

Script B**TMA 02*****Introduction***

In this assignment I will describe how my previous experience has affected my personal values and discuss the ways they have changed in response to that experience. Then I will discuss my current understanding of professional social work values and how I have arrived at that understanding, and to outline those issues I would like to work on during my present placement. Finally I will summarise the points discussed.

I came into social work in 1988 after experiencing a lot of turmoil in my life. My first job was as a mental health worker working with people who were severe and enduring mentally ill. During my years at the centre I was encouraged by management to attend training courses, the feedback I had from colleagues, service users and management were positive regarding the standard of my work. Being the only black member of staff was not an issue, I was treated equally I was given the same opportunities as the white members of staff. Within that working environment I was able to develop the skills I had, and acquire new ones to enable me to increase my knowledge and to develop on a professional level. In 1990 due to economic factors, I made the decision to move on and sought new challenges. I applied for and got a job as a day centre officer with the same client group in an informal setting. The centre operated an open door policy whereby clients could drop in as and when they needed support. Referral to the centre by professionals was not a criteria to access the service, referral was by word of mouth or self-referral. The job was interesting in that every day was different. The centre was located in an area of great deprivation and social issues; therefore the job was demanding and challenging.

For some reason the manager took an instant dislike to me and proceeded to make my life unbearable, he would undermine me, and the decisions I made regarding work. He would use his authority as a manager in such a way to divide the staff in order to be more effective in oppressing me. I began to doubt my abilities my self-esteem was at an all time low, I became disillusioned, I felt devalued, and de-skilled I had lost my enthusiasm. The mere thought of going to work would evoke fear and dread in me. Inevitably this affected my practice. As a woman of colour my upbringing was to respect each other, and to treat people the way I would like to be treated. As you can imagine this behaviour was alien to me, and especially from another professional. Eventually in 1990 the day centre was closed, all the staff

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were re-located to a resource centre, again with the same client group, working in a multidisciplinary team the manager was de-moted to out-reach manager instead of overall manager for the resource centre. There was new management structure in place, after a few months working with new management the skills I had lost were returning, I began to feel valued again as a worker, I regain my self-esteem, and began to enjoy my work once more.

This experience has shown me that abuse or power can have a detrimental effect on the oppressed and service users. Working in an oppressive environment can have serious implication for practice, and the service I provide. I became ineffective as a practitioner, I felt dis-empowered and powerlessness. The manager in this case failed to acknowledge that as a person with a white identity it was important to value and understand himself in order to lead, help and empower others. As a result of this failing I felt dis-empowered and undervalued within the team setting. Experience has taught me that being oppressed can have serious consequences for your practice, therefore as a social worker I endeavour to practice in an anti-oppressive manner. I encourage and empower service users to build on the strengths they already have in order to achieve their aim, I engage with service users and colleagues in a sensitive and respectful manner. As Thompson states: 'Social workers are in a position of power and influence, therefore the scope for discrimination and oppression are considerable, be it intentional or by default. (Thompson, 1997, cited in Part A, Unit 1 p.78). Due to being managed by what may be considered as an ineffective manager, I am prepared to professionally challenge oppression and discrimination in order to influence equality in service.

My current understanding of professional social work values and how I arrive at this understanding are, during the years of being oppressed, I thought the problem was with me, on reflection it occur to me that the manager of the day centre did not identify and question his own values and prejudices, and their implications for practice. Could it have been that he held a stereotypical view of black people being inferior and different? According to Dominelli (1998) 'Valuing 'difference' goes against common sense socialisation which portrays difference as inferior or deems it in pathological terms as a 'deficit''. (Set book, Dominelli, p.10). Could that be how he perceives me different and inferior? I often wondered about his interaction with black service users, and his perception of them, did he feel the same contempt for them as he did for me? If the manager had sought professional training he would have realised that the 'difference' may have been overruled. He did not respect me as an equal member of the team, hence

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the divide and rule tactic to deny me the right to being an effective member of staff, therefore I was excluded. The manager fail to realise that valuing others as equals applies not only to working with service users but also to working with, including supporting and being supported by colleagues. I have arrived at this understanding in that as a social worker you must identify and question your values, your prejudices and their implication for practice, you must also be self-aware.

By being self-aware you begin to know yourself. 'Self knowledge is a central component of the repertoire of skills held b a reflective practitioner'. (Shon quoted in set book, Adams, Dominelli, and Payne, p.10). Being self aware means you are open minded, you are constantly reflecting not just on your current practice, but being aware of previous experiences and the impact they can have on your practice. Having personal and professional values are important and are an integral part of social work, they help to guide your practice as a social worker.

The manager did not practice in a manner that does not stigmatise or disadvantage individual, groups or communities. During that experience I was not allowed to develop professionally, the impact on my practice made me an ineffective practitioner. I was focused on building my self-esteem and trying to survive the ordeal instead of focussing on new legislation and guidelines which could have improved my service delivery to service users. Now as a social worker my practice is non-judgemental, I do not stigmatise or disadvantage service users, and reading the course material has enabled me to underpin my practice knowledge with the theoretical framework which has helped to improve my practice.

The manager did not promote appropriate ethnic and cultural diversity of services, in that in his failure to acknowledge me as an effective member of staff he completely disregard the agency's equal opportunity act to treat all employees fairly and equally, by excluding me as a member of staff with his oppressive methods, which did have an impact on me personally and professionally in that I went to work in order to have money to pay the bills, I had lost interest in my job and the service users and vice-versa, I became a paid non-practitioner. He undermined me every opportunity he got. I became ineffective in my approach, I in turn oppressed the service users, I did not respect them, I had no clear value base to guide my practice which would afford equal rights and respect to service users and colleagues. I have arrived at my current understanding of social work values because my values have changed, as a social worker it is important for me to have adequate knowledge, understanding and sensitivity towards service users, to treat them with respect, to treat them fairly, equally and as

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individuals or this could have serious consequences of my practice and to service users. Also to gain the skills and knowledge to be able to communicate and engaged or promote and enable and improve my practice. Most of all to develop professional competence.

The issues I find problematic and would like to work on while on placement is getting to grips with critically evaluating my work practice in order to become more knowledgeable and competent and to be aware of the contextual basis of my practice and in relation to the theoretical framework and how meanings and understandings are formed.

During my present placement working with the children with disabilities team, it has become apparent to me how easy it is to oppress others, be it consciously or unconsciously. For example, parents in their effort to protect their children from being ridiculed by their peers because they are deemed to be different, can become over protective in their methods to protect their children to the extent of not allowing their children to play with their peers, they can become oppressive in their methods to safeguard their child. Parents can also feel oppressed by the resentment from other members of the family by giving birth to a disabled child, they could see the birth as a punishment from God, parents especially mothers could have a feeling of inadequacy and embarrassment in having a disabled child. Due to the over protectiveness the parents feels it spills over as the child develops towards adulthood, therefore often undermining the child's (individual's) potential to take risks and develop towards adulthood. As a result these young adults are disadvantaged often unable to live independently of parents or staff guidance due to this form of oppression.

Society as a whole can and does oppress people who are deemed to be different by using disablist language, and making access to places of entertainment virtually impossible to the disabled. My placement within the children with disabilities team have opened my eyes to a lot of issues, the guilt I felt for having used disablist language in the past, I will now try not to use that sort of language again, because it can be seen as another form of oppression.

As a social work student I have to be aware of the power dynamics between the practice teacher and myself, she has the power to pass or fail me but non the less I have to be prepared to challenge. I consider that as a white woman my practice teacher may have stereotypical ideas about me, as a black woman, therefore I am mindful of the issues this raises for me in this situation. Therefore where I recognise inequality and oppressive attitudes, I am prepared to professionally challenge.

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I am prepared to bring her attention to the fact that I am aware of her perception of me and be prepared to professionally challenge those perceptions. According to the course material it states that anti-oppressive practice is about minimising the power differences in society, in this case between the practice teacher and myself.

Conclusion

It is vital as social workers for us to practice in an anti-oppressive manner, or it could have serious consequences for our practice. It is also important that we recognise and identify the impact previous experiences can have on our present practice, and to be continually reflective, in order to make sense of that lived experience and to be able to critically evaluate those experiences in context. Also as practitioners to be prepared to challenge any power dynamics we may encounter, and to professionally challenge oppression.

References

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