realisation for me and no doubt the students alike, that they were leaving a social work diploma course in six months time to pursue responsibilities in a multi-racial/cultural society, not having resolved cultural and racial conflicts in their own 'backyard'.

I personally found the dynamics and learning atmosphere on this social work course extremely disturbing and wondered how its members could successfully mature with an adequate degree of cultural competence by the end of the diploma programme.

Right from the beginning, this Transcultural Counselling Training programme indirectly stirred up the group's old wounds leading to overt signs of storming.

There were several late arrivals for the training due to their apparent confusion with the starting time. There were long and drawn out discussions about breaks and ending times. The pre-planned programme was disrupted in a major way and it became frustrating trying to get participants to move away from superficial issues and engage with the important task.

White members focussed on what was left over for them from the last two Race trainings. The main themes were that people were left more confused than ever. They hated the aggressive and autocratic style of the previous black external consultants who they felt disregarded their feelings and just wanted to get their agenda delivered. The black and other minority members didn't feel they were getting much and opted to stay silent, watching and observing with a clear message of, 'we've been here before and nothing is ever going to change or be any different.'

The focus of Transcultural Counselling had to be deferred in order to address the 'real' agenda. Reparative work was ethically necessary at this stage and we achieved this by focussing on what was enabling about the previous two trainings. The idea of getting them to think symbolically about what they were bringing into this training was also to prove helpful in encouraging more creative expression of difficult feelings without the fear of saying things literally and acting out.

This group seemed unable to deal with a new lease of life after the earlier exercises enabled a positive shift and grudgingly slipped back into its invested raging state. Attempts at role play

failed. One role play presented a challenge for a group member to counsel a young 22 year old man who presented with internal conflicts of being gay and a Christian.

The second role play created a heated exchange on the issue of racism. A group of black members insisted that there was no such thing as white on white racism, and to bring anti-Irish racism and anti-Semitism into the discussion was a devious ploy on the part of whites to 'dilute' the discussion about 'true' racism – white on black racism.

What transpired from this point excluded any focus or attention to counselling skills, counselling approach, or counselling knowledge. The plenary session degenerated into a full blown circular argument on homophobia and those whose oppression had the rightful entitlement to racism.

The salvaging task was a difficult one made via a tutorial input in which the group's 'stuckness' was confronted and made clear. Other group dynamics were challenged and clarified, with me offering different ways of understanding and working with the issues raised. Some members clearly did not agree with what I had offered, but I decided I had to be strict with this wayward and disillusioned group. The group struggled from here on, with five members leaving in the afternoon and by the second day, being reduced to half its membership. At the end of the training there were 8 students left.

Reporting the days' events to the resident tutors produced a lost and helpless response. Aborting this training was a real option, but the remaining members who labelled themselves the 'marathon braves' acknowledged that ironically some learning had taken place in an atmosphere where a group of originally twenty social work students were never able to resolve their cultural and racial conflicts.

Many areas of learning were identified on reflection. I was angry with the tutors for inviting me to facilitate this training, and also with myself for taking on this inappropriate request. This group was hurt and let down by the 'abuse' of its tutors and had unconsciously held onto the hurt by way of punishing them. The investment in this dynamic sadly backfired on the group itself. I was brought in to do a clean up job; fix a major haemorrhage, which strangely was one of the reasons given by a member who left the course. The request for this training in effect was for *reparative work* and as a result was clearly an abuse of the trainer – and participants alike. I felt I should have been given more detailed information about the state of the group, and equally should have elicited more explanations to the many questions raised for me in this invitation. I felt satisfied however that I had used my skills and knowledge of group processes appropriately to deal with some of the confusion, splits, displacement of anger, and acting out in the group. My regrets are not stating quite as clearly to the tutors what I have expressed here and not letting them know they needed to accept blame on this occasion.

Groups would be seen to be in the norming stage when differences like those revealed in the social work students' group are resolved and real learning arises out of the resolution process. Only at this stage can meaningful exchange and the celebration of differences be sustained for

the production of the group task. From this, participants are able to engage in self-reflection, self-mirroring (finding oneself in others), and self-monitoring (tracking oneself).

Identifying dynamics and evaluating outcomes at the ending stage

The intended learning outcomes for training in working with race and cultural diversity and particularly black/white issues are, that participants are able to identify personal blocks in relating to the Other, and develop understanding of the mechanisms operating in keeping these blocks alive. Training should be geared towards deepening participants' awareness of unconscious processes and their influence on resistant attitudes. Another important outcome is recognising areas of commonality and being able to celebrate differences rather than fear and react to them. The examples described earlier show variations in learning outcome.

It is important to evaluate whether or not training goals are being achieved. As the trainer, I have evaluated my own, and the group's success by a number of indicators e.g. whether members have kept their attention and are able to stay the full course of the training; whether skills learnt and awareness gained can be translated into the reality of their work setting. I am privileged to get feedback from participants and groups alike who have made real shifts and major changes. These have varied from black support groups being set up by black workers for black workers; a rolling programme of transcultural training being funded in a few agencies; more emphasis on non-discriminatory language being used in pre-sentencing reports (Probation Services); plans made to ensure magistrates themselves are trained in anti-discriminatory practices; and changes made to work policies with regard to clinical transcultural work with clients.

Further positive evaluation can be indicated by a strong interest in the bibliography given on courses and requests made for specific reading material. Other good signs are measured by participants using 'live' case examples to work on and in them feeling safe to challenge and be challenged. My own sense of my effectiveness is measured by: members openly acknowledging and appreciating good facilitation; being clear and flexible; maintaining a stimulating atmosphere and a level of expertise that is not hackneyed and benign. At a more intuitive level, I go by what I see and that is the deep levels at which participants are able show the capacity for involvement, empathy, reciprocity and exchange.

These dynamics along with the written evaluations from the participants can offer very useful feedback to the trainer who is then able to assess her training methods, approaches and effectiveness.

The following list is a sample of actual comments taken from participants' evaluation of psychodynamically orientated training courses.

'Excellent clarity of thought – feel it allowed tremendous space for exploration + would like to see more of this approach.' (Jackie, black female from London)

'The balance between 'introspective' work and external (practice-based) work was good. It seems really important to get in touch with what we bring with us before we try to work on the issues involved. Practice sessions essential even if painful at times.'

(Di, white female from Shropshire)

‘Whether the course increased my skills or not I’m not sure. But it gave me the confidence to utilise what I know and do with a real sense of purpose and direction.’
(John, white male from Birmingham)

‘Stimulating two days which explored deeper issues relating to prejudice and oppression. I am more aware of how I may offend and oppress others and because of this, want to explore further unconscious processes. I wish there was more time to look at ways of effectively challenging institutional prejudice.’ (Luca, black, bi-racial male from London)

Feedback generally highlights a number of points. Participants seem to prefer and benefit from a training approach which manages a creative synthesis between introspective work, that is, work on exploring one’s own values and beliefs systems and one’s own blocks and blind-spots, and linking this with practice based exercises which address the reality of their work. Participants have generally reflected positively on increased levels of awareness of themselves as cultural individuals. There has been an overwhelming appreciation from those who have found their voice which was lost through guilt and fear of being labelled in one way or another. And there are those who have regained confidence to challenge positively. Many have commented on regaining a sense of direction which was lost in the struggle to combat institutional racism and oppression. A majority of participants have found real value in the psychodynamic approach which offers a focus on exploring the unconscious realm of human interactions and its connection with cultural and racial differences.

Issues for trainers

Equal Opportunities training can be very rewarding and even more exciting and challenging using a psychodynamic approach. Consistent positive feedback and evaluations have led me to devise a personal approach with techniques which are simple yet powerfully effective. The following points highlight this approach:-

1. Be fully briefed about the nature and appropriateness of the request and contract to be established.
2. Analyse and work with pre-transference issues, i.e. being cognisant of pre-training dynamics and their influence on the course.
3. Deal with anxieties and ‘baggage’ at the onset of all training by allowing its actual or symbolic expression in an opening circle round.
4. Acknowledge and support the lone black member’s position in a predominantly white group, by highlighting and deflecting those inevitable tendencies for the group to dump (project), scapegoat, create as the black member as ‘spokesperson’ for black issues, and use as abdicator of white shame and guilt.

5. Emphasise early 'introspective' work which is covered by exercises examining values and beliefs systems, and trust exercises highlighting complex dynamics in black/white relations.
6. Use of visual aids after 'introspective' work can create a supportive break from what is painful, yet allowing for reflection on ways forward. Helpful videos on issues of differences can be rented from Social Services, Probation Services and Counselling bodies.
7. Set clear strategies for role plays of 'live' or appropriately constructed scenarios. This teaching tool is best used and timed before and after the lunch break, thereby allowing enough time to process. Constructive challenge is best made at this stage of the work where difficult and even painful realisations can be taken on board in an atmosphere of established trust and safety.
8. The trainer's input is necessary after each block of work allowing for teaching which uses timely introductions of relevant texts, appropriate self disclosure, anecdotes and statistics if necessary. The inclusion of the group's here and now dynamics can be worked with to provide 'real' material to illuminate the workings of conscious and unconscious dynamics in intercultural situations.
9. Organise endings well to create adequate time to work out ways forward and clearly identify what was learnt. Encourage members to share what was being taken away, future learning needs, and other course learning for work and life generally.

The above approach is embraced by ingredients which include warmth, clarity of ideas and speech, non-gratuitous humour and a way of diminishing the emphasis on terminology. Other ingredients include not encouraging an atmosphere of overzealous "political correctness", not colluding with black group members and not blaming white group members.

Because the psychodynamic approach has the effect of creating a state of deep arousal and agitation, I feel I often become the container for the group's fragmentation and projections. It is imperative that these are analysed and understood. Support and holding should be maintained in regular supervision. Meeting fortnightly with two other independent trainers and using other colleagues for consultation on difficult and problematic training issues has been invaluable in my work. Supervision, whether individual, group, or ad hoc consultation, is the necessary stabiliser and forum for the trainer to debrief. Failure to maintain this support system can easily result in emotional and mental exhaustion and consequent clinical burnout.

As Hawkins and Shohet (1989) confirm, the professional carer 'can survive the negative attacks of the client through the strength of being held within and by the supervisory relationship.' (p.3).

This concept of supervision is taken from Donald Winnicott's (1965) theory of the 'good-enough mother' needing to withstand the frustrations of the child by being supported in her role either by the child's father or other supportive adult.

As a black trainer who also works as a psychotherapist and clinical supervisor, I choose to work on my own for selfish reasons. I find it is less stressful overall, but it brings with it a loneliness and isolation. This is however counteracted by my other work as a part-time tutor and as a psychotherapist within a local collective.

The advantages of working with someone who is an equal (your equal) can prove richly rewarding, less burdensome and immensely supportive. In my experience, this kind of partnership is rare and not easily sustainable.

Trainers who work consistently in partnerships can provide each other with immediate support and feedback, and can offer training groups the benefits of a richer dynamic experience of complementary trainer styles. However, there can be problems of working from different standpoints which may not necessarily fit well together. A trainer who believes in racial integration will not be able to work therapeutically with a colleague who supports separatism. In a partnership where one partner holds firm on say, an Afrocentric approach to counselling, and the other sees Afrocentricity as meaningless terminology (as opposed to a clear conceptual framework for counselling others), an atmosphere will develop where the two partners will not be able to work effectively together.

Training in black and white issues and other areas of Equalities Training generally will need continued monitoring, critiquing and evaluation. As race relations undergo constant change within our society, the repercussions will be felt in many ways and places, including the work environment. Changing political climate will dictate organisations' professional focus and in turn, the demands for continued training in race and cultural diversity.

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