

Do we practice (or teach) what we preach? Developing a more inclusive learning environment to better prepare social work students for practice through improving the exploration of their different ethnicities within teaching, learning and assessment opportunities.

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ABSTRACT

Teaching experience at the University of Suffolk noted anecdotally that Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students avoid discussing their identity, cultural heritage, norms and values, in lectures, tutor groups and in assignments.

To improve the integration of different cultural perspectives into the social work curriculum, we devised a small-scale qualitative research project Spring, 2017, to explore students' views of teaching, learning and assessment about cultural norms and differences, seeking the views of both BAME students and white students on the programme in order to compare and contrast their experiences.

Focus groups were used to gather the views of BAME and white students about the opportunities and barriers to discussing identity, culture, and anti-racism. The findings raised significant issues, specifically about the barriers for both BAME and white students to considering cultural differences. Student perspectives suggest more sensitive approaches to considering cultural differences; more responsibility for white lecturers to explore white privilege and its impact; and more safe spaces to manage emotional responses to oppression to enable exchange of experience and learning about different cultural norms and values. The article analyses the findings, discussing ways forward to improve the student experience and promote good practice in teaching and learning.

KEYWORDS: And phrases: anti-racist practice, cultural diversity, social justice, student voice, good practice in social work education

Introduction

Teaching experience on a Social Work programme in England at the University of Suffolk (UoS) noted anecdotally over a few years that BAME students (see [Appendix 1](#) for notes on terminology) tend not to discuss their identity, or cultural heritage and cultural norms as they differ from the dominant white norms. As social work is a profession that seeks to promote critical reflection, empathy and the celebration of difference and diversity through education into practice, then, clearly, this was a situation that required attention and change to ensure that graduates from the programme are able to practice in an anti-discriminatory manner, celebrate difference as a positive fact of life and promote social justice in their work with users of services from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This article presents findings from a small qualitative study which has played a part in the process of change to develop a more open and encouraging learning culture wherein BAME students could feel confident to discuss, reflect on, and critically evaluate differences in ethnicity and culture in their study groups and in their assessed work. It contains reflections that may be of use to other social work qualifying programmes, seeking to ensure that they reflect the curriculum standards of the current regulator, the Health and Care Professions Council (in particular, Standard 4.3, (Health and Care Professions Council 2018) *Standards of education and training*. Retrieved from <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-relevant-to-education-and-training/set/> [Google Scholar], p. 32)). This requires that students... 'reflect the philosophy, core values, skills and knowledge base as articulated in any relevant curriculum guidance', (in this case, the Professional Capabilities Framework (British Association of Social Workers [BASW], 2018) *Professional capabilities framework*. Retrieved from <https://www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/PCF%20CHART%20update%2010-9-18.pdf> [Google Scholar])), until these standards are replaced by Social Work England sometime during 2019.

Background

A number of themes emerge from the literature that resonate with the research presented as the focus of this article. These will be briefly explored to contextualise the research.

BAME students' experiences in higher education

Whilst there has been an increase in the diversity of students on social work courses in England in the last decade or more (across all dimensions of identity, and including ethnicity) (Dillon, 2011) Dillon, J. (2011). Black minority

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Social Work Education on 25 March 2019, available online:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

ethnic students navigating their way from access courses to social work programmes: Key considerations for the selection of students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(8), 1477–1496.[Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]; Moriarty & Murray, 2007Moriarty, J., & Murray, J. (2007). Who wants to be a social worker? Using routine published data to identify trends in the numbers of people applying for and completing social work programmes in England. *British Journal of Social Work*, 37(4), 715–733.[Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]), this does not imply equality and full participation exists throughout the system. Findings from studies carried out on other social work programmes in England, Scotland, Wales, Australia and in the United States showed difficulties and barriers in teaching cultural diversity on social work courses (see Bartoli, Kennedy, & Tedam, 2008Bartoli, A., Kennedy, S., & Tedam, P. (2008). Practice learning: Who is failing to adjust? Black African student experience of practice learning in a social work setting. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 75–90.[Crossref], [Google Scholar]; Fairtlough, Bernard, Fletcher, & Ahmet, 2014Fairtlough, A., Bernard, C., Fletcher, J., & Ahmet, A. (2014). Black social work students' experiences of practice learning: understanding differential progression rates. *Journal of Social Work*, 14(6), 605–624.[Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]; Gair, 2017Gair, S. (2017). Pondering the colour of empathy: Social work students' reasoning on activism, empathy and racism. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(1), 162–180.[Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]; Hillen & Levy, 2015Hillen, P., & Levy, S. (2015). Framing the experiences of BME social work students within a narrative of educating for a culturally diverse workforce. *Social Work Education*, 34(7), 785–798.[Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]; Werkmeister Rozas & Garras, 2016Werkmeister Rozas, L., & Garras, A. M. (2016). Towards a human rights culture in social work education. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(4), 890–905.[Crossref], [PubMed], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]; Williams & Parrott, 2013Williams, C., & Parrott, L.(2013). From specialism to genericism: Rising and falling to the challenges of responding to racial and ethnic diversity in social work education in Wales. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43(6), 1206–1224.[Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]). In some of these examples, different teaching tools (such as the Mandela Model (Tedam, 2011Tedam, P. (2011). The MANDELA model of practice learning: An old present in new wrapping? *Journal of Practice Teaching & Learning*, 11(2), 19–33. [Google Scholar]) and empathy training (Gair, 2017Gair, S. (2017). Pondering the colour of empathy: Social work students' reasoning on activism, empathy and racism. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(1), 162–180.[Web of Science®], [Google Scholar])) are proposed to tackle the problem and improve the teaching of anti-racism, cultural diversity and human rights. Dillon (2011Dillon, J. (2011). Black minority ethnic students navigating their way from access courses to social work programmes: Key considerations for the selection of students. *British*

Journal of Social Work, 41(8), 1477–1496.[Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar], p. 1491) discusses the obstacles at the organisational level, created for some BAME students through increased competition for places on social work courses and the credentialism and greater selectivity that has entered into the selection process since social work became a degree programme, which can impact negatively on BAME students.

The learning environment has to be conducive to the development and support of confident learners and there is extensive academic literature, particularly from the USA and from this country, that indicates that black and minority ethnic students in education at all levels and, more generally, across different disciplines at HE level, do less well in the outcomes of their studies (Isik et al., 2018Isik, U., El Tahir, O., Meeter, M., Heymans, M. W., Jansma, E. P., Croiset, G., & Kusurkar, R. A.(2018). Factors influencing academic motivation of ethnic minority students: A review. *SAGE Open*, 8(2), 1–23.[Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]; See Appendix 3 for a local perspective), arising from a range of issues—internal to the student (for example, internalised racism, self-confidence and self-doubts (Housee, 2011Housee, S. (2011). What difference does difference make? A discussion with ethnic minority students about their learning experience in higher education. *Learning and Teaching*, 4(1), 70–91.[Crossref], [Google Scholar])), and external, including environmental and institutional issues, such as stereotyping (the impact of stereotype threat arising from negative stereotypes about their group (Massey & Fischer, 2008Massey, D. S., & Fischer, M. J.(2008). Stereotype threat and academic performance. New findings from a racially diverse sample of college freshman. *Du Bois Review*, 2(1), 45–68. [Google Scholar]; Steele, 1997Steele, C. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist*, 52(6), 13–629.[Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]; Woolf, Cave, Greenhalgh, & Dacre, 2008Woolf, K., Cave, J., Greenhalgh, T., & Dacre, J. (2008). Ethnic stereotypes and the underachievement of UK medical students from ethnic minorities: Qualitative study. *British Medical Journal*, 337(7670), 1–7. [Google Scholar])), oppositional identity (resistance to educational achievement which means ‘acting white’ and ‘racial’ betrayal (Downey, 2008Downey, D. B. (2008). Black/white differences in school performance. The oppositional culture explanation. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34(1), 107–126.[Crossref], [Google Scholar])), and resource issues (lack of social and cultural capital, financial constraints (Housee, 2011Housee, S. (2011). What difference does difference make? A discussion with ethnic minority students about their learning experience in higher education. *Learning and Teaching*, 4(1), 70–91.[Crossref], [Google Scholar])). These issues are very similar to those raised in the UK by Cree (2011Cree, V. E. (2011). ‘I’d like to call you my mother.’ Reflections on supervising international PhD students in social work. *Social Work Education*, 31(4), 451–464.[Taylor & Francis Online], [Google Scholar]) in her study of international BME students

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Social Work Education on 25 March 2019, available online:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

studying for a Phd in Social Work, in which she highlights the additional pressures, compared with 'home' students, that these students have to contend with, including different academic conventions and expectations, language differences and difficulties, social isolation, financial and other stresses and insecurities. Singh's earlier study (2005) Singh, S. (2005). *Listening to the Silence, unpublished action research*. Edinburgh: The Open University in Scotland. [Google Scholar], cited in Hillen & Levy, 2015 Hillen, P., & Levy, S. (2015). Framing the experiences of BME social work students within a narrative of educating for a culturally diverse workforce. *Social Work Education*, 34(7), 785–798. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]) raised significant concerns about the learning environment for social work education, notably, a Euro-centric bias, pathologising of BAME students and institutional structures of racism.

Qualifying social work courses at universities in England are, as indicated above, no exception within the well-noted trend (Bartoli et al., 2008) Bartoli, A., Kennedy, S., & Tedam, P. (2008). Practice learning: Who is failing to adjust? Black African student experience of practice learning in a social work setting. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 75–90. [Crossref], [Google Scholar]; Hussein, Moriarty, Manthorpe, & Huxley, 2008) Hussein, S., Moriarty, J., Manthorpe, J., & Huxley, P. (2008). Diversity and progression among social work students starting social work qualifying programmes in England between 1995 and 1998: A quantitative study. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(8), 1588–1609. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]) of differential progression rates between BAME and white students, and similarly on access courses to Higher Education for social work (Dillon, 2011) Dillon, J. (2011). Black minority ethnic students navigating their way from access courses to social work programmes: Key considerations for the selection of students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(8), 1477–1496. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]). In terms of barriers for students on courses, Dillon's (2011) Dillon, J. (2011). Black minority ethnic students navigating their way from access courses to social work programmes: Key considerations for the selection of students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(8), 1477–1496. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar], p. 1489) study highlights external barriers to success for BAME students on access courses to social work in South East England as socio-economic disadvantage, alongside working and managing family commitments.

Anti-oppressive practice

The significance of anti-oppressive practice, anti-racism and cultural competence in social work education and practice is well-documented (Bartoli, 2013) Bartoli, A. (ed). (2013). *Anti-racism in social work practice*. St.

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd.. [Google Scholar]; Dominelli, 2008Dominelli, L. (2008). *Anti-racist social work*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar]; Smethurst & Bhatti-Sinclair, 2017Smethurst, C., & Bhatti-Sinclair, K. (2017). Diversity and difference in challenging times: The social and political context. In K. Bhatti-Sinclair & C.Smethurst (Eds.), *Diversity, difference and dilemmas. Analysing concepts and developing skills* (pp. 3–12). London: Open University Press. [Google Scholar]; Thompson, 2012Thompson, M. (2012). *Anti-discriminatory practice: Equality, diversity and social justice* (5thed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar]). These concepts all recognize the structural forces that create oppression at the same time as working with individuals in ways that mitigate its impact and promote social justice. They relate also to human rights, which have perhaps received less attention in social work until more recently (Reichert, 2007Reichert, E. (2007). Human rights in the twenty-first century: Creating a new paradigm for social work. In E.Reichert (Ed.), *Challenges in human rights: A social work perspective* (pp. 1–15). New York: Columbia University Press. [Google Scholar]), but these are equally important in relation to anti-racism—specifically in the core notions of human dignity; non-discrimination; and economic, social and cultural rights for all individuals (Werkmeister Rozas & Garras, 2016Werkmeister Rozas, L., & Garras, A. M. (2016). Towards a human rights culture in social work education. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(4), 890–905.[Crossref], [PubMed], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]). From a social justice perspective, within which anti-racism is a fundamental aspect, students need to learn about a set of values for practice that encompass equity, responsibility (for themselves and for others) and accountability (to their profession and their organization—or to challenge this where failings in relation to equality occur). They also need to develop a critical appreciation of whiteness and of discourses of exclusion.

Whiteness and a black perspective

Racism continues to affect the lives of many people in this country (Bhopal, 2018Bhopal, K. (2018). *White privilege. The myth of a post-racial society*. Bristol: Policy Press.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar]; Eddo-Lodge, 2018Eddo-Lodge, R. (2018). *Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. [Google Scholar]; Smethurst & Bhatti-Sinclair, 2017Smethurst, C., & Bhatti-Sinclair, K. (2017). Diversity and difference in challenging times: The social and political context. In K. Bhatti-Sinclair & C.Smethurst (Eds.), *Diversity, difference and dilemmas. Analysing concepts and developing skills* (pp. 3–12). London: Open University Press. [Google Scholar]). It is defined by Masocha (2017Masocha, S. (2017). A 'turn to language' as a response to the shifting contours of racist discourse. *Practice, Social Work in Action*, 29(3), 159–177. [Google Scholar], p. 161) as 'an ideology that is enacted through social

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

practices and serves to establish and maintain unequal power relations’.

There is continuing evidence of discrimination, oppression and racial inequality in the UK (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016 Equality and Human Rights Commission. (2016). *Healing a divided Britain: The need for a comprehensive race equality strategy*. London: EHRC. [Google Scholar]). The report found 5 areas where urgent improvement is required: employment; education; crime; living standards and health and care. Within education, the report found that only 6 per cent of Black school leavers attended a Russell Group university, compared with 12 per cent of mixed and Asian school leavers and 11 per cent of White school leavers. Social work students, whether white or BAME, are involved in its impact, and there is a growing literature on critical whiteness and white privilege, which, as the other side of the racism coin, are crucial areas of learning for white social work students (see Abrams & Gibson, 2007 Abrams, L. S., & Gibson, P.(2007). Reframing multicultural education: Teaching white privilege in the social work curriculum. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 43(1), 147–160.[Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]; Crofts, 2013 Crofts, P. (2013). Critical race theory and exploring whiteness. In A. Bartoli (Ed.), *Anti-racism in social work practice* (pp. 103–124). St Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd. [Google Scholar]; Jeyasingham, 2012 Jeyasingham, D. (2012). White noise: A critical evaluation of social work education’s engagement with whiteness studies. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(4), 669–686.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]; Kennedy, 2013 Kennedy, S. (2013). White woman listening. In A. Bartoli(Ed.), *Anti-racism in social work practice* (pp. 83–102). St Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd. [Google Scholar]; Ng’andu, 2017 Ng’andu, B. (2017). Being white – Feeling guilty?. In K. Bhatti-Sinclair & C. Smethurst (Eds.), *Diversity, difference and dilemmas: Analysing concepts and developing skills* (pp. 26–33). London: Open University Press. [Google Scholar]).

McIntosh (1988 Macintosh, P. (1988) *White privilege: Unpacking the invisible Knapsack*. Retrieved

from <https://www.csusm.edu/sjs/documents/unpackingtheknapsack.pdf> [Google Scholar], cited in Crofts, 2013 Crofts, P. (2013). Critical race theory and exploring whiteness. In A. Bartoli (Ed.), *Anti-racism in social work practice* (pp. 103–124). St Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd. [Google Scholar], p. 107)

explored the idea of white privilege, as unearned social rights which white people possess without ever having to think about them. This led her to identify fifty ways in which she experienced white privilege on a daily basis. She describes it as ‘an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks’. Bhopal (2018 Bhopal, K. (2018). *White privilege. The myth of a post-racial society*. Bristol: Policy Press.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar], p. 25) discusses the role of institutions in perpetuating white privilege and contends that... ..In

such white spaces, whiteness and white Western practices are the norm and those which do not comply with these are seen as outsiders and others’.

Bhopal (2018) Bhopal, K. (2018). *White privilege. The myth of a post-racial society*. Bristol: Policy Press. [Crossref], [Google Scholar], p. 27) argues that, although through intersectionality, a person’s identity may contain many facets, for example, class, gender, religion and sexuality, being white is so powerful that it ‘takes precedence over all other forms of identity’. Miller (1976) Miller, J. B. (1976). *Toward a new psychology of women*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. [Google Scholar]) suggests that privilege is often unconscious; therefore, for many white students, the involvement within social work education is often their first introduction to these concepts.

Culturally responsive pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy has been seen as an important way of tackling the underachievement of BAME students, for example, in teacher training in the USA (Howard, 2003) Howard, T. C. (2003). Culturally relevant pedagogy: Ingredients for critical teacher reflection. *Theory into Practice*, 42(3), 195–202. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]; Rychly & Graves, 2012) Rychly, L., & Graves, E. (2012). Teacher characteristics for culturally responsive pedagogy. *Multi-Cultural Studies*, 14(1), 44–49. [Google Scholar]), where the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of diverse students are actively attended to within the curriculum. This includes values, traditions, social and cultural norms, relationship norms and communication styles (Gay, 2002) Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106–116. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]. Studies applying culturally sensitive practice within social work education point to the need for educators to address diverse identities within the student group. It is suggested that this is in order to manage.... ‘the challenge of finding pedagogical methods that model and demonstrate the anti-racist and culturally competent practice that they are advocating, rather than purely engaging in a descriptive or didactic process’... (Gollan & O’Leary, 2009) Gollan, S., & O’Leary, P. J. (2009). Teaching culturally competent social work practice through black and white pedagogical partnerships. *Social Work Education*, 28(7), 707–721. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Google Scholar], p. 708).

These authors suggest a model of a black-white partnership teaching as a safe and effective way of exploring personal and professional identities within diverse groups of students. The aim is to ensure that, in a student-centred way, each student’s cultural background and cultural references can be included in teaching and learning to improve academic achievement and a sense of inclusivity and well-being for BAME student groups.

Consequently, it should be acknowledged that the focus of this particular study is not new but remains a current concern. In addition, the purpose of the study, as well as to identify barriers to critical reflection and learning about culture and identity, is to add to the existing body of knowledge about student experiences and to address issues that may undermine teaching, learning and achievement on the social work programme at UoS, and, indeed, elsewhere.

Methodology

A three-stage approach was employed to address the issues identified earlier, which involved;

1. the completion of a curriculum audit of individual modules in 2015, to identify strengths and gaps in teaching. This was a teaching exercise which formed part of an annual curriculum review and as such was not part of the formal ethics committee submission.
2. a team development day, which, as in 1. above, was an institutional expectation for staff development to enhance teaching and learning. It provided a reflective space and was led by an external facilitator with experience of these issues from educational and therapeutic perspectives, to examine social work lecturers' own issues in teaching anti-racism, black perspectives and white privilege. One day was not enough but it started to deepen team members' thinking about barriers, change and improvement.
3. the student perspective—a small scale qualitative study using focus groups to explore perceptions and gain understanding of the student experience from across the three years of the BA Social Work degree programme. This is the stage of the project reported on here.

The aim of this small-scale exploratory study was to increase understanding, from the perspectives of ethnicity and culture, of how well (or otherwise) the programme created opportunities, through teaching and learning, for students to explore cultural differences, either in academic discussions, in lectures or tutor groups, or in practice learning with practice educators, for students from minority ethnic groups, with the aim of providing important learning for the whole student group.

To this end, a student researcher was engaged from a European university who was interested in the area of research for her own studies. Her status as a student was helpful for working with the student cohorts, to engage them in the study, as she was seen as an 'insider' as a student, but an 'outsider' in relation to the programme and the lecturing team (Padgett, 2017Padgett, D. K. (2017). *Qualitative methods in social work research*(3rd ed.). London: Sage. [Google Scholar], p. 65–66). It was thought

that equal power and status between the researcher and participants would enable students to share their thoughts more openly.

Ethical approval was granted in March 2017 by the University's Ethics Committee. All students across the three years of the programme were then sent information explaining the study and inviting participation. Informed consent was gained from participants and the right to withdrawal was clarified. Focus groups were selected as a method of data collection, because in terms of researcher time available, they were an economical means of gathering data (Alston & Bowles, 2018; Alston, M., & Bowles, W. (2018). *Research for social workers; An introduction to methods* (4th ed.). NSW: A&U Academic. [Google Scholar], p. 194). When the research project was initially discussed with students, in the early planning stage, BAME students asked if they could be interviewed in groups together as they would feel more confident in raising sensitive issues in this context. White students were also in agreement with this proposition. We structured this into the research design, devising two focus groups (namely, one for white and one for BAME students) for each year group (6 in total across the three-year degree programme). The homogeneity of the groups provided mutual support and encouragement for participants to discuss some sensitive and difficult issues that they may not have found easy to raise in an individual interview (Flick, 2014; Flick, U. (2014). *An introduction to qualitative research* (5th ed.). London: SAGE. [Google Scholar], p. 251). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013; Kamberelis, G., & Dimitriadis, G. (2013). *Focus Groups. From structured interviews to collective conversations*. Abingdon: Routledge. [Crossref], [Google Scholar], p. 40) note how focus groups have an '*intensely social nature*' and bring together '*a confluence of varied perspectives on similar experiences*', providing the opportunity for participants to develop their ideas together about the difficulties faced and how to create change, through a kind of 'group think'. The research student was able to create an informal yet focused climate for discussion.

Five focus groups were held across the three cohorts (Years 1–3). Individual interviews were offered if a student preferred this, or was unable to attend a group. The focus groups were as follows—

Year 1 BAME—Four students

Year 2 BAME—Seven students

Year 3 BAME—Two students

Year 1 White—Two students

Year 2 White—Three students

It was not possible to arrange a focus group with Year 3 White students because of difficulties in arranging a mutually convenient time due to the

programme timetable. Individual interviews were offered but, in the end, an online forum was created to capture the perceptions of those unable to attend a group. One white student made use of this forum. (Table 1—see below—here).

Table 1. Student numbers and ratios.

CSVDisplay Table

An interview schedule was devised (see [Appendix 1](#)), and interviews were recorded and transcribed. A thematic analysis of the content of the interviews was used to identify themes and to compare these across the groups. A draft report was produced and circulated to participants for their comments to check for accuracy and to minimize researcher influence.

The limitations of the study are that as a qualitative project, only a small number of students was involved. All students on the programme were invited to attend a focus group. They self-selected and, notably, more BAME students than white students attended groups overall. Significantly, less white students demonstrated interest and motivation to take part, even though we offered an online forum to make it practically more easy for students to engage. One final year white student made use of this opportunity. All students who took part were motivated by an awareness of the need for change.

Themes arising from the findings

Experiences of racism and their effects on teaching and learning about culture and ethnicity

BAME students bring ongoing experiences of racism with them on to the social work course at UoS, forming a lens through which they give meaning to their experiences in the university, based on past and current experiences outside the course. In terms of everyday racism that students experienced in their lives generally, one Year 3 BAME student contrasted her experience as a BAME person living in an East Anglian county town, compared to London where there is more diversity. She commented that in her town... *'it was more like trying to fit in'* and she felt that *'everybody was so aware...and everybody made me aware...'* of her difference.

The power of accents

One BAME student talked about his accent and how he feels he is seen as less capable on the course because of it. Another BAME student described being met with incredulity when she speaks with a British accent, and has a

typical British name, and has been asked ‘*so what is your real name?*’ An accent (or perceived lack of accent) marks these students out as different, as outsiders, and as problems in terms of communication, although, as one student commented, the logic of this is very questionable as accents within white communities can be hard to understand and people need to make the effort to listen and communicate to find meaning.

Generalizations about culture and identity

In all three BAME focus groups, there was discussion about how BAME students were often treated by white students and sometimes by lecturers, as a homogenous group, which they found difficult. White students will see all ‘black’ people as the same and diversity, for instance, within different African cultures and different individual experiences within a culture, is not understood by white students, demonstrated with comments such as... ‘*In your culture, you do.....*’ or ‘*...In Africa you do....*’; therefore, evidencing little knowledge of Africa as a continent, containing many cultures, religions and different practices.

Subtle racism

Some BAME students thought that racism is often subtle, both outside the university as well as on the social work course; ‘*Racism is going underground; it is more hidden ...*’. An aspect of this for some BAME students was that they felt their cultural values and beliefs were not given sufficient importance on the course ‘*...and if you don’t acknowledge that value and if you don’t acknowledge it while you are here, are you gonna acknowledge it in practice?*’

One Year 2 BAME student also said that for group work in lectures, there were some white students that... ‘*don’t want to work with black people...there is a massive divide*’.

Tired of challenging and fearful of being judged

BAME students also feel labelled and under-rated in written work, when English is not their first language and find lecturers’ judgments on their written work sometimes hard to accept. In group discussions, they felt ‘*shot down*’ and then feared writing anything down for assessment.

Because of the nature of the course ...we speak about equality and respect, but literately EVERYTIME we are talking about something we ALWAYS get shot down ...’

This echoes the warning from Fletcher et al.’s (2015) Fletcher, J., Bernard, C., Fairtlough, A., & Ahmet, A.(2015). Beyond

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

equal access to equal outcomes: The role of the institutional culture in promoting full participation, positive inter-group interaction and timely progression for minority social work students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 45(1), 120–137. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar] study against complacency within social work programmes' staff teams, arising from the anti-oppressive value base within social work, which can blind teaching staff to the oppressions that minority students experience within the HEI (Fletcher et al., 2015 Fletcher, J., Bernard, C., Fairtlough, A., & Ahmet, A. (2015). Beyond equal access to equal outcomes: The role of the institutional culture in promoting full participation, positive inter-group interaction and timely progression for minority social work students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 45(1), 120–137. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar], p. 126)—an 'it doesn't happen here' attitude.

University support services

At a more general level in the university, there were also views that the needs of BAME students were ignored. Students spoke about their perception that some groups (for example, those with specific learning disabilities) get help but they do not. It was seen that what Learning Services offered for those with English as a second language was not really any different from the support that was offered to most other students, and that this should be improved. This contrasts to Stevenson's report (2012 Stevenson, J. (2012). *Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment*. York: HEA. [Google Scholar], p. 15) in which BME (as identified in the report) students were unequivocally opposed to the idea of targeted support, suggesting it... 'smacked of inadvertent racism'.

Confidence to make changes

The students spoke about handling these difficult issues in different ways. Sometimes they might act self-protectively out of tiredness or avoidance, or they may confront, as when a student stood up in a tutor group because she was upset;

Right...I don't like the attitude of this tutorial group' and she spoke about how she felt victimized and bullied. Those present described how her action was very powerful and *'from that situation onwards, people were really mindful.*

The important issue from all the experiences above is that however an individual decided to handle an issue, whether to accommodate or to confront, they all felt the effects of the experiences as negative and undermining of identity and sense of self.

Whiteness and white privilege

Ideas about whiteness and white privilege emerged across all focus groups and there tended to be a clear division between the responses of white students. There were those who believed that there was not a significant problem on the programme and these students tended to take a colour-blind approach, seemingly unaware of their own structural advantages. In her book 'White Fragility', Diangelo (2018) Diangelo, R. (2018). *White fragility*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. [Google Scholar] suggests that the socialization process for white people is so powerful that they struggle to see themselves in racial terms and therefore are unable to see the privileges associated with this. This idea can be seen in the comment from one white student who said that it is hard... *'to associate with what that (BAME) person goes through, because I have always been of the mind that they are no different to me, you know... it is a person'*.

In this student's view the BAME students...

'...integrate really well...I don't see that being different, they are just part of that cohort and (we) have friendships with them they are people we know'. However, there were white students who thought that in the large student groups, BAME students experienced some difficulties in the teaching and learning environment. One student suggested that these were due to culture rather than ethnicity, with the comment that BAME students... *'struggle more because of the culture rather than the language....it is a cultural thing that separates groups within the class'*. This suggests a reluctance to 'see' ethnicity, with the white student suggesting that the difficulties experienced by BAME students were due to perceived cultural differences.

Another white student commented that she hoped that... *'the teaching you get on the social work course would be more sensitive and aware of black and minority ethnic differences and...there is less of the racial power differential'*; however, she was not certain about this being achieved.

Outside of the teaching environment, a positive influence for one white student on their learning had been a close friendship with a BAME fellow student because... *'she makes me look at things in a different way sometimes'*.

This student reflected that she... *'might be ignorant without realizing...and she (her friend) pulls me up about stuff'*, and their relationship... *'has had quite a big influence on me, but in a positive way. She made me think about "stuff".... sometimes she tries to make it almost...sort of like...humorous...the way she describes things sometimes...it would be.... taking the piss out of it....'*

Clearly this friendship could circumvent psychological defensiveness with humour, trust and familiarity to allow for challenge, reflection and re-evaluating within a 'safe space'.

The above comments point to the need for more sensitive teaching on the course with tutors and lecturers creating a safe space to explore issues of privilege—not only to open up conversations, but to have the confidence to manage them in a way that is comfortable for everyone. This is supported by Housee's (2011) Housee, S. (2011). What difference does difference make? A discussion with ethnic minority students about their learning experience in higher education. *Learning and Teaching*, 4(1), 70–91.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar]) research referred to earlier;

Whilst external factors seemed to be the most crucial in shaping student experiences, internal factors such as helpful staff, interactive and inclusive group work and democratic dialogue were important' (Housee, 2011) Housee, S. (2011). What difference does difference make? A discussion with ethnic minority students about their learning experience in higher education. *Learning and Teaching*, 4(1), 70–91.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar], p. 87).

Teaching black history, black perspectives and anti-racism

The main themes within this section of the discussion were as follows;

Black history is poorly taught in schools

There was agreement amongst BAME students that black history was poorly taught in the schools they had attended in England. One BAME student described her experience in a local school as quickly passed over and superficially dealt with, ignoring the achievements of black people in history and focusing just on slavery in a dismissive and non-critical way, in her view, to reduce white people's discomfort;

It was like: "We did black history. You were slaves. Now you are not. Get over it". That is how it.... that was exactly how I thought it was taught. You are not slaves anymore, you haven't to be upset, move on.. really?'

Another BAME student criticized some white students because they had no knowledge of black history. But she was even more shocked that 'my own people don't know their history'.

The focus of history teaching was seen as misplaced;

Being aware of things and of identity and culture and of different cultural backgrounds and perspectives starts way deeper.....we have to learn about

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

World War II.... we have to learn about Henry VIII.... I am thinking, "I don't care about that, because it has nothing to do with me.....where is my history?"

Whilst there was less discussion within the white student focus groups on the issue of black history, when and how it is taught and the impact this has, one of the white student focus groups highlighted that they thought that they needed more knowledge about this and did not have enough teaching on black perspectives and different cultures on the social work programme.

So, from the comments of both BAME and white students on the social work course, it seems they are starting to look at this important area of knowledge but from a low baseline.

An emotional divide

A BAME student emphasized the emotional impact of the teaching on black history;

I think some part of it is quite emotional as well... to know what black people have gone through in terms of racism and stuff like that so I think it is quite over-powering.....

From a BAME perspective, there was also a sense of separation and marginalization between the white students and themselves. One BAME student spoke of a feeling of marginalization because of the imbalance between the focus on dominant white perspectives over black perspectives;

It is bit of a sensitive, you know, a sensitive issue, but like... you think: "Ok, I step back and, you know, em, whoever wants to talk, because it is always, there is always no balance, if you know what I mean, you always definitely feel, em, the difference...."

Again, this points to the need for a sensitive approach in a contained and safe setting. One BAME student recounted how white lecturers trying to cover black perspectives in their lectures were criticized by BAME students... *'judging them for being a white person trying to explain black and minority ethnic groups'* and they *'get automatically told: "You don't know how it feels."'*

This same student felt that white lecturers needed to be afforded more space as well;

...to at least try to explain where they are coming from, but people don't give people the chance, so that makes it hard for lecturers to be right.

However, some white students specifically stated that whilst they found teaching on black perspectives and black history useful... *'it is depending on*

how it is delivered', because 'on some occasions, it is such a stark way of delivering it...it shocks us', although they see the importance of the teaching, because, even if it... 'sometimes feels uneasy...I know a bit more about black culture and that will hopefully influence my learning.'

The discomfort of white students had an emotional impact on black students. One BAME student reported that she felt uncomfortable when slavery was discussed in a lecture;

...because the way sometimes it is.... you can FEEL the tension and the eyes on your head.

Comparing the different group responses, the students' comments above highlight the emotional impact of the learning for both BAME and white students, albeit different emotions depending on their identity. Across the groups, there was little discussion or critical comment about the teaching of anti-racism or the diversity of reading lists and other teaching materials, though one student commented on the narrowness of theoretical approaches and the need... *'[to] bring in other theories that are not white eurocentric'*.

It seems from the themes and issues raised by the students in this section, that students were more preoccupied with their experiences on the course, in turn influenced by their pre-course experiences (highlighted in the first section of the findings (above)), that need to be addressed, before feeling able to think themselves into a practitioner role with the full significance of anti-racist practice in work with minority ethnic service users.

Confidence in discussing cultural background

BAME students felt that their contributions about their own culture and background were not appreciated in group discussions, which undermined their confidence. The main issue for BAME students was the sense of a lack of a safe space in which to have a meaningful discussion about differences. One BAME student reported on how a visiting lecturer made assumptions about her religion and culture from her dress and ascribed things to her as part of a cultural group which she felt did not relate to her at all. She felt angry and upset about his treatment of her.

Lecturer behaviour and control was seen as important in either establishing or undermining a safe space. Some students said they did not feel safe because sometimes in a discussion, a lecturer might stand back and... *'leave it to see where it goes.....(and) you are shut downand it doesn't go away'*. A supportive stance from the tutor or lecturer was seen as crucial here, given the sensitive, emotional nature of such discussions, as described above. One student felt aggrieved by how she was treated when she tried to stand up for herself;

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One of my tutors, when I tried to stand up for myself and tell them what I need.... I was told... (I was) aggressive...and then I was told.... manipulative.

Anxiety was seen as a barrier to meaningful discussions because of the lack of confidence it produced. One group of BAME students suspected that there are certain inhibitions among the white students because... *'there are a lot of people.... who are White-British.... that may feel quite...worried about offending....so they don't ask their questions'*.

White students acknowledged their anxieties... *'as a white person (you) can feel blamed.... for previous white atrocities'*.

Another white participant admitted... *'personally....quite a lot of cultural guilt, I suppose, I would call it...historically...a burden'*.

Two significant fears emerged amongst the white students' discussions—the fear of offending someone directly and the fear of not knowing or not being sensitive enough. White students lived with this uncertainty, acknowledging that they would not necessarily know how BAME students feel but they tried to imagine what they might be feeling, such as one white student who tried to use her own experience as a comparison;

Being female it feels like it is...a minority group in terms of power...in terms of numbers.

However, anxiety can also provoke withdrawal and several students admitted that they may want to say something, but they remain silent, preferring to... *'just get to the end of the course'*.

On balance, what these comments seem to indicate, is that there is little meaningful communication between the groups about these important matters. From a BAME student perspective, the insecurity that develops from their past and present awareness and experience of white privilege and racism affects their interactions with white colleagues, and from a white student perspective, their fear and uncertainty about how to explore these important issues, and a lack of awareness about their own white privilege, get in the way of meaningful exchange too. Jeyasingham (2012) Jeyasingham, D. (2012). White noise: A critical evaluation of social work education's engagement with whiteness studies. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(4), 669–686. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar] suggests that whiteness studies should form an integral part of the social work curriculum as this offers a way to explore how invisible power operates and permeates within our society. This moves the focus from being solely on the discrimination and oppression experienced by BAME students to a shared problem.

Most of the students expressed a desire to be more confident about having such discussions. However, there are powerful influences that prevent

students from taking risks, and in this respect, the creation of a safe space (see below) in which to try out their growing skills and self-awareness is crucial.

Areas of tension between cultural backgrounds and the expectations of professional practice

Fear of standing out as 'different'

This section of the focus group discussion did not yield significant comment from the white student groups, but BAME students voiced fears and anxieties that seemed to indicate that any critical thinking about a student's own culture and the expectations of professional practice would be blocked by anxiety and fear of standing out as 'different'.

Generally, BAME students seemed to think that because there was little felt interest in cultures other than the dominant white culture on the course, then it was difficult to explore, in any meaningful way, the tensions that may arise between cultural backgrounds and the expectations of professional practice, due to a fear of being judged. One BAME student was concerned that he would be marked out on placement and commented... *'like, you know, you would be painted with this brush, you know.'*

Anxieties that white students do not face

Other BAME students referred to tensions and anxieties that they take to placement settings about how they will be received and valued on a practice placement, which they thought white students would not face because they espoused dominant cultural values...

...you know, if someone is going into placement and you don't know what you going into....and you go into the voluntary sector, I don't know what other people are going to be there, and that is something on my mind, which other students, you know, white students, it probably won't even cross their minds.

It seems that BAME students feel a lack of confidence in raising potential areas of tension on placement for the same reason that they do not write about these in their portfolios, as noted by the lecturing team. This would appear to indicate that the tensions between cultural backgrounds and the expectations of professional practice is a whole area of learning that is not being adequately explored within the academic course. It may be that it is explored on placement between practice educator and student (through, for example, the use of the Mandela Model (Tedam, 2011 Tedam, P. (2011). The MANDELA model of practice learning: An old present in new

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wrapping? *Journal of Practice Teaching & Learning*, 11(2), 19–33. [Google Scholar]) which the course introduced in 2016). This model was developed by Tadam in response to a qualitative study she undertook with colleagues exploring the experiences of black African students on a social work programme in England (Bartoli et al., 2008 Bartoli, A., Kennedy, S., & Tadam, P. (2008). Practice learning: Who is failing to adjust? Black African student experience of practice learning in a social work setting. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 75–90. [Crossref], [Google Scholar]) and a lack of specific resources to support the teaching and learning of these students. The model is a strengths-based tool which enables practice educators to aid discussion and explore with students the differences and similarities in power and lived experiences, to develop a deeper understanding and to assist practice educators to avoid oppressive practice in their teaching, supervision and assessment of students. However, there was little commentary on the use of this model in the participants' responses which may suggest that it is not being routinely used by practice educators and more work needs to take place to ensure this tool is effectively used to open up conversations. The literature supports the view that tensions and expectations are not explored in significant depth within the practice placement (Bartoli et al., 2008 Bartoli, A., Kennedy, S., & Tadam, P. (2008). Practice learning: Who is failing to adjust? Black African student experience of practice learning in a social work setting. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 75–90. [Crossref], [Google Scholar]; Fairtlough et al., 2014 Fairtlough, A., Bernard, C., Fletcher, J., & Ahmet, A. (2014). Black social work students' experiences of practice learning: understanding differential progression rates. *Journal of Social Work*, 14(6), 605–624. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]).

Improving the student experience of teaching black perspectives and anti-racism on the course

The students interviewed showed a strong sense of motivation for change within the programme, particularly, and not surprisingly, for the BAME students who felt marginalized by the dominant perspectives. As one BAME student put it... *'The solution is here.... when you keep it within yourself, how is the university gonna know to address the situation'*.

Discussing white privilege on the course

There was a clear message that white privilege needed to be explored more and led by white lecturers, as this would enable white students to hear the discussion differently. It was suggested that if this discussion was led by a black lecturer, then white students might dismiss the issues as coming from a personal perspective and not from the position of structural inequality;

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I think, that more white lecturers need to mention it, need to speak about it ...to be able to relate and go actually yeah, I get it, I can see it.'

White educators, both in this country (Ryde, 2009) Ryde, J. (2009). *Being white in the helping professions*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publications. [Google Scholar] and internationally (Diangelo, 2018) Diangelo, R. (2018). *White fragility*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. [Google Scholar] highlight the importance of white awareness training and how this can assist white students to unpick their unconscious bias and begin to see themselves in racial terms. Doing so enables them to acknowledge emotions, such as guilt, that often follow when there is a realization that racism is so deeply rooted in societal structures it is impossible not to experience the privilege of this as a white person.

A safe space

In her model of community cultural wealth and her discussion of this through the lens of critical race theory, Yosso (2005) Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91. [Taylor & Francis Online], , [Google Scholar] questions whether educators provide students with the opportunities to tell their stories. As discussed earlier, black students spoke about not feeling safe to discuss their cultural values and described experiences of feeling 'shot down', by either students or lecturers. Including spaces within the curriculum for the use of narrative and storytelling may provide opportunities for discussion and exploration of these issues without judgement or blame (Yosso, 2005) Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91. [Taylor & Francis Online], , [Google Scholar]). In this respect, the role of the lecturer as highlighted by BAME students is crucial in establishing a safe space.

One thing that we should be looking at is the relationship between the lecturers and us. It should be more sensitive—the way they talk to us.

The white students expressed similar desires because the lecturers should act in an...

...open and....non-judgemental wayWe would hope that (their) behaviour would be respectful of whoever the person is in front ...because it comes from a background of social work, so they should be adaptable, to the person that is in front of them whether they might be young, old, black, white,whatever, they should be able to behave and deliver in a non-judgemental way.

But it is not just the lecturer's responsibility;

I expect all members of the discussion to be open to all views of all members.

A more sensitive and balanced approach

BAME students did not feel that a separate support group would be useful to them as this would separate them out again and label them, but instead, a sensitive inclusive approach was required by lecturers with more of a focus on exploring not only differences in culture and ethnicity, but also similarities. One BAME student commented;

people should be treated individually..... because like you said, people have different life experiences in addition to being an ethnic minority ...

Another BAME student advocated for a whole module on ethnicity, culture, religion and extremism to counter what they saw as media bias...

...there needs to be a whole module on like, race and religion and extremism and everything else, because the world as it is now, we gonna let people go out and have views of people and have assumption of people because the media said something, and the media is not always correct.

A Year 3 white student thought that more time should be dedicated to diversity;

I think all students would benefit from a module dedicated to diversity. Learning about different cultures, customs and values would make everyone more aware of the diversity in our society.

Whose responsibility?

In a previous study of marginalised social work students, Bernard, Fairtlough, Fletcher and Ahmet (2014) Bernard, C., Fairtlough, A., Fletcher, J., & Ahmet, A. (2014). A qualitative study of marginalised social work students' views of social work education and learning. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(7), 1934–1949. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar], p. 1935) said that BAME students reported that they were often called upon to be 'race experts' by lecturers, and these students also felt there was an expectation that they would pro-actively challenge racism. These views are echoed in this study with a BAME student who said;

But why should we have to challenge? Like...I have got enough to do, and I don't need any extra work from challenging when no one else.. if other people don't have to challenge about things then why should I have to?

In other instances, students saw that they had a responsibility to promote change through their behaviour and expectations. A BAME student encouraged fellow students in the group discussions to reach out to the lecturers with their issues because...

...it is for you to let them know in a subtle way in a conversation..... so that they know that stuff has been said that affects you.

Discussion

Students' responses identify barriers and difficulties that get in the way of meaningful exchanges and discussions. They have clear ideas about what is wrong and what needs to be changed in teaching and learning on the programme. BAME students express feelings of frustration that there is a lack of sensitivity to their feelings, for example, about insufficient time or interest in learning about their different cultures. They highlight the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) Hochschild, A. (1983). *The managed heart*. Berkeley: University of California Press. [Google Scholar] involved in managing this disappointment (for instance, their management of feelings they experience internally and what they reveal externally). This is an essential response for managing themselves on the programme that does not arise for white students. The sense of being burdened is increased further by resentment about having to challenge when other students fail to see racism, or having to justify or explain when others were not sufficiently aware of their culture and being expected to take on the role of 'expert'.

Additionally, there are issues about identity and white privilege that are insufficiently addressed and feelings about these remain trapped beneath the surface of group discussions. BAME students expressed frustration and anger about what is not said, whereas white students expressed fear and uncertainty about how to express themselves on these matters. The impact of the emotional responses for each group of students (BAME and white) then appears to have further emotional impact on the other group.

Both BAME and (some) white students thought they arrived at university with a poor appreciation of the histories of BAME people and cultures (of black history for example) and whilst it is outside of the scope and power of this particular social work programme to change this in the short term, it is something that requires further consideration more widely, in the longer term and some current political thinking does see the significance of increasing a more critical approach to teaching in schools about imperialism and colonialism (The Guardian, 2018) The Guardian. (2018) 'Jeremy Corbyn vows to increase teaching of black history in schools' <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/11/jeremy-corbyn-labour-vows-to-increase-teaching-of-black-history-in-schools> [Google Scholar]).

It is clear from the comments of some BAME students that interpersonal interactions on the course, between students or with lecturers, that are felt as racist, or marginalising, such as comments from white students about accents, names, countries of origin and so on, or expectations that they are 'experts' in

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all things African (as set out in the first section of the themes and issues), contribute, alongside the other issues such as poor knowledge of other cultures and histories, wider experiences of racism and white privilege, to a negative perception for those BAME participants in this study about their value as students on the programme.

This echoes Housee's (2011) Housee, S. (2011). What difference does difference make? A discussion with ethnic minority students about their learning experience in higher education. *Learning and Teaching*, 4(1), 70–91. [Crossref], [Google Scholar] research with sociology undergraduates, referred to earlier, which highlighted how, at an individual and internal level, BAME students' experiences prior to entering university shaped their ability to access learning in the classroom and negative interactions with other students in student groups, or with tutors, confirmed earlier negative experiences and a sense of failure that could be difficult to recover from.

The BAME students in our study clearly articulate a lack of confidence that speaking or writing about their own cultural heritage is worth the risk, resulting in the significant omissions in discussions and assignments as highlighted in the abstract above. And these omissions, if not addressed will continue to impair the students' emotional well-being and their professional functioning, and undermine the programme's ability to promote effective teaching and learning in a way that practices what we preach in a truly anti-racist way.

To turn this around, a key preoccupation of both BAME and white students in this study is the need for more safe spaces in lectures and tutor groups to exchange learning about cultural differences, values and experiences. Students recognise the importance of this for their learning and professional development but need the leadership of the teaching team to facilitate this more consistently.

Conclusion

Social work's different regulatory bodies over the years have recognised the importance of actively and consistently addressing ethnic and cultural diversity to ensure that practitioners adhere to culturally appropriate standards in line with the Equality Act 2010. Taking an anti-racist perspective suggests an emphasis on resistance and challenge to forces that disadvantage and exclude members of society subjected to racism at an individual and institutional level by virtue of 'cultural markers'

(Singh, 2013) Singh, S. (2013). Anti-racist social work education.

In A. Bartoli (Ed.), *Anti-racism in social work practice* (pp. 25–47). St Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd. [Google Scholar], p. 30).

Students need to feel comfortable about critically examining their own cultures in order to competently explore those of others and the impact of racism on

individuals and groups. Comments from BAME students about their experiences of teaching and learning about cultural differences on the course, and about the way in which their own ethnicities and cultures feel devalued, indicate that more work needs to be done to facilitate this. In the need to create safer spaces to increase students' confidence to discuss cultural diversity, agreed ground rules for discussion on cultural differences across the course, held in a context of openness, honesty, non-judgementalism, mutual respect, sensitivity, with an expectation that racist attitudes will be challenged appropriately, have not been enough. More work needs to be done by lecturers (who may need more support/training to prepare them for this) to explore and competently manage difficult feelings that arise, or are defended against, within such discussions.

The feeling from students that ideas of white privilege need to be explored and led by white lecturers is an area that needs to be considered. Davis, Mirick, and McQueen (2015) Davis, A., Mirick, R., & McQueen, B. (2015). Teaching from privilege: reflections from white female instructors. *Journal of Women and Social Work*, 30(3), 302–313. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]) suggest that it is necessary for educators with privilege to be aware of their own power in order to understand and anticipate the dynamics within the teaching and learning environment and be open to discussion as well as being willing to make themselves vulnerable. By doing so, lectures and tutors are able to model skills and values for students who are able, in turn, to adopt these in their work with people who have been oppressed. It is acknowledged that more training may be required for white lecturers who may be working against the grain of their own socialisation (Monaghan, 2010) Monaghan, C. H. (2010). Working against the grain: White privilege in human resource development. *New Directions For Adult & Continuing Education*, 135, 53–63. [Google Scholar]. The collective guilt and shame experienced by white students and white lecturers about histories of slavery, racism and 'racial cleansing' can be supported by mindfulness training for example, which engenders self-compassion (Birnie, Speca, and Carlson (2010) Birnie, K., Speca, M., & Carlson, L. E. (2010). Exploring self-compassion and empathy in the context of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). *Stress and Health*, 26(5), 359–371. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]), cited in Parkes and Kelly (2014) Parkes, R., & Kelly, S. (2014). Mindfulness for resilience in social work. In L. Grant & G. Kinman (Eds.), *Developing resilience for social work practice* (pp. 110–127). London: Palgrave Macmillan. [Crossref], [Google Scholar]). According to Parkes and Kelly (2014) Parkes, R., & Kelly, S. (2014). Mindfulness for resilience in social work. In L. Grant & G. Kinman (Eds.), *Developing resilience for social work practice* (pp. 110–127). London: Palgrave Macmillan. [Crossref], [Google Scholar]), it can also facilitate collaborative learning in student groups and, in relation of anti-discriminatory practice, it can engender greater tolerance and understanding of difference because it encourages the individual to see

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different perspectives and thereby enhances cultural competence (Parkes & Kelly, 2014). Parkes, R., & Kelly, S. (2014). Mindfulness for resilience in social work. In L. Grant & G. Kinman (Eds.), *Developing resilience for social work practice* (pp. 110–127). London: Palgrave Macmillan. [Crossref], [Google Scholar], pp. 122–123).

Increased emphasis on cultural diversity, BAME perspectives and anti-racism across all teaching, including the integration of non-Western theories and values is also important with a recognition of the knowledge and expertise within the student body to which lecturers and tutors should give due positive recognition. Hillen and Levy (2015). Hillen, P., & Levy, S. (2015). Framing the experiences of BME social work students within a narrative of educating for a culturally diverse workforce. *Social Work Education*, 34(7), 785–798. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar], p. 788) undertook a similar study in Scotland and as a result recommend that a strengths-based approach is taken which critiques ‘race’ and ‘whiteness’ whilst ‘valuing other knowledges’. These points may well have been considered as having been addressed within the programme, but a student perspective, as presented here, strongly suggests that from a student point of view, this was not the case. The project has provided an important reflective ‘moment’ for this particular social work programme, and sharing these reflections may be helpful to other social work programmes too.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Language and terminology

It is important to consider the impact that language and terminology has had on social work education and the interplay with contemporary practice. We use the term *ethnicity* (preferred to ‘race’), as it suggests group membership on account of heritage, culture (inclusive of religion), language and ancestral identification and through the shaping of political status and socio-economic circumstances (Burck, 2007). Burck, C. (2007). *Multilingual living: Explorations of language and subjectivity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. [Google Scholar]; Institute of Race Relations, 2018). Institute of Race Relations. (2018). *Definitions*. Retrieved from <http://www.irr.org.uk/research/statistics/definitions/> [Google Scholar]). In recent years, the term ‘ethnic minority’ has been reversed and expanded upon, for example, ‘minority ethnic’; ‘black and minority ethnic’ (BME); ‘black, Asian and minority ethnic’ (BAME) to underline the fact that we ALL have an

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

ethnicity, whilst at the same time, highlighting the discrimination and oppression minority groups still encounter (Richardson, 2006 Richardson, R. (2006). To BME or not to BME. *Race Equality Teaching*, 25(1), 11–16. [Crossref], [Google Scholar]; Thomas et al., 2004 Thomas, L., Wareing, S., Singh, I., Stillwell Pecci, J., Thornborrow, J., & Jones, J.(2004). *Language society and power; An introduction* (2nded.). London: Routledge. [Google Scholar]). Whilst acknowledging the evolving nature of language, its impact on identity and the problems associated with using a generalised term to describe a group of people that is highly diverse, the authors have settled on Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME) as the chosen terminology, which will be reflected in this journal article, focusing mainly on those students who are Black and Asian as these were the groups that self-selected for the study.

Appendix 2

Interview schedule

1. Have you ever had experiences on racism at the university (or on the social work programme)?
2. How much do you think 'whiteness' and a white perspective characterizes the teaching and learning on the programme?
3. How (well) do you think anti-racism and black perspectives are taught? How responsive are tutors to discussing cultural difference and diversity? How diverse are reading lists and other materials for module teaching?
4. How confident do you feel about discussing your own culture and background in ... lectures, group tutorials or individual tutorials, your own written assignments and practice portfolios? On what does this depend?
5. Do you see any areas of tension between your cultural background and the expectations of professional practice? How comfortable are you in exploring these either in class discussions or in written assignments/portfolios?
6. What would you change in the social work programme if you could increase anti-racist education?
7. Ending. Anything that should still be said or hasn't been asked?

Appendix 3

The main campus of University of Suffolk is located in a large county town within a rural county in England. Forty-eight percent of students studying at the university (including all campuses and part-time students) reside within its area postal code, with an additional thirty-one percent travelling in from surrounding counties. The student and local population are synonymous with each other, reflecting the dominant ethnic group (White/British—80%; rising to

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84% when 'White Other' is included). The next largest ethnic groups are 'Black' (including African, Caribbean and 'Other')—7.1%; Asian (including Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese and 'Other')—4.8% and 'Mixed' (that is White and Caribbean; White and African; White and Asian; White and 'Other')—3.4%. Interestingly, successful completion and progression rates across all university programmes also reflect the ethnic group sizes—90.8% of White and 'White Other' students successfully complete programmes; Black—85.94%; Asian—82.17%; 'Mixed'—80.50%. Results from national figures obtained via Stevenson's (2012) Stevenson, J. (2012). *Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment*. York: HEA. [Google Scholar] HEA research report suggest similar attainment in relation to White (90.4%) and Black students (88.7%) being likely to qualify. The gap, post-qualifying, also appears to be evident, as according to Stevenson et al.'s (2019) Stevenson, J., O'Mahony, J., Khan, O., Ghaffar, F., & Stiell, B. (2019). *Understanding and overcoming the challenges of ethnicity targeting*. Retrieved from <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/d21cb263-526d-401c-bc74-299c748e9ecd/ethnicity-targeting-research-report.pdf> [Google Scholar] recent report to the Office for Students...

'...regardless of entry qualifications, subjects studied, degree outcomes and other socio-demographic characteristics, differences in employment outcomes between White and BAME graduates persist even three years after graduation' (OFFA, 2018) OFFA (Office for Fair Access for Students). (2018). Topic briefing -bme students. Retrieved from <https://www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/guidance/topic-briefings/offa-topic-briefing-bme-students/> [Google Scholar], cited in Stevenson et al., 2019) Stevenson, J., O'Mahony, J., Khan, O., Ghaffar, F., & Stiell, B. (2019). *Understanding and overcoming the challenges of ethnicity targeting*. Retrieved from <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/d21cb263-526d-401c-bc74-299c748e9ecd/ethnicity-targeting-research-report.pdf> [Google Scholar], p. 11).

Where figures for religion were obtainable, most students (41.7%) described themselves as 'non religious'; Christian (in various denominations) was the next largest group (28.5%), followed by 'Unknown' (20.4%); Muslim (2.68%) and 'refused to state' (2.65%). (All figures taken from the university's most recent Equality and Diversity Report, 2017–2018).

The majority of the students fall within the 18–24 category (47%) followed by 25–34 year olds (25%). In terms of highest level of qualification on entry, 19% of students had A/AS levels; 12.5% a UK undergraduate degree with Honours; 12% a diploma Level 3; and 8.5% a Diploma in Higher Education. Less than 4% had an HE Access Course/QAA recognised award.

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ABSTRACT

Teaching experience at the University of Suffolk noted anecdotally that Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students avoid discussing their identity, cultural heritage, norms and values, in lectures, tutor groups and in assignments.

To improve the integration of different cultural perspectives into the social work curriculum, we devised a small-scale qualitative research project Spring, 2017, to explore students' views of teaching, learning and assessment about cultural norms and differences, seeking the views of both BAME students and white students on the programme in order to compare and contrast their experiences.

Focus groups were used to gather the views of BAME and white students about the opportunities and barriers to discussing identity, culture, and anti-racism. The findings raised significant issues, specifically about the barriers for both BAME and white students to considering cultural differences. Student perspectives suggest more sensitive approaches to considering cultural differences; more responsibility for white lecturers to explore white privilege and its impact; and more safe spaces to manage emotional responses to oppression to enable exchange of experience and learning about different cultural norms and values. The article analyses the findings, discussing ways forward to improve the student experience and promote good practice in teaching and learning.

Introduction

Teaching experience on a Social Work programme in England at the University of Suffolk (UoS) noted anecdotally over a few years that BAME students (see [Appendix 1](#) for notes on terminology) tend not to discuss their identity, or cultural heritage and cultural norms as they differ from the dominant white norms. As social work is a profession that seeks to promote critical reflection, empathy and the celebration of difference and diversity through education into practice, then, clearly, this was a situation that required attention and change to ensure that graduates from the programme are able to practice in an anti-discriminatory manner, celebrate difference as a positive fact of life and promote social justice in their work with users of services from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This article presents findings from a small qualitative study which has played a part in the process of change to develop a more open and encouraging learning culture wherein BAME students could feel confident to discuss, reflect on, and critically evaluate differences in ethnicity and culture in their study groups and in their assessed work. It contains reflections that may be of use to other social work qualifying programmes, seeking to ensure that they reflect the curriculum standards of the current regulator, the Health and Care Professions Council (in particular, Standard 4.3, (Health and Care Professions Council 2018) *Standards of education and training*. Retrieved from <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-relevant-to-education-and-training/set/> [Google Scholar], p. 32)). This requires that students... *'reflect the philosophy, core values, skills and knowledge base as articulated in any relevant curriculum guidance'*, (in this case, the Professional Capabilities Framework (British Association of Social Workers [BASW], 2018) *Professional capabilities framework*. Retrieved from <https://www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/PCF%20CHART%20update%2010-9-18.pdf> [Google Scholar])), until these standards are replaced by Social Work England sometime during 2019.

Background

A number of themes emerge from the literature that resonate with the research presented as the focus of this article. These will be briefly explored to contextualise the research.

BAME students' experiences in higher education

Whilst there has been an increase in the diversity of students on social work courses in England in the last decade or more (across all dimensions of identity, and including ethnicity) (Dillon, 2011) Dillon, J. (2011). Black minority ethnic students navigating their way from access courses to social work programmes: Key considerations for the selection of students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(8), 1477–1496.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]; Moriarty & Murray, 2007) Moriarty, J., & Murray, J. (2007). Who wants to be a social worker? Using routine published data to identify trends in the numbers of people applying for and completing social work programmes in England. *British Journal of Social Work*, 37(4), 715–733.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]), this does not imply equality and full participation exists throughout the system. Findings from studies carried out on other social work programmes in England, Scotland, Wales, Australia and in the United States showed difficulties and barriers in teaching cultural diversity on social work courses (see Bartoli, Kennedy, & Tedam, 2008) Bartoli, A., Kennedy, S., & Tedam, P. (2008). Practice learning: Who is failing to adjust? Black African student experience of practice learning in a social work setting. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 75–90.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar]; Fairtlough, Bernard, Fletcher, & Ahmet, 2014) Fairtlough, A., Bernard, C., Fletcher, J., & Ahmet, A. (2014). Black social work students' experiences of practice learning: understanding differential progression rates. *Journal of Social Work*, 14(6), 605–624.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]; Gair, 2017) Gair, S. (2017). Pondering the colour of empathy: Social work students' reasoning on activism, empathy and racism. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(1), 162–180.[Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]; Hillen & Levy, 2015) Hillen, P., & Levy, S. (2015). Framing the experiences of BME social work students within a narrative of educating for a culturally diverse workforce. *Social Work Education*, 34(7), 785–798.[Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]; Werkmeister Rozas & Garras, 2016) Werkmeister Rozas, L., & Garras, A. M. (2016). Towards a human rights culture in social work education. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(4), 890–905.[Crossref], [PubMed], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]; Williams & Parrott, 2013) Williams, C., & Parrott, L. (2013). From specialism to genericism: Rising and falling to the challenges of responding to racial and ethnic diversity in social work education in Wales. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43(6), 1206–1224.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]). In some of these examples, different teaching tools (such as the Mandela Model (Tedam, 2011) Tedam, P. (2011). The MANDELA model of practice learning: An old present in new wrapping? *Journal of Practice Teaching & Learning*, 11(2), 19–33. [Google Scholar]) and empathy training (Gair, 2017) Gair, S. (2017). Pondering the colour of empathy: Social work

students' reasoning on activism, empathy and racism. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(1), 162–180.[Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar])) are proposed to tackle the problem and improve the teaching of anti-racism, cultural diversity and human rights. Dillon (2011) Dillon, J. (2011). Black minority ethnic students navigating their way from access courses to social work programmes: Key considerations for the selection of students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(8), 1477–1496.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar], p. 1491) discusses the obstacles at the organisational level, created for some BAME students through increased competition for places on social work courses and the credentialism and greater selectivity that has entered into the selection process since social work became a degree programme, which can impact negatively on BAME students.

The learning environment has to be conducive to the development and support of confident learners and there is extensive academic literature, particularly from the USA and from this country, that indicates that black and minority ethnic students in education at all levels and, more generally, across different disciplines at HE level, do less well in the outcomes of their studies (Isik et al., 2018) Isik, U., El Tahir, O., Meeter, M., Heymans, M. W., Jansma, E. P., Croiset, G., & Kusurkar, R. A. (2018). Factors influencing academic motivation of ethnic minority students: A review. *SAGE Open*, 8(2), 1–23.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]; See Appendix 3 for a local perspective), arising from a range of issues—internal to the student (for example, internalised racism, self-confidence and self-doubts (Housee, 2011) Housee, S. (2011). What difference does difference make? A discussion with ethnic minority students about their learning experience in higher education. *Learning and Teaching*, 4(1), 70–91.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar])), and external, including environmental and institutional issues, such as stereotyping (the impact of stereotype threat arising from negative stereotypes about their group (Massey & Fischer, 2008) Massey, D. S., & Fischer, M. J. (2008). Stereotype threat and academic performance. New findings from a racially diverse sample of college freshman. *Du Bois Review*, 2(1), 45–68. [Google Scholar]; Steele, 1997) Steele, C. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist*, 52(6), 13–629.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]; Woolf, Cave, Greenhalgh, & Dacre, 2008) Woolf, K., Cave, J., Greenhalgh, T., & Dacre, J. (2008). Ethnic stereotypes and the underachievement of UK medical students from ethnic minorities: Qualitative study. *British Medical Journal*, 337(7670), 1–7. [Google Scholar])), oppositional identity (resistance to educational achievement which means 'acting white' and 'racial' betrayal (Downey, 2008) Downey, D. B. (2008). Black/white differences in school performance. The oppositional culture explanation. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34(1), 107–126.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar])), and resource issues (lack of social and cultural capital, financial constraints (Housee, 2011) Housee, S. (2011). What difference does difference make? A discussion with ethnic minority students

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

about their learning experience in higher education. *Learning and Teaching*, 4(1), 70–91.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar])). These issues are very similar to those raised in the UK by Cree (2011Cree, V. E. (2011). ‘I’d like to call you my mother.’ Reflections on supervising international PhD students in social work. *Social Work Education*, 31(4), 451–464.[Taylor & Francis Online], , [Google Scholar]) in her study of international BME students studying for a Phd in Social Work, in which she highlights the additional pressures, compared with ‘home’ students, that these students have to contend with, including different academic conventions and expectations, language differences and difficulties, social isolation, financial and other stresses and insecurities. Singh’s earlier study (2005Singh, S. (2005). *Listening to the Silence, unpublished action research*. Edinburgh: The Open University in Scotland. [Google Scholar], cited in Hillen & Levy, 2015Hillen, P., & Levy, S. (2015). Framing the experiences of BME social work students within a narrative of educating for a culturally diverse workforce. *Social Work Education*, 34(7), 785–798.[Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]) raised significant concerns about the learning environment for social work education, notably, a Euro-centric bias, pathologising of BAME students and institutional structures of racism.

Qualifying social work courses at universities in England are, as indicated above, no exception within the well-noted trend (Bartoli et al., 2008Bartoli, A., Kennedy, S., & Tedam, P. (2008). Practice learning: Who is failing to adjust? Black African student experience of practice learning in a social work setting. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 75–90.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar]; Hussein, Moriarty, Manthorpe, & Huxley, 2008Hussein, S., Moriarty, J., Manthorpe, J., & Huxley, P.(2008). Diversity and progression among social work students starting social work qualifying programmes in England between 1995 and 1998: A quantitative study. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(8), 1588–1609.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]) of differential progression rates between BAME and white students, and similarly on access courses to Higher Education for social work (Dillon, 2011Dillon, J. (2011). Black minority ethnic students navigating their way from access courses to social work mprogrammes: Key consideraations for the selection of students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(8), 1477–1496.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]). In terms of barriers for students on courses, Dillon’s (2011Dillon, J. (2011). Black minority ethnic students navigating their way from access courses to social work mprogrammes: Key consideraations for the selection of students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(8), 1477–1496.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar], p. 1489) study highlights external barriers to success for BAME students on access courses to social work in South East England as socio-economic disadvantage, alongside working and managing family commitments.

Anti-oppressive practice

The significance of anti-oppressive practice, anti-racism and cultural competence in social work education and practice is well-documented (Bartoli, 2013; Bartoli, A. (ed). (2013). *Anti-racism in social work practice*. St. Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd.. [Google Scholar]; Dominelli, 2008; Dominelli, L. (2008). *Anti-racist social work*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.[Crossref], [Google Scholar]; Smethurst & Bhatti-Sinclair, 2017; Smethurst, C., & Bhatti-Sinclair, K. (2017). Diversity and difference in challenging times: The social and political context. In K. Bhatti-Sinclair & C.Smethurst (Eds.), *Diversity, difference and dilemmas. Analysing concepts and developing skills* (pp. 3–12). London: Open University Press. [Google Scholar]; Thompson, 2012; Thompson, M. (2012). *Anti-discriminatory practice: Equality, diversity and social justice* (5th ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.[Crossref], [Google Scholar]). These concepts all recognize the structural forces that create oppression at the same time as working with individuals in ways that mitigate its impact and promote social justice. They relate also to human rights, which have perhaps received less attention in social work until more recently (Reichert, 2007; Reichert, E. (2007). Human rights in the twenty-first century: Creating a new paradigm for social work. In E.Reichert (Ed.), *Challenges in human rights: A social work perspective* (pp. 1–15). New York: Columbia University Press. [Google Scholar]), but these are equally important in relation to anti-racism—specifically in the core notions of human dignity; non-discrimination; and economic, social and cultural rights for all individuals (Werkmeister Rozas & Garras, 2016; Werkmeister Rozas, L., & Garras, A. M. (2016). Towards a human rights culture in social work education. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(4), 890–905.[Crossref], [PubMed], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]). From a social justice perspective, within which anti-racism is a fundamental aspect, students need to learn about a set of values for practice that encompass equity, responsibility (for themselves and for others) and accountability (to their profession and their organization—or to challenge this where failings in relation to equality occur). They also need to develop a critical appreciation of whiteness and of discourses of exclusion.

Whiteness and a black perspective

Racism continues to affect the lives of many people in this country (Bhopal, 2018; Bhopal, K. (2018). *White privilege. The myth of a post-racial society*. Bristol: Policy Press.[Crossref], [Google Scholar]; Eddo-Lodge, 2018; Eddo-Lodge, R. (2018). *Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. [Google Scholar]; Smethurst & Bhatti-Sinclair, 2017; Smethurst, C., & Bhatti-Sinclair, K. (2017). Diversity and difference in challenging times: The social and political context. In K. Bhatti-Sinclair & C.Smethurst (Eds.), *Diversity, difference and dilemmas. Analysing*

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concepts and developing skills (pp. 3–12). London: Open University Press. [Google Scholar]. It is defined by Masocha (2017) Masocha, S. (2017). A 'turn to language' as a response to the shifting contours of racist discourse. *Practice, Social Work in Action*, 29(3), 159–177. [Google Scholar], p. 161) as 'an ideology that is enacted through social practices and serves to establish and maintain unequal power relations'. There is continuing evidence of discrimination, oppression and racial inequality in the UK (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016) Equality and Human Rights Commission. (2016). *Healing a divided Britain: The need for a comprehensive race equality strategy*. London: EHRC. [Google Scholar]. The report found 5 areas where urgent improvement is required: employment; education; crime; living standards and health and care. Within education, the report found that only 6 per cent of Black school leavers attended a Russell Group university, compared with 12 per cent of mixed and Asian school leavers and 11 per cent of White school leavers. Social work students, whether white or BAME, are involved in its impact, and there is a growing literature on critical whiteness and white privilege, which, as the other side of the racism coin, are crucial areas of learning for white social work students (see Abrams & Gibson, 2007) Abrams, L. S., & Gibson, P. (2007). Reframing multicultural education: Teaching white privilege in the social work curriculum. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 43(1), 147–160. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]; Crofts, 2013) Crofts, P. (2013). Critical race theory and exploring whiteness. In A. Bartoli (Ed.), *Anti-racism in social work practice* (pp. 103–124). St Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd. [Google Scholar]; Jeyasingham, 2012) Jeyasingham, D. (2012). White noise: A critical evaluation of social work education's engagement with whiteness studies. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(4), 669–686. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]; Kennedy, 2013) Kennedy, S. (2013). White woman listening. In A. Bartoli (Ed.), *Anti-racism in social work practice* (pp. 83–102). St Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd. [Google Scholar]; Ng'andu, 2017) Ng'andu, B. (2017). Being white – Feeling guilty?. In K. Bhatti-Sinclair & C. Smethurst (Eds.), *Diversity, difference and dilemmas: Analysing concepts and developing skills* (pp. 26–33). London: Open University Press. [Google Scholar].

McIntosh (1988) Macintosh, P. (1988) *White privilege: Unpacking the invisible Knapsack*. Retrieved from <https://www.csusm.edu/sjs/documents/unpackingtheknapsack.pdf> [Google Scholar], cited in Crofts, 2013) Crofts, P. (2013). Critical race theory and exploring whiteness. In A. Bartoli (Ed.), *Anti-racism in social work practice* (pp. 103–124). St Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd. [Google Scholar], p. 107) explored the idea of white privilege, as unearned social rights which white people possess without ever having to think about them. This led her to identify fifty ways in which she experienced white privilege on a daily basis. She describes it as 'an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions,

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maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks'. Bhopal (2018) Bhopal, K. (2018). *White privilege. The myth of a post-racial society*. Bristol: Policy Press. [Crossref], [Google Scholar], p. 25) discusses the role of institutions in perpetuating white privilege and contends that... *...In such white spaces, whiteness and white Western practices are the norm and those which do not comply with these are seen as outsiders and others*'.

Bhopal (2018) Bhopal, K. (2018). *White privilege. The myth of a post-racial society*. Bristol: Policy Press. [Crossref], [Google Scholar], p. 27) argues that, although through intersectionality, a person's identity may contain many facets, for example, class, gender, religion and sexuality, being white is so powerful that it 'takes precedence over all other forms of identity'. Miller (1976) Miller, J. B. (1976). *Toward a new psychology of women*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. [Google Scholar] suggests that privilege is often unconscious; therefore, for many white students, the involvement within social work education is often their first introduction to these concepts.

Culturally responsive pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy has been seen as an important way of tackling the underachievement of BAME students, for example, in teacher training in the USA (Howard, 2003) Howard, T. C. (2003). Culturally relevant pedagogy: Ingredients for critical teacher reflection. *Theory into Practice*, 42(3), 195–202. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]; Rychly & Graves, 2012) Rychly, L., & Graves, E. (2012). Teacher characteristics for culturally responsive pedagogy. *Multi-Cultural Studies*, 14(1), 44–49. [Google Scholar]), where the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of diverse students are actively attended to within the curriculum. This includes values, traditions, social and cultural norms, relationship norms and communication styles (Gay, 2002) Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106–116. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]. Studies applying culturally sensitive practice within social work education point to the need for educators to address diverse identities within the student group. It is suggested that this is in order to manage... *'the challenge of finding pedagogical methods that model and demonstrate the anti-racist and culturally competent practice that they are advocating, rather than purely engaging in a descriptive or didactic process'*... (Gollan & O'Leary, 2009) Gollan, S., & O'Leary, P. J. (2009). Teaching culturally competent social work practice through black and white pedagogical partnerships. *Social Work Education*, 28(7), 707–721. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Google Scholar], p. 708).

These authors suggest a model of a black-white partnership teaching as a safe and effective way of exploring personal and professional identities within diverse groups of students. The aim is to ensure that, in a student-centred

way, each student's cultural background and cultural references can be included in teaching and learning to improve academic achievement and a sense of inclusivity and well-being for BAME student groups.

Consequently, it should be acknowledged that the focus of this particular study is not new but remains a current concern. In addition, the purpose of the study, as well as to identify barriers to critical reflection and learning about culture and identity, is to add to the existing body of knowledge about student experiences and to address issues that may undermine teaching, learning and achievement on the social work programme at UoS, and, indeed, elsewhere.

Methodology

A three-stage approach was employed to address the issues identified earlier, which involved;

1. the completion of a curriculum audit of individual modules in 2015, to identify strengths and gaps in teaching. This was a teaching exercise which formed part of an annual curriculum review and as such was not part of the formal ethics committee submission.
2. a team development day, which, as in 1. above, was an institutional expectation for staff development to enhance teaching and learning. It provided a reflective space and was led by an external facilitator with experience of these issues from educational and therapeutic perspectives, to examine social work lecturers' own issues in teaching anti-racism, black perspectives and white privilege. One day was not enough but it started to deepen team members' thinking about barriers, change and improvement.
3. the student perspective-a small scale qualitative study using focus groups to explore perceptions and gain understanding of the student experience from across the three years of the BA Social Work degree programme. This is the stage of the project reported on here.

The aim of this small-scale exploratory study was to increase understanding, from the perspectives of ethnicity and culture, of how well (or otherwise) the programme created opportunities, through teaching and learning, for students to explore cultural differences, either in academic discussions, in lectures or tutor groups, or in practice learning with practice educators, for students from minority ethnic groups, with the aim of providing important learning for the whole student group.

To this end, a student researcher was engaged from a European university who was interested in the area of research for her own studies. Her status as a student was helpful for working with the student cohorts, to engage them in the study, as she was seen as an 'insider' as a student, but an 'outsider' in

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relation to the programme and the lecturing team (Padgett, 2017Padgett, D. K. (2017). *Qualitative methods in social work research*(3rd ed.). London: Sage. [Google Scholar], p. 65–66). It was thought that equal power and status between the researcher and participants would enable students to share their thoughts more openly.

Ethical approval was granted in March 2017 by the University's Ethics Committee. All students across the three years of the programme were then sent information explaining the study and inviting participation. Informed consent was gained from participants and the right to withdrawal was clarified. Focus groups were selected as a method of data collection, because in terms of researcher time available, they were an economical means of gathering data (Alston & Bowles, 2018Alston, M., & Bowles, W. (2018). *Research for social workers; An introduction to methods* (4thed.). NSW: A&U Academic. [Google Scholar], p. 194). When the research project was initially discussed with students, in the early planning stage, BAME students asked if they could be interviewed in groups together as they would feel more confident in raising sensitive issues in this context. White students were also in agreement with this proposition. We structured this into the research design, devising two focus groups (namely, one for white and one for BAME students) for each year group (6 in total across the three-year degree programme). The homogeneity of the groups provided mutual support and encouragement for participants to discuss some sensitive and difficult issues that they may not have found easy to raise in an individual interview (Flick, 2014Flick, U. (2014). *An introduction to qualitative research* (5th ed.). London: SAGE. [Google Scholar], p. 251). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013Kamberelis, G., & Dimitriadis, G. (2013). *Focus Groups. From structured interviews to collective conversations*. Abingdon: Routledge.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar], p. 40) note how focus groups have an '*intensely social nature*' and bring together '*a confluence of varied perspectives on similar experiences*', providing the opportunity for participants to develop their ideas together about the difficulties faced and how to create change, through a kind of 'group think'. The research student was able to create an informal yet focused climate for discussion.

Five focus groups were held across the three cohorts (Years 1–3). Individual interviews were offered if a student preferred this, or was unable to attend a group. The focus groups were as follows—

Year 1 BAME—Four students

Year 2 BAME—Seven students

Year 3 BAME—Two students

Year 1 White—Two students

Year 2 White—Three students

It was not possible to arrange a focus group with Year 3 White students because of difficulties in arranging a mutually convenient time due to the programme timetable. Individual interviews were offered but, in the end, an online forum was created to capture the perceptions of those unable to attend a group. One white student made use of this forum. (Table 1—see below—here).

Table 1. Student numbers and ratios.

CSVDisplay Table

An interview schedule was devised (see [Appendix 1](#)), and interviews were recorded and transcribed. A thematic analysis of the content of the interviews was used to identify themes and to compare these across the groups. A draft report was produced and circulated to participants for their comments to check for accuracy and to minimize researcher influence.

The limitations of the study are that as a qualitative project, only a small number of students was involved. All students on the programme were invited to attend a focus group. They self-selected and, notably, more BAME students than white students attended groups overall. Significantly, less white students demonstrated interest and motivation to take part, even though we offered an online forum to make it practically more easy for students to engage. One final year white student made use of this opportunity. All students who took part were motivated by an awareness of the need for change.

Themes arising from the findings

Experiences of racism and their effects on teaching and learning about culture and ethnicity

BAME students bring ongoing experiences of racism with them on to the social work course at UoS, forming a lens through which they give meaning to their experiences in the university, based on past and current experiences outside the course. In terms of everyday racism that students experienced in their lives generally, one Year 3 BAME student contrasted her experience as a BAME person living in an East Anglian county town, compared to London where there is more diversity. She commented that in her town... *'it was more like trying to fit in'* and she felt that *'everybody was so aware...and everybody made me aware...'* of her difference.

The power of accents

One BAME student talked about his accent and how he feels he is seen as less capable on the course because of it. Another BAME student described being met with incredulity when she speaks with a British accent, and has a typical British name, and has been asked ‘*so what is your real name?*’ An accent (or perceived lack of accent) marks these students out as different, as outsiders, and as problems in terms of communication, although, as one student commented, the logic of this is very questionable as accents within white communities can be hard to understand and people need to make the effort to listen and communicate to find meaning.

Generalizations about culture and identity

In all three BAME focus groups, there was discussion about how BAME students were often treated by white students and sometimes by lecturers, as a homogenous group, which they found difficult. White students will see all ‘black’ people as the same and diversity, for instance, within different African cultures and different individual experiences within a culture, is not understood by white students, demonstrated with comments such as... ‘*In your culture, you do.....*’ or ‘*...In Africa you do....*’; therefore, evidencing little knowledge of Africa as a continent, containing many cultures, religions and different practices.

Subtle racism

Some BAME students thought that racism is often subtle, both outside the university as well as on the social work course; ‘*Racism is going underground; it is more hidden ...*’. An aspect of this for some BAME students was that they felt their cultural values and beliefs were not given sufficient importance on the course ‘*...and if you don’t acknowledge that value and if you don’t acknowledge it while you are here, are you gonna acknowledge it in practice?*’

One Year 2 BAME student also said that for group work in lectures, there were some white students that... ‘*don’t want to work with black people...there is a massive divide*’.

Tired of challenging and fearful of being judged

BAME students also feel labelled and under-rated in written work, when English is not their first language and find lecturers’ judgments on their written work sometimes hard to accept. In group discussions, they felt ‘*shot down*’ and then feared writing anything down for assessment.

Because of the nature of the course ...we speak about equality and respect, but literately EVERYTIME we are talking about something we ALWAYS get shot down ...

This echoes the warning from Fletcher et al.'s (2015 Fletcher, J., Bernard, C., Fairtlough, A., & Ahmet, A.(2015). Beyond equal access to equal outcomes: The role of the institutional culture in promoting full participation, positive inter-group interaction and timely progression for minority social work students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 45(1), 120–137.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]) study against complacency within social work programmes' staff teams, arising from the anti-oppressive value base within social work, which can blind teaching staff to the oppressions that minority students experience within the HEI (Fletcher et al., 2015 Fletcher, J., Bernard, C., Fairtlough, A., & Ahmet, A.(2015). Beyond equal access to equal outcomes: The role of the institutional culture in promoting full participation, positive inter-group interaction and timely progression for minority social work students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 45(1), 120–137.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar], p. 126)—an 'it doesn't happen here' attitude.

University support services

At a more general level in the university, there were also views that the needs of BAME students were ignored. Students spoke about their perception that some groups (for example, those with specific learning disabilities) get help but they do not. It was seen that what Learning Services offered for those with English as a second language was not really any different from the support that was offered to most other students, and that this should be improved. This contrasts to Stevenson's report (2012 Stevenson, J. (2012). *Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment*. York: HEA. [Google Scholar], p. 15) in which BME (as identified in the report) students were unequivocally opposed to the idea of targeted support, suggesting it... '*smacked of inadvertent racism*'.

Confidence to make changes

The students spoke about handling these difficult issues in different ways. Sometimes they might act self-protectively out of tiredness or avoidance, or they may confront, as when a student stood up in a tutor group because she was upset;

Right...I don't like the attitude of this tutorial group' and she spoke about how she felt victimized and bullied. Those present described how her action was very powerful and '*from that situation onwards, people were really mindful*.

The important issue from all the experiences above is that however an individual decided to handle an issue, whether to accommodate or to confront, they all felt the effects of the experiences as negative and undermining of identity and sense of self.

Whiteness and white privilege

Ideas about whiteness and white privilege emerged across all focus groups and there tended to be a clear division between the responses of white students. There were those who believed that there was not a significant problem on the programme and these students tended to take a colour-blind approach, seemingly unaware of their own structural advantages. In her book 'White Fragility', Diangelo (2018) Diangelo, R. (2018). *White fragility*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. [Google Scholar] suggests that the socialization process for white people is so powerful that they struggle to see themselves in racial terms and therefore are unable to see the privileges associated with this. This idea can be seen in the comment from one white student who said that it is hard... *'to associate with what that (BAME) person goes through, because I have always been of the mind that they are no different to me, you know... it is a person'*.

In this student's view the BAME students...

'...integrate really well...I don't see that being different, they are just part of that cohort and (we) have friendships with them they are people we know'. However, there were white students who thought that in the large student groups, BAME students experienced some difficulties in the teaching and learning environment. One student suggested that these were due to culture rather than ethnicity, with the comment that BAME students... *'struggle more because of the culture rather than the language....it is a cultural thing that separates groups within the class'*. This suggests a reluctance to 'see' ethnicity, with the white student suggesting that the difficulties experienced by BAME students were due to perceived cultural differences.

Another white student commented that she hoped that... *'the teaching you get on the social work course would be more sensitive and aware of black and minority ethnic differences and...there is less of the racial power differential'*; however, she was not certain about this being achieved.

Outside of the teaching environment, a positive influence for one white student on their learning had been a close friendship with a BAME fellow student because... *'she makes me look at things in a different way sometimes'*.

This student reflected that she... *'might be ignorant without realizing...and she (her friend) pulls me up about stuff'*, and their relationship... *'has had quite a big influence on me, but in a positive way. She made me think about "stuff".... sometimes she tries to make it almost...sort of like...humorous...the way she describes things sometimes...it would be.... taking the piss out of it....'*

Clearly this friendship could circumvent psychological defensiveness with humour, trust and familiarity to allow for challenge, reflection and re-evaluating within a 'safe space'.

The above comments point to the need for more sensitive teaching on the course with tutors and lecturers creating a safe space to explore issues of privilege—not only to open up conversations, but to have the confidence to manage them in a way that is comfortable for everyone. This is supported by Housee's (2011) Housee, S. (2011). What difference does difference make? A discussion with ethnic minority students about their learning experience in higher education. *Learning and Teaching*, 4(1), 70–91.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar]) research referred to earlier;

Whilst external factors seemed to be the most crucial in shaping student experiences, internal factors such as helpful staff, interactive and inclusive group work and democratic dialogue were important' (Housee, 2011) Housee, S. (2011). What difference does difference make? A discussion with ethnic minority students about their learning experience in higher education. *Learning and Teaching*, 4(1), 70–91.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar], p. 87).

Teaching black history, black perspectives and anti-racism

The main themes within this section of the discussion were as follows;

Black history is poorly taught in schools

There was agreement amongst BAME students that black history was poorly taught in the schools they had attended in England. One BAME student described her experience in a local school as quickly passed over and superficially dealt with, ignoring the achievements of black people in history and focusing just on slavery in a dismissive and non-critical way, in her view, to reduce white people's discomfort;

It was like: "We did black history. You were slaves. Now you are not. Get over it". That is how it.... that was exactly how I thought it was taught. You are not slaves anymore, you haven't to be upset, move on.. really?'

Another BAME student criticized some white students because they had no knowledge of black history. But she was even more shocked that 'my own people don't know their history'.

The focus of history teaching was seen as misplaced;

Being aware of things and of identity and culture and of different cultural backgrounds and perspectives starts way deeper.....we have to learn about

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

World War II.... we have to learn about Henry VIII.... I am thinking, "I don't care about that, because it has nothing to do with me.....where is my history?"

Whilst there was less discussion within the white student focus groups on the issue of black history, when and how it is taught and the impact this has, one of the white student focus groups highlighted that they thought that they needed more knowledge about this and did not have enough teaching on black perspectives and different cultures on the social work programme.

So, from the comments of both BAME and white students on the social work course, it seems they are starting to look at this important area of knowledge but from a low baseline.

An emotional divide

A BAME student emphasized the emotional impact of the teaching on black history;

I think some part of it is quite emotional as well... to know what black people have gone through in terms of racism and stuff like that so I think it is quite over-powering.....

From a BAME perspective, there was also a sense of separation and marginalization between the white students and themselves. One BAME student spoke of a feeling of marginalization because of the imbalance between the focus on dominant white perspectives over black perspectives;

It is bit of a sensitive, you know, a sensitive issue, but like... you think: "Ok, I step back and, you know, em, whoever wants to talk, because it is always, there is always no balance, if you know what I mean, you always definitely feel, em, the difference...."

Again, this points to the need for a sensitive approach in a contained and safe setting. One BAME student recounted how white lecturers trying to cover black perspectives in their lectures were criticized by BAME students... *'judging them for being a white person trying to explain black and minority ethnic groups'* and they *'get automatically told: "You don't know how it feels."'*

This same student felt that white lecturers needed to be afforded more space as well;

...to at least try to explain where they are coming from, but people don't give people the chance, so that makes it hard for lecturers to be right.

However, some white students specifically stated that whilst they found teaching on black perspectives and black history useful... *'it is depending on*

how it is delivered', because 'on some occasions, it is such a stark way of delivering it...it shocks us', although they see the importance of the teaching, because, even if it... 'sometimes feels uneasy...I know a bit more about black culture and that will hopefully influence my learning.'

The discomfort of white students had an emotional impact on black students. One BAME student reported that she felt uncomfortable when slavery was discussed in a lecture;

...because the way sometimes it is.... you can FEEL the tension and the eyes on your head.

Comparing the different group responses, the students' comments above highlight the emotional impact of the learning for both BAME and white students, albeit different emotions depending on their identity. Across the groups, there was little discussion or critical comment about the teaching of anti-racism or the diversity of reading lists and other teaching materials, though one student commented on the narrowness of theoretical approaches and the need... *'[to] bring in other theories that are not white eurocentric'*.

It seems from the themes and issues raised by the students in this section, that students were more preoccupied with their experiences on the course, in turn influenced by their pre-course experiences (highlighted in the first section of the findings (above)), that need to be addressed, before feeling able to think themselves into a practitioner role with the full significance of anti-racist practice in work with minority ethnic service users.

Confidence in discussing cultural background

BAME students felt that their contributions about their own culture and background were not appreciated in group discussions, which undermined their confidence. The main issue for BAME students was the sense of a lack of a safe space in which to have a meaningful discussion about differences. One BAME student reported on how a visiting lecturer made assumptions about her religion and culture from her dress and ascribed things to her as part of a cultural group which she felt did not relate to her at all. She felt angry and upset about his treatment of her.

Lecturer behaviour and control was seen as important in either establishing or undermining a safe space. Some students said they did not feel safe because sometimes in a discussion, a lecturer might stand back and... *'leave it to see where it goes.....(and) you are shut downand it doesn't go away'*. A supportive stance from the tutor or lecturer was seen as crucial here, given the sensitive, emotional nature of such discussions, as described above. One student felt aggrieved by how she was treated when she tried to stand up for herself;

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

One of my tutors, when I tried to stand up for myself and tell them what I need.... I was told... (I was) aggressive...and then I was told.... manipulative.

Anxiety was seen as a barrier to meaningful discussions because of the lack of confidence it produced. One group of BAME students suspected that there are certain inhibitions among the white students because... *'there are a lot of people.... who are White-British.... that may feel quite...worried about offending....so they don't ask their questions'*.

White students acknowledged their anxieties... *'as a white person (you) can feel blamed.... for previous white atrocities'*.

Another white participant admitted... *'personally....quite a lot of cultural guilt, I suppose, I would call it...historically...a burden'*.

Two significant fears emerged amongst the white students' discussions—the fear of offending someone directly and the fear of not knowing or not being sensitive enough. White students lived with this uncertainty, acknowledging that they would not necessarily know how BAME students feel but they tried to imagine what they might be feeling, such as one white student who tried to use her own experience as a comparison;

Being female it feels like it is...a minority group in terms of power...in terms of numbers.

However, anxiety can also provoke withdrawal and several students admitted that they may want to say something, but they remain silent, preferring to... *'just get to the end of the course'*.

On balance, what these comments seem to indicate, is that there is little meaningful communication between the groups about these important matters. From a BAME student perspective, the insecurity that develops from their past and present awareness and experience of white privilege and racism affects their interactions with white colleagues, and from a white student perspective, their fear and uncertainty about how to explore these important issues, and a lack of awareness about their own white privilege, get in the way of meaningful exchange too. Jeyasingham (2012) Jeyasingham, D. (2012). White noise: A critical evaluation of social work education's engagement with whiteness studies. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(4), 669–686. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar] suggests that whiteness studies should form an integral part of the social work curriculum as this offers a way to explore how invisible power operates and permeates within our society. This moves the focus from being solely on the discrimination and oppression experienced by BAME students to a shared problem.

Most of the students expressed a desire to be more confident about having such discussions. However, there are powerful influences that prevent

students from taking risks, and in this respect, the creation of a safe space (see below) in which to try out their growing skills and self-awareness is crucial.

Areas of tension between cultural backgrounds and the expectations of professional practice

Fear of standing out as 'different'

This section of the focus group discussion did not yield significant comment from the white student groups, but BAME students voiced fears and anxieties that seemed to indicate that any critical thinking about a student's own culture and the expectations of professional practice would be blocked by anxiety and fear of standing out as 'different'.

Generally, BAME students seemed to think that because there was little felt interest in cultures other than the dominant white culture on the course, then it was difficult to explore, in any meaningful way, the tensions that may arise between cultural backgrounds and the expectations of professional practice, due to a fear of being judged. One BAME student was concerned that he would be marked out on placement and commented... *'like, you know, you would be painted with this brush, you know.'*

Anxieties that white students do not face

Other BAME students referred to tensions and anxieties that they take to placement settings about how they will be received and valued on a practice placement, which they thought white students would not face because they espoused dominant cultural values...

...you know, if someone is going into placement and you don't know what you going into....and you go into the voluntary sector, I don't know what other people are going to be there, and that is something on my mind, which other students, you know, white students, it probably won't even cross their minds.

It seems that BAME students feel a lack of confidence in raising potential areas of tension on placement for the same reason that they do not write about these in their portfolios, as noted by the lecturing team. This would appear to indicate that the tensions between cultural backgrounds and the expectations of professional practice is a whole area of learning that is not being adequately explored within the academic course. It may be that it is explored on placement between practice educator and student (through, for example, the use of the Mandela Model (Tedam, 2011 Tedam, P. (2011). The MANDELA model of practice learning: An old present in new

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wrapping? *Journal of Practice Teaching & Learning*, 11(2), 19–33. [Google Scholar]) which the course introduced in 2016). This model was developed by Tadam in response to a qualitative study she undertook with colleagues exploring the experiences of black African students on a social work programme in England (Bartoli et al., 2008Bartoli, A., Kennedy, S., & Tadam, P. (2008). Practice learning: Who is failing to adjust? Black African student experience of practice learning in a social work setting. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 75–90.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar]) and a lack of specific resources to support the teaching and learning of these students. The model is a strengths-based tool which enables practice educators to aid discussion and explore with students the differences and similarities in power and lived experiences, to develop a deeper understanding and to assist practice educators to avoid oppressive practice in their teaching, supervision and assessment of students. However, there was little commentary on the use of this model in the participants' responses which may suggest that it is not being routinely used by practice educators and more work needs to take place to ensure this tool is effectively used to open up conversations. The literature supports the view that tensions and expectations are not explored in significant depth within the practice placement (Bartoli et al., 2008Bartoli, A., Kennedy, S., & Tadam, P. (2008). Practice learning: Who is failing to adjust? Black African student experience of practice learning in a social work setting. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 75–90.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar]; Fairtlough et al., 2014Fairtlough, A., Bernard, C., Fletcher, J., & Ahmet, A. (2014). Black social work students' experiences of practice learning: understanding differential progression rates. *Journal of Social Work*, 14(6), 605–624.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]).

Improving the student experience of teaching black perspectives and anti-racism on the course

The students interviewed showed a strong sense of motivation for change within the programme, particularly, and not surprisingly, for the BAME students who felt marginalized by the dominant perspectives. As one BAME student put it... *'The solution is here.... when you keep it within yourself, how is the university gonna know to address the situation'*.

Discussing white privilege on the course

There was a clear message that white privilege needed to be explored more and led by white lecturers, as this would enable white students to hear the discussion differently. It was suggested that if this discussion was led by a black lecturer, then white students might dismiss the issues as coming from a personal perspective and not from the position of structural inequality;

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I think, that more white lecturers need to mention it, need to speak about it ...to be able to relate and go actually yeah, I get it, I can see it.'

White educators, both in this country (Ryde, 2009Ryde, J. (2009). *Being white in the helping professions*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publications. [Google Scholar]) and internationally (Diangelo, 2018Diangelo, R. (2018). *White fragility*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. [Google Scholar]) highlight the importance of white awareness training and how this can assist white students to unpick their unconscious bias and begin to see themselves in racial terms. Doing so enables them to acknowledge emotions, such as guilt, that often follow when there is a realization that racism is so deeply rooted in societal structures it is impossible not to experience the privilege of this as a white person.

A safe space

In her model of community cultural wealth and her discussion of this through the lens of critical race theory, Yosso (2005Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91.[Taylor & Francis Online], , [Google Scholar]) questions whether educators provide students with the opportunities to tell their stories. As discussed earlier, black students spoke about not feeling safe to discuss their cultural values and described experiences of feeling 'shot down', by either students or lecturers. Including spaces within the curriculum for the use of narrative and storytelling may provide opportunities for discussion and exploration of these issues without judgement or blame (Yosso, 2005Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91.[Taylor & Francis Online], , [Google Scholar]). In this respect, the role of the lecturer as highlighted by BAME students is crucial in establishing a safe space.

One thing that we should be looking at is the relationship between the lecturers and us. It should be more sensitive—the way they talk to us.

The white students expressed similar desires because the lecturers should act in an...

...open and....non-judgemental wayWe would hope that (their) behaviour would be respectful of whoever the person is in front ...because it comes from a background of social work, so they should be adaptable, to the person that is in front of them whether they might be young, old, black, white,whatever, they should be able to behave and deliver in a non-judgemental way.

But it is not just the lecturer's responsibility;

I expect all members of the discussion to be open to all views of all members.

A more sensitive and balanced approach

BAME students did not feel that a separate support group would be useful to them as this would separate them out again and label them, but instead, a sensitive inclusive approach was required by lecturers with more of a focus on exploring not only differences in culture and ethnicity, but also similarities. One BAME student commented;

people should be treated individually..... because like you said, people have different life experiences in addition to being an ethnic minority ...

Another BAME student advocated for a whole module on ethnicity, culture, religion and extremism to counter what they saw as media bias...

...there needs to be a whole module on like, race and religion and extremism and everything else, because the world as it is now, we gonna let people go out and have views of people and have assumption of people because the media said something, and the media is not always correct.

A Year 3 white student thought that more time should be dedicated to diversity;

I think all students would benefit from a module dedicated to diversity. Learning about different cultures, customs and values would make everyone more aware of the diversity in our society.

Whose responsibility?

In a previous study of marginalised social work students, Bernard, Fairtlough, Fletcher and Ahmet (2014) Bernard, C., Fairtlough, A., Fletcher, J., & Ahmet, A. (2014). A qualitative study of marginalised social work students' views of social work education and learning. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(7), 1934–1949. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar], p. 1935) said that BAME students reported that they were often called upon to be 'race experts' by lecturers, and these students also felt there was an expectation that they would pro-actively challenge racism. These views are echoed in this study with a BAME student who said;

But why should we have to challenge? Like...I have got enough to do, and I don't need any extra work from challenging when no one else.. if other people don't have to challenge about things then why should I have to?

In other instances, students saw that they had a responsibility to promote change through their behaviour and expectations. A BAME student encouraged fellow students in the group discussions to reach out to the lecturers with their issues because...

...it is for you to let them know in a subtle way in a conversation..... so that they know that stuff has been said that affects you.

Discussion

Students' responses identify barriers and difficulties that get in the way of meaningful exchanges and discussions. They have clear ideas about what is wrong and what needs to be changed in teaching and learning on the programme. BAME students express feelings of frustration that there is a lack of sensitivity to their feelings, for example, about insufficient time or interest in learning about their different cultures. They highlight the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) Hochschild, A. (1983). *The managed heart*. Berkeley: University of California Press. [Google Scholar] involved in managing this disappointment (for instance, their management of feelings they experience internally and what they reveal externally). This is an essential response for managing themselves on the programme that does not arise for white students. The sense of being burdened is increased further by resentment about having to challenge when other students fail to see racism, or having to justify or explain when others were not sufficiently aware of their culture and being expected to take on the role of 'expert'.

Additionally, there are issues about identity and white privilege that are insufficiently addressed and feelings about these remain trapped beneath the surface of group discussions. BAME students expressed frustration and anger about what is not said, whereas white students expressed fear and uncertainty about how to express themselves on these matters. The impact of the emotional responses for each group of students (BAME and white) then appears to have further emotional impact on the other group.

Both BAME and (some) white students thought they arrived at university with a poor appreciation of the histories of BAME people and cultures (of black history for example) and whilst it is outside of the scope and power of this particular social work programme to change this in the short term, it is something that requires further consideration more widely, in the longer term and some current political thinking does see the significance of increasing a more critical approach to teaching in schools about imperialism and colonialism (The Guardian, 2018) The Guardian. (2018) 'Jeremy Corbyn vows to increase teaching of black history in schools' <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/11/jeremy-corbyn-labour-vows-to-increase-teaching-of-black-history-in-schools> [Google Scholar]).

It is clear from the comments of some BAME students that interpersonal interactions on the course, between students or with lecturers, that are felt as racist, or marginalising, such as comments from white students about accents, names, countries of origin and so on, or expectations that they are 'experts' in

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

all things African (as set out in the first section of the themes and issues), contribute, alongside the other issues such as poor knowledge of other cultures and histories, wider experiences of racism and white privilege, to a negative perception for those BAME participants in this study about their value as students on the programme.

This echoes Housee's (2011) Housee, S. (2011). What difference does difference make? A discussion with ethnic minority students about their learning experience in higher education. *Learning and Teaching*, 4(1), 70–91. [Crossref], [Google Scholar] research with sociology undergraduates, referred to earlier, which highlighted how, at an individual and internal level, BAME students' experiences prior to entering university shaped their ability to access learning in the classroom and negative interactions with other students in student groups, or with tutors, confirmed earlier negative experiences and a sense of failure that could be difficult to recover from.

The BAME students in our study clearly articulate a lack of confidence that speaking or writing about their own cultural heritage is worth the risk, resulting in the significant omissions in discussions and assignments as highlighted in the abstract above. And these omissions, if not addressed will continue to impair the students' emotional well-being and their professional functioning, and undermine the programme's ability to promote effective teaching and learning in a way that practices what we preach in a truly anti-racist way.

To turn this around, a key preoccupation of both BAME and white students in this study is the need for more safe spaces in lectures and tutor groups to exchange learning about cultural differences, values and experiences. Students recognise the importance of this for their learning and professional development but need the leadership of the teaching team to facilitate this more consistently.

Conclusion

Social work's different regulatory bodies over the years have recognised the importance of actively and consistently addressing ethnic and cultural diversity to ensure that practitioners adhere to culturally appropriate standards in line with the Equality Act 2010. Taking an anti-racist perspective suggests an emphasis on resistance and challenge to forces that disadvantage and exclude members of society subjected to racism at an individual and institutional level by virtue of 'cultural markers'

(Singh, 2013) Singh, S. (2013). Anti-racist social work education.

In A. Bartoli (Ed.), *Anti-racism in social work practice* (pp. 25–47). St Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd. [Google Scholar], p. 30).

Students need to feel comfortable about critically examining their own cultures in order to competently explore those of others and the impact of racism on

individuals and groups. Comments from BAME students about their experiences of teaching and learning about cultural differences on the course, and about the way in which their own ethnicities and cultures feel devalued, indicate that more work needs to be done to facilitate this. In the need to create safer spaces to increase students' confidence to discuss cultural diversity, agreed ground rules for discussion on cultural differences across the course, held in a context of openness, honesty, non-judgementalism, mutual respect, sensitivity, with an expectation that racist attitudes will be challenged appropriately, have not been enough. More work needs to be done by lecturers (who may need more support/training to prepare them for this) to explore and competently manage difficult feelings that arise, or are defended against, within such discussions.

The feeling from students that ideas of white privilege need to be explored and led by white lecturers is an area that needs to be considered. Davis, Mirick, and McQueen (2015) Davis, A., Mirick, R., & McQueen, B. (2015). Teaching from privilege: reflections from white female instructors. *Journal of Women and Social Work*, 30(3), 302–313. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]) suggest that it is necessary for educators with privilege to be aware of their own power in order to understand and anticipate the dynamics within the teaching and learning environment and be open to discussion as well as being willing to make themselves vulnerable. By doing so, lectures and tutors are able to model skills and values for students who are able, in turn, to adopt these in their work with people who have been oppressed. It is acknowledged that more training may be required for white lecturers who may be working against the grain of their own socialisation (Monaghan, 2010) Monaghan, C. H. (2010). Working against the grain: White privilege in human resource development. *New Directions For Adult & Continuing Education*, 135, 53–63. [Google Scholar]. The collective guilt and shame experienced by white students and white lecturers about histories of slavery, racism and 'racial cleansing' can be supported by mindfulness training for example, which engenders self-compassion (Birnie, Speca, and Carlson (2010) Birnie, K., Speca, M., & Carlson, L. E. (2010). Exploring self-compassion and empathy in the context of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). *Stress and Health*, 26(5), 359–371. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]), cited in Parkes and Kelly (2014) Parkes, R., & Kelly, S. (2014). Mindfulness for resilience in social work. In L. Grant & G. Kinman (Eds.), *Developing resilience for social work practice* (pp. 110–127). London: Palgrave Macmillan. [Crossref], [Google Scholar])). According to Parkes and Kelly (2014) Parkes, R., & Kelly, S. (2014). Mindfulness for resilience in social work. In L. Grant & G. Kinman (Eds.), *Developing resilience for social work practice* (pp. 110–127). London: Palgrave Macmillan. [Crossref], [Google Scholar]), it can also facilitate collaborative learning in student groups and, in relation of anti-discriminatory practice, it can engender greater tolerance and understanding of difference because it encourages the individual to see

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

different perspectives and thereby enhances cultural competence (Parkes & Kelly, 2014). Parkes, R., & Kelly, S. (2014). Mindfulness for resilience in social work. In L. Grant & G. Kinman (Eds.), *Developing resilience for social work practice* (pp. 110–127). London: Palgrave Macmillan. [Crossref], [Google Scholar], pp. 122–123).

Increased emphasis on cultural diversity, BAME perspectives and anti-racism across all teaching, including the integration of non-Western theories and values is also important with a recognition of the knowledge and expertise within the student body to which lecturers and tutors should give due positive recognition. Hillen and Levy (2015). Hillen, P., & Levy, S. (2015). Framing the experiences of BME social work students within a narrative of educating for a culturally diverse workforce. *Social Work Education*, 34(7), 785–798. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar], p. 788) undertook a similar study in Scotland and as a result recommend that a strengths-based approach is taken which critiques ‘race’ and ‘whiteness’ whilst ‘valuing other knowledges’. These points may well have been considered as having been addressed within the programme, but a student perspective, as presented here, strongly suggests that from a student point of view, this was not the case. The project has provided an important reflective ‘moment’ for this particular social work programme, and sharing these reflections may be helpful to other social work programmes too.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Language and terminology

It is important to consider the impact that language and terminology has had on social work education and the interplay with contemporary practice. We use the term *ethnicity* (preferred to ‘race’), as it suggests group membership on account of heritage, culture (inclusive of religion), language and ancestral identification and through the shaping of political status and socio-economic circumstances (Burck, 2007). Burck, C. (2007). *Multilingual living: Explorations of language and subjectivity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. [Google Scholar]; Institute of Race Relations, 2018). Institute of Race Relations. (2018). *Definitions*. Retrieved from <http://www.irr.org.uk/research/statistics/definitions/> [Google Scholar]). In recent years, the term ‘ethnic minority’ has been reversed and expanded upon, for example, ‘minority ethnic’; ‘black and minority ethnic’ (BME); ‘black, Asian and minority ethnic’ (BAME) to underline the fact that we ALL have an

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ethnicity, whilst at the same time, highlighting the discrimination and oppression minority groups still encounter (Richardson, 2006 Richardson, R. (2006). To BME or not to BME. *Race Equality Teaching*, 25(1), 11–16. [Crossref], [Google Scholar]; Thomas et al., 2004 Thomas, L., Wareing, S., Singh, I., Stillwell Pecci, J., Thornborrow, J., & Jones, J.(2004). *Language society and power; An introduction* (2nded.). London: Routledge. [Google Scholar]). Whilst acknowledging the evolving nature of language, its impact on identity and the problems associated with using a generalised term to describe a group of people that is highly diverse, the authors have settled on Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME) as the chosen terminology, which will be reflected in this journal article, focusing mainly on those students who are Black and Asian as these were the groups that self-selected for the study.

Appendix 2

Interview schedule

1. Have you ever had experiences on racism at the university (or on the social work programme)?
2. How much do you think 'whiteness' and a white perspective characterizes the teaching and learning on the programme?
3. How (well) do you think anti-racism and black perspectives are taught? How responsive are tutors to discussing cultural difference and diversity? How diverse are reading lists and other materials for module teaching?
4. How confident do you feel about discussing your own culture and background in ... lectures, group tutorials or individual tutorials, your own written assignments and practice portfolios? On what does this depend?
5. Do you see any areas of tension between your cultural background and the expectations of professional practice? How comfortable are you in exploring these either in class discussions or in written assignments/portfolios?
6. What would you change in the social work programme if you could increase anti-racist education?
7. Ending. Anything that should still be said or hasn't been asked?

Appendix 3

The main campus of University of Suffolk is located in a large county town within a rural county in England. Forty-eight percent of students studying at the university (including all campuses and part-time students) reside within its area postal code, with an additional thirty-one percent travelling in from surrounding counties. The student and local population are synonymous with each other, reflecting the dominant ethnic group (White/British—80%; rising to

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

84% when 'White Other' is included). The next largest ethnic groups are 'Black' (including African, Caribbean and 'Other')—7.1%; Asian (including Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese and 'Other')—4.8% and 'Mixed' (that is White and Caribbean; White and African; White and Asian; White and 'Other')—3.4%. Interestingly, successful completion and progression rates across all university programmes also reflect the ethnic group sizes—90.8% of White and 'White Other' students successfully complete programmes; Black—85.94%; Asian—82.17%; 'Mixed'—80.50%. Results from national figures obtained via Stevenson's (2012) Stevenson, J. (2012). *Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment*. York: HEA. [Google Scholar] HEA research report suggest similar attainment in relation to White (90.4%) and Black students (88.7%) being likely to qualify. The gap, post-qualifying, also appears to be evident, as according to Stevenson et al.'s (2019) Stevenson, J., O'Mahony, J., Khan, O., Ghaffar, F., & Stiell, B. (2019). *Understanding and overcoming the challenges of ethnicity targeting*. Retrieved from <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/d21cb263-526d-401c-bc74-299c748e9ecd/ethnicity-targeting-research-report.pdf> [Google Scholar] recent report to the Office for Students...

'...regardless of entry qualifications, subjects studied, degree outcomes and other socio-demographic characteristics, differences in employment outcomes between White and BAME graduates persist even three years after graduation' (OFFA, 2018) OFFA (Office for Fair Access for Students). (2018). Topic briefing -bme students. Retrieved from <https://www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/guidance/topic-briefings/offa-topic-briefing-bme-students/> [Google Scholar], cited in Stevenson et al., 2019) Stevenson, J., O'Mahony, J., Khan, O., Ghaffar, F., & Stiell, B. (2019). *Understanding and overcoming the challenges of ethnicity targeting*. Retrieved from <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/d21cb263-526d-401c-bc74-299c748e9ecd/ethnicity-targeting-research-report.pdf> [Google Scholar], p. 11).

Where figures for religion were obtainable, most students (41.7%) described themselves as 'non religious'; Christian (in various denominations) was the next largest group (28.5%), followed by 'Unknown' (20.4%); Muslim (2.68%) and 'refused to state' (2.65%). (All figures taken from the university's most recent Equality and Diversity Report, 2017–2018).

The majority of the students fall within the 18–24 category (47%) followed by 25–34 year olds (25%). In terms of highest level of qualification on entry, 19% of students had A/AS levels; 12.5% a UK undergraduate degree with Honours; 12% a diploma Level 3; and 8.5% a Diploma in Higher Education. Less than 4% had an HE Access Course/QAA recognised award.

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ABSTRACT

Teaching experience at the University of Suffolk noted anecdotally that Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students avoid discussing their identity, cultural heritage, norms and values, in lectures, tutor groups and in assignments.

To improve the integration of different cultural perspectives into the social work curriculum, we devised a small-scale qualitative research project Spring, 2017, to explore students' views of teaching, learning and assessment about cultural norms and differences, seeking the views of both BAME students and white students on the programme in order to compare and contrast their experiences.

Focus groups were used to gather the views of BAME and white students about the opportunities and barriers to discussing identity, culture, and anti-racism. The findings raised significant issues, specifically about the barriers for both BAME and white students to considering cultural differences. Student perspectives suggest more sensitive approaches to considering cultural differences; more responsibility for white lecturers to explore white privilege and its impact; and more safe spaces to manage emotional responses to oppression to enable exchange of experience and learning about different cultural norms and values. The article analyses the findings, discussing ways forward to improve the student experience and promote good practice in teaching and learning.

Introduction

Teaching experience on a Social Work programme in England at the University of Suffolk (UoS) noted anecdotally over a few years that BAME students (see [Appendix 1](#) for notes on terminology) tend not to discuss their identity, or cultural heritage and cultural norms as they differ from the dominant white norms. As social work is a profession that seeks to promote critical reflection, empathy and the celebration of difference and diversity through education into practice, then, clearly, this was a situation that required attention and change to ensure that graduates from the programme are able to practice in an anti-discriminatory manner, celebrate difference as a positive fact of life and promote social justice in their work with users of services from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This article presents findings from a small qualitative study which has played a part in the process of change to develop a more open and encouraging learning culture wherein BAME students could feel confident to discuss, reflect on, and critically evaluate differences in ethnicity and culture in their study groups and in their assessed work. It contains reflections that may be of use to other social work qualifying programmes, seeking to ensure that they reflect the curriculum standards of the current regulator, the Health and Care Professions Council (in particular, Standard 4.3, (Health and Care Professions Council 2018) *Standards of education and training*. Retrieved from <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-relevant-to-education-and-training/set/> [Google Scholar], p. 32)). This requires that students... *'reflect the philosophy, core values, skills and knowledge base as articulated in any relevant curriculum guidance'*, (in this case, the Professional Capabilities Framework (British Association of Social Workers [BASW], 2018) *Professional capabilities framework*. Retrieved from <https://www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/PCF%20CHART%20update%2010-9-18.pdf> [Google Scholar])), until these standards are replaced by Social Work England sometime during 2019.

Background

A number of themes emerge from the literature that resonate with the research presented as the focus of this article. These will be briefly explored to contextualise the research.

BAME students' experiences in higher education

Whilst there has been an increase in the diversity of students on social work courses in England in the last decade or more (across all dimensions of identity, and including ethnicity) (Dillon, 2011) Dillon, J. (2011). Black minority ethnic students navigating their way from access courses to social work programmes: Key considerations for the selection of students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(8), 1477–1496.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]; Moriarty & Murray, 2007 Moriarty, J., & Murray, J. (2007). Who wants to be a social worker? Using routine published data to identify trends in the numbers of people applying for and completing social work programmes in England. *British Journal of Social Work*, 37(4), 715–733.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]), this does not imply equality and full participation exists throughout the system. Findings from studies carried out on other social work programmes in England, Scotland, Wales, Australia and in the United States showed difficulties and barriers in teaching cultural diversity on social work courses (see Bartoli, Kennedy, & Tedam, 2008 Bartoli, A., Kennedy, S., & Tedam, P. (2008). Practice learning: Who is failing to adjust? Black African student experience of practice learning in a social work setting. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 75–90.[Crossref], [Google Scholar]; Fairtlough, Bernard, Fletcher, & Ahmet, 2014 Fairtlough, A., Bernard, C., Fletcher, J., & Ahmet, A. (2014). Black social work students' experiences of practice learning: understanding differential progression rates. *Journal of Social Work*, 14(6), 605–624.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]; Gair, 2017 Gair, S. (2017). Pondering the colour of empathy: Social work students' reasoning on activism, empathy and racism. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(1), 162–180.[Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]; Hillen & Levy, 2015 Hillen, P., & Levy, S. (2015). Framing the experiences of BME social work students within a narrative of educating for a culturally diverse workforce. *Social Work Education*, 34(7), 785–798.[Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]; Werkmeister Rozas & Garras, 2016 Werkmeister Rozas, L., & Garras, A. M. (2016). Towards a human rights culture in social work education. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(4), 890–905.[Crossref], [PubMed], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]; Williams & Parrott, 2013 Williams, C., & Parrott, L. (2013). From specialism to genericism: Rising and falling to the challenges of responding to racial and ethnic diversity in social work education in Wales. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43(6), 1206–1224.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]). In some of these examples, different teaching tools (such as the Mandela Model (Tedam, 2011 Tedam, P. (2011). The MANDELA model of practice learning: An old present in new wrapping? *Journal of Practice Teaching & Learning*, 11(2), 19–33. [Google Scholar]) and empathy training (Gair, 2017 Gair, S. (2017). Pondering the colour of empathy: Social work

students' reasoning on activism, empathy and racism. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(1), 162–180.[Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar])) are proposed to tackle the problem and improve the teaching of anti-racism, cultural diversity and human rights. Dillon (2011) Dillon, J. (2011). Black minority ethnic students navigating their way from access courses to social work programmes: Key considerations for the selection of students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(8), 1477–1496.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar], p. 1491) discusses the obstacles at the organisational level, created for some BAME students through increased competition for places on social work courses and the credentialism and greater selectivity that has entered into the selection process since social work became a degree programme, which can impact negatively on BAME students.

The learning environment has to be conducive to the development and support of confident learners and there is extensive academic literature, particularly from the USA and from this country, that indicates that black and minority ethnic students in education at all levels and, more generally, across different disciplines at HE level, do less well in the outcomes of their studies (Isik et al., 2018) Isik, U., El Tahir, O., Meeter, M., Heymans, M. W., Jansma, E. P., Croiset, G., & Kusurkar, R. A. (2018). Factors influencing academic motivation of ethnic minority students: A review. *SAGE Open*, 8(2), 1–23.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]; See Appendix 3 for a local perspective), arising from a range of issues—internal to the student (for example, internalised racism, self-confidence and self-doubts (Housee, 2011) Housee, S. (2011). What difference does difference make? A discussion with ethnic minority students about their learning experience in higher education. *Learning and Teaching*, 4(1), 70–91.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar])), and external, including environmental and institutional issues, such as stereotyping (the impact of stereotype threat arising from negative stereotypes about their group (Massey & Fischer, 2008) Massey, D. S., & Fischer, M. J. (2008). Stereotype threat and academic performance. New findings from a racially diverse sample of college freshman. *Du Bois Review*, 2(1), 45–68. [Google Scholar]; Steele, 1997) Steele, C. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist*, 52(6), 13–629.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]; Woolf, Cave, Greenhalgh, & Dacre, 2008) Woolf, K., Cave, J., Greenhalgh, T., & Dacre, J. (2008). Ethnic stereotypes and the underachievement of UK medical students from ethnic minorities: Qualitative study. *British Medical Journal*, 337(7670), 1–7. [Google Scholar])), oppositional identity (resistance to educational achievement which means 'acting white' and 'racial' betrayal (Downey, 2008) Downey, D. B. (2008). Black/white differences in school performance. The oppositional culture explanation. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34(1), 107–126.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar])), and resource issues (lack of social and cultural capital, financial constraints (Housee, 2011) Housee, S. (2011). What difference does difference make? A discussion with ethnic minority students

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

about their learning experience in higher education. *Learning and Teaching*, 4(1), 70–91.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar])). These issues are very similar to those raised in the UK by Cree (2011Cree, V. E. (2011). ‘I’d like to call you my mother.’ Reflections on supervising international PhD students in social work. *Social Work Education*, 31(4), 451–464.[Taylor & Francis Online], , [Google Scholar]) in her study of international BME students studying for a Phd in Social Work, in which she highlights the additional pressures, compared with ‘home’ students, that these students have to contend with, including different academic conventions and expectations, language differences and difficulties, social isolation, financial and other stresses and insecurities. Singh’s earlier study (2005Singh, S. (2005). *Listening to the Silence, unpublished action research*. Edinburgh: The Open University in Scotland. [Google Scholar], cited in Hillen & Levy, 2015Hillen, P., & Levy, S. (2015). Framing the experiences of BME social work students within a narrative of educating for a culturally diverse workforce. *Social Work Education*, 34(7), 785–798.[Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]) raised significant concerns about the learning environment for social work education, notably, a Euro-centric bias, pathologising of BAME students and institutional structures of racism.

Qualifying social work courses at universities in England are, as indicated above, no exception within the well-noted trend (Bartoli et al., 2008Bartoli, A., Kennedy, S., & Tedam, P. (2008). Practice learning: Who is failing to adjust? Black African student experience of practice learning in a social work setting. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 75–90.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar]; Hussein, Moriarty, Manthorpe, & Huxley, 2008Hussein, S., Moriarty, J., Manthorpe, J., & Huxley, P.(2008). Diversity and progression among social work students starting social work qualifying programmes in England between 1995 and 1998: A quantitative study. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(8), 1588–1609.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]) of differential progression rates between BAME and white students, and similarly on access courses to Higher Education for social work (Dillon, 2011Dillon, J. (2011). Black minority ethnic students navigating their way from access courses to social work mprogrammes: Key consideraations for the selection of students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(8), 1477–1496.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar]). In terms of barriers for students on courses, Dillon’s (2011Dillon, J. (2011). Black minority ethnic students navigating their way from access courses to social work mprogrammes: Key consideraations for the selection of students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(8), 1477–1496.[Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar], p. 1489) study highlights external barriers to success for BAME students on access courses to social work in South East England as socio-economic disadvantage, alongside working and managing family commitments.

Anti-oppressive practice

The significance of anti-oppressive practice, anti-racism and cultural competence in social work education and practice is well-documented (Bartoli, 2013; Bartoli, A. (ed). (2013). *Anti-racism in social work practice*. St. Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd.. [Google Scholar]; Dominelli, 2008; Dominelli, L. (2008). *Anti-racist social work*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.[Crossref], [Google Scholar]; Smethurst & Bhatti-Sinclair, 2017; Smethurst, C., & Bhatti-Sinclair, K. (2017). Diversity and difference in challenging times: The social and political context. In K. Bhatti-Sinclair & C. Smethurst (Eds.), *Diversity, difference and dilemmas. Analysing concepts and developing skills* (pp. 3–12). London: Open University Press. [Google Scholar]; Thompson, 2012; Thompson, M. (2012). *Anti-discriminatory practice: Equality, diversity and social justice* (5th ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.[Crossref], [Google Scholar]). These concepts all recognize the structural forces that create oppression at the same time as working with individuals in ways that mitigate its impact and promote social justice. They relate also to human rights, which have perhaps received less attention in social work until more recently (Reichert, 2007; Reichert, E. (2007). Human rights in the twenty-first century: Creating a new paradigm for social work. In E. Reichert (Ed.), *Challenges in human rights: A social work perspective* (pp. 1–15). New York: Columbia University Press. [Google Scholar]), but these are equally important in relation to anti-racism—specifically in the core notions of human dignity; non-discrimination; and economic, social and cultural rights for all individuals (Werkmeister Rozas & Garras, 2016; Werkmeister Rozas, L., & Garras, A. M. (2016). Towards a human rights culture in social work education. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(4), 890–905.[Crossref], [PubMed], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]). From a social justice perspective, within which anti-racism is a fundamental aspect, students need to learn about a set of values for practice that encompass equity, responsibility (for themselves and for others) and accountability (to their profession and their organization—or to challenge this where failings in relation to equality occur). They also need to develop a critical appreciation of whiteness and of discourses of exclusion.

Whiteness and a black perspective

Racism continues to affect the lives of many people in this country (Bhopal, 2018; Bhopal, K. (2018). *White privilege. The myth of a post-racial society*. Bristol: Policy Press.[Crossref], [Google Scholar]; Eddo-Lodge, 2018; Eddo-Lodge, R. (2018). *Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. [Google Scholar]; Smethurst & Bhatti-Sinclair, 2017; Smethurst, C., & Bhatti-Sinclair, K. (2017). Diversity and difference in challenging times: The social and political context. In K. Bhatti-Sinclair & C. Smethurst (Eds.), *Diversity, difference and dilemmas. Analysing*

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

concepts and developing skills (pp. 3–12). London: Open University Press. [Google Scholar]. It is defined by Masocha (2017) Masocha, S. (2017). A 'turn to language' as a response to the shifting contours of racist discourse. *Practice, Social Work in Action*, 29(3), 159–177. [Google Scholar], p. 161) as 'an ideology that is enacted through social practices and serves to establish and maintain unequal power relations'. There is continuing evidence of discrimination, oppression and racial inequality in the UK (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016) Equality and Human Rights Commission. (2016). *Healing a divided Britain: The need for a comprehensive race equality strategy*. London: EHRC. [Google Scholar]. The report found 5 areas where urgent improvement is required: employment; education; crime; living standards and health and care. Within education, the report found that only 6 per cent of Black school leavers attended a Russell Group university, compared with 12 per cent of mixed and Asian school leavers and 11 per cent of White school leavers. Social work students, whether white or BAME, are involved in its impact, and there is a growing literature on critical whiteness and white privilege, which, as the other side of the racism coin, are crucial areas of learning for white social work students (see Abrams & Gibson, 2007) Abrams, L. S., & Gibson, P. (2007). Reframing multicultural education: Teaching white privilege in the social work curriculum. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 43(1), 147–160. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]; Crofts, 2013) Crofts, P. (2013). Critical race theory and exploring whiteness. In A. Bartoli (Ed.), *Anti-racism in social work practice* (pp. 103–124). St Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd. [Google Scholar]; Jeyasingham, 2012) Jeyasingham, D. (2012). White noise: A critical evaluation of social work education's engagement with whiteness studies. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(4), 669–686. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]; Kennedy, 2013) Kennedy, S. (2013). White woman listening. In A. Bartoli (Ed.), *Anti-racism in social work practice* (pp. 83–102). St Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd. [Google Scholar]; Ng'andu, 2017) Ng'andu, B. (2017). Being white – Feeling guilty?. In K. Bhatti-Sinclair & C. Smethurst (Eds.), *Diversity, difference and dilemmas: Analysing concepts and developing skills* (pp. 26–33). London: Open University Press. [Google Scholar].

McIntosh (1988) Macintosh, P. (1988) *White privilege: Unpacking the invisible Knapsack*. Retrieved from <https://www.csusm.edu/sjs/documents/unpackingtheknapsack.pdf> [Google Scholar], cited in Crofts, 2013) Crofts, P. (2013). Critical race theory and exploring whiteness. In A. Bartoli (Ed.), *Anti-racism in social work practice* (pp. 103–124). St Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd. [Google Scholar], p. 107) explored the idea of white privilege, as unearned social rights which white people possess without ever having to think about them. This led her to identify fifty ways in which she experienced white privilege on a daily basis. She describes it as 'an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions,

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maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks'. Bhopal (2018) Bhopal, K. (2018). *White privilege. The myth of a post-racial society*. Bristol: Policy Press. [Crossref], [Google Scholar], p. 25) discusses the role of institutions in perpetuating white privilege and contends that... *...In such white spaces, whiteness and white Western practices are the norm and those which do not comply with these are seen as outsiders and others*'.

Bhopal (2018) Bhopal, K. (2018). *White privilege. The myth of a post-racial society*. Bristol: Policy Press. [Crossref], [Google Scholar], p. 27) argues that, although through intersectionality, a person's identity may contain many facets, for example, class, gender, religion and sexuality, being white is so powerful that it 'takes precedence over all other forms of identity'. Miller (1976) Miller, J. B. (1976). *Toward a new psychology of women*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. [Google Scholar] suggests that privilege is often unconscious; therefore, for many white students, the involvement within social work education is often their first introduction to these concepts.

Culturally responsive pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy has been seen as an important way of tackling the underachievement of BAME students, for example, in teacher training in the USA (Howard, 2003) Howard, T. C. (2003). Culturally relevant pedagogy: Ingredients for critical teacher reflection. *Theory into Practice*, 42(3), 195–202. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]; Rychly & Graves, 2012) Rychly, L., & Graves, E. (2012). Teacher characteristics for culturally responsive pedagogy. *Multi-Cultural Studies*, 14(1), 44–49. [Google Scholar]), where the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of diverse students are actively attended to within the curriculum. This includes values, traditions, social and cultural norms, relationship norms and communication styles (Gay, 2002) Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106–116. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]. Studies applying culturally sensitive practice within social work education point to the need for educators to address diverse identities within the student group. It is suggested that this is in order to manage... *'the challenge of finding pedagogical methods that model and demonstrate the anti-racist and culturally competent practice that they are advocating, rather than purely engaging in a descriptive or didactic process'*... (Gollan & O'Leary, 2009) Gollan, S., & O'Leary, P. J. (2009). Teaching culturally competent social work practice through black and white pedagogical partnerships. *Social Work Education*, 28(7), 707–721. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Google Scholar], p. 708).

These authors suggest a model of a black-white partnership teaching as a safe and effective way of exploring personal and professional identities within diverse groups of students. The aim is to ensure that, in a student-centred

way, each student's cultural background and cultural references can be included in teaching and learning to improve academic achievement and a sense of inclusivity and well-being for BAME student groups.

Consequently, it should be acknowledged that the focus of this particular study is not new but remains a current concern. In addition, the purpose of the study, as well as to identify barriers to critical reflection and learning about culture and identity, is to add to the existing body of knowledge about student experiences and to address issues that may undermine teaching, learning and achievement on the social work programme at UoS, and, indeed, elsewhere.

Methodology

A three-stage approach was employed to address the issues identified earlier, which involved;

1. the completion of a curriculum audit of individual modules in 2015, to identify strengths and gaps in teaching. This was a teaching exercise which formed part of an annual curriculum review and as such was not part of the formal ethics committee submission.
2. a team development day, which, as in 1. above, was an institutional expectation for staff development to enhance teaching and learning. It provided a reflective space and was led by an external facilitator with experience of these issues from educational and therapeutic perspectives, to examine social work lecturers' own issues in teaching anti-racism, black perspectives and white privilege. One day was not enough but it started to deepen team members' thinking about barriers, change and improvement.
3. the student perspective-a small scale qualitative study using focus groups to explore perceptions and gain understanding of the student experience from across the three years of the BA Social Work degree programme. This is the stage of the project reported on here.

The aim of this small-scale exploratory study was to increase understanding, from the perspectives of ethnicity and culture, of how well (or otherwise) the programme created opportunities, through teaching and learning, for students to explore cultural differences, either in academic discussions, in lectures or tutor groups, or in practice learning with practice educators, for students from minority ethnic groups, with the aim of providing important learning for the whole student group.

To this end, a student researcher was engaged from a European university who was interested in the area of research for her own studies. Her status as a student was helpful for working with the student cohorts, to engage them in the study, as she was seen as an 'insider' as a student, but an 'outsider' in

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relation to the programme and the lecturing team (Padgett, 2017Padgett, D. K. (2017). *Qualitative methods in social work research*(3rd ed.). London: Sage. [Google Scholar], p. 65–66). It was thought that equal power and status between the researcher and participants would enable students to share their thoughts more openly.

Ethical approval was granted in March 2017 by the University's Ethics Committee. All students across the three years of the programme were then sent information explaining the study and inviting participation. Informed consent was gained from participants and the right to withdrawal was clarified. Focus groups were selected as a method of data collection, because in terms of researcher time available, they were an economical means of gathering data (Alston & Bowles, 2018Alston, M., & Bowles, W. (2018). *Research for social workers; An introduction to methods* (4thed.). NSW: A&U Academic. [Google Scholar], p. 194). When the research project was initially discussed with students, in the early planning stage, BAME students asked if they could be interviewed in groups together as they would feel more confident in raising sensitive issues in this context. White students were also in agreement with this proposition. We structured this into the research design, devising two focus groups (namely, one for white and one for BAME students) for each year group (6 in total across the three-year degree programme). The homogeneity of the groups provided mutual support and encouragement for participants to discuss some sensitive and difficult issues that they may not have found easy to raise in an individual interview (Flick, 2014Flick, U. (2014). *An introduction to qualitative research* (5th ed.). London: SAGE. [Google Scholar], p. 251). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013Kamberelis, G., & Dimitriadis, G. (2013). *Focus Groups. From structured interviews to collective conversations*. Abingdon: Routledge.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar], p. 40) note how focus groups have an '*intensely social nature*' and bring together '*a confluence of varied perspectives on similar experiences*', providing the opportunity for participants to develop their ideas together about the difficulties faced and how to create change, through a kind of 'group think'. The research student was able to create an informal yet focused climate for discussion.

Five focus groups were held across the three cohorts (Years 1–3). Individual interviews were offered if a student preferred this, or was unable to attend a group. The focus groups were as follows—

Year 1 BAME—Four students

Year 2 BAME—Seven students

Year 3 BAME—Two students

Year 1 White—Two students

Year 2 White—Three students

It was not possible to arrange a focus group with Year 3 White students because of difficulties in arranging a mutually convenient time due to the programme timetable. Individual interviews were offered but, in the end, an online forum was created to capture the perceptions of those unable to attend a group. One white student made use of this forum. (Table 1—see below—here).

Table 1. Student numbers and ratios.

CSVDisplay Table

An interview schedule was devised (see [Appendix 1](#)), and interviews were recorded and transcribed. A thematic analysis of the content of the interviews was used to identify themes and to compare these across the groups. A draft report was produced and circulated to participants for their comments to check for accuracy and to minimize researcher influence.

The limitations of the study are that as a qualitative project, only a small number of students was involved. All students on the programme were invited to attend a focus group. They self-selected and, notably, more BAME students than white students attended groups overall. Significantly, less white students demonstrated interest and motivation to take part, even though we offered an online forum to make it practically more easy for students to engage. One final year white student made use of this opportunity. All students who took part were motivated by an awareness of the need for change.

Themes arising from the findings

Experiences of racism and their effects on teaching and learning about culture and ethnicity

BAME students bring ongoing experiences of racism with them on to the social work course at UoS, forming a lens through which they give meaning to their experiences in the university, based on past and current experiences outside the course. In terms of everyday racism that students experienced in their lives generally, one Year 3 BAME student contrasted her experience as a BAME person living in an East Anglian county town, compared to London where there is more diversity. She commented that in her town... *'it was more like trying to fit in'* and she felt that *'everybody was so aware...and everybody made me aware...'* of her difference.

The power of accents

One BAME student talked about his accent and how he feels he is seen as less capable on the course because of it. Another BAME student described being met with incredulity when she speaks with a British accent, and has a typical British name, and has been asked ‘*so what is your real name?*’ An accent (or perceived lack of accent) marks these students out as different, as outsiders, and as problems in terms of communication, although, as one student commented, the logic of this is very questionable as accents within white communities can be hard to understand and people need to make the effort to listen and communicate to find meaning.

Generalizations about culture and identity

In all three BAME focus groups, there was discussion about how BAME students were often treated by white students and sometimes by lecturers, as a homogenous group, which they found difficult. White students will see all ‘black’ people as the same and diversity, for instance, within different African cultures and different individual experiences within a culture, is not understood by white students, demonstrated with comments such as... ‘*In your culture, you do.....*’ or ‘*...In Africa you do....*’; therefore, evidencing little knowledge of Africa as a continent, containing many cultures, religions and different practices.

Subtle racism

Some BAME students thought that racism is often subtle, both outside the university as well as on the social work course; ‘*Racism is going underground; it is more hidden ...*’. An aspect of this for some BAME students was that they felt their cultural values and beliefs were not given sufficient importance on the course ‘*...and if you don’t acknowledge that value and if you don’t acknowledge it while you are here, are you gonna acknowledge it in practice?*’

One Year 2 BAME student also said that for group work in lectures, there were some white students that... ‘*don’t want to work with black people...there is a massive divide*’.

Tired of challenging and fearful of being judged

BAME students also feel labelled and under-rated in written work, when English is not their first language and find lecturers’ judgments on their written work sometimes hard to accept. In group discussions, they felt ‘*shot down*’ and then feared writing anything down for assessment.

Because of the nature of the course ...we speak about equality and respect, but literately EVERYTIME we are talking about something we ALWAYS get shot down ...

This echoes the warning from Fletcher et al.'s (2015) Fletcher, J., Bernard, C., Fairtlough, A., & Ahmet, A. (2015). Beyond equal access to equal outcomes: The role of the institutional culture in promoting full participation, positive inter-group interaction and timely progression for minority social work students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 45(1), 120–137. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar] study against complacency within social work programmes' staff teams, arising from the anti-oppressive value base within social work, which can blind teaching staff to the oppressions that minority students experience within the HEI (Fletcher et al., 2015) Fletcher, J., Bernard, C., Fairtlough, A., & Ahmet, A. (2015). Beyond equal access to equal outcomes: The role of the institutional culture in promoting full participation, positive inter-group interaction and timely progression for minority social work students. *British Journal of Social Work*, 45(1), 120–137. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar], p. 126)—an 'it doesn't happen here' attitude.

University support services

At a more general level in the university, there were also views that the needs of BAME students were ignored. Students spoke about their perception that some groups (for example, those with specific learning disabilities) get help but they do not. It was seen that what Learning Services offered for those with English as a second language was not really any different from the support that was offered to most other students, and that this should be improved. This contrasts to Stevenson's report (2012) Stevenson, J. (2012). *Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment*. York: HEA. [Google Scholar], p. 15) in which BME (as identified in the report) students were unequivocally opposed to the idea of targeted support, suggesting it... '*smacked of inadvertent racism*'.

Confidence to make changes

The students spoke about handling these difficult issues in different ways. Sometimes they might act self-protectively out of tiredness or avoidance, or they may confront, as when a student stood up in a tutor group because she was upset;

Right...I don't like the attitude of this tutorial group' and she spoke about how she felt victimized and bullied. Those present described how her action was very powerful and '*from that situation onwards, people were really mindful*'.

The important issue from all the experiences above is that however an individual decided to handle an issue, whether to accommodate or to confront, they all felt the effects of the experiences as negative and undermining of identity and sense of self.

Whiteness and white privilege

Ideas about whiteness and white privilege emerged across all focus groups and there tended to be a clear division between the responses of white students. There were those who believed that there was not a significant problem on the programme and these students tended to take a colour-blind approach, seemingly unaware of their own structural advantages. In her book 'White Fragility', Diangelo (2018) Diangelo, R. (2018). *White fragility*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. [Google Scholar] suggests that the socialization process for white people is so powerful that they struggle to see themselves in racial terms and therefore are unable to see the privileges associated with this. This idea can be seen in the comment from one white student who said that it is hard... *'to associate with what that (BAME) person goes through, because I have always been of the mind that they are no different to me, you know... it is a person'*.

In this student's view the BAME students...

'...integrate really well...I don't see that being different, they are just part of that cohort and (we) have friendships with them they are people we know'. However, there were white students who thought that in the large student groups, BAME students experienced some difficulties in the teaching and learning environment. One student suggested that these were due to culture rather than ethnicity, with the comment that BAME students... *'struggle more because of the culture rather than the language....it is a cultural thing that separates groups within the class'*. This suggests a reluctance to 'see' ethnicity, with the white student suggesting that the difficulties experienced by BAME students were due to perceived cultural differences.

Another white student commented that she hoped that... *'the teaching you get on the social work course would be more sensitive and aware of black and minority ethnic differences and...there is less of the racial power differential'*; however, she was not certain about this being achieved.

Outside of the teaching environment, a positive influence for one white student on their learning had been a close friendship with a BAME fellow student because... *'she makes me look at things in a different way sometimes'*.

This student reflected that she... *'might be ignorant without realizing...and she (her friend) pulls me up about stuff'*, and their relationship... *'has had quite a big influence on me, but in a positive way. She made me think about "stuff".... sometimes she tries to make it almost...sort of like...humorous...the way she describes things sometimes...it would be.... taking the piss out of it....'*

Clearly this friendship could circumvent psychological defensiveness with humour, trust and familiarity to allow for challenge, reflection and re-evaluating within a 'safe space'.

The above comments point to the need for more sensitive teaching on the course with tutors and lecturers creating a safe space to explore issues of privilege—not only to open up conversations, but to have the confidence to manage them in a way that is comfortable for everyone. This is supported by Housee's (2011) Housee, S. (2011). What difference does difference make? A discussion with ethnic minority students about their learning experience in higher education. *Learning and Teaching*, 4(1), 70–91.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar]) research referred to earlier;

Whilst external factors seemed to be the most crucial in shaping student experiences, internal factors such as helpful staff, interactive and inclusive group work and democratic dialogue were important' (Housee, 2011) Housee, S. (2011). What difference does difference make? A discussion with ethnic minority students about their learning experience in higher education. *Learning and Teaching*, 4(1), 70–91.[Crossref], , [Google Scholar], p. 87).

Teaching black history, black perspectives and anti-racism

The main themes within this section of the discussion were as follows;

Black history is poorly taught in schools

There was agreement amongst BAME students that black history was poorly taught in the schools they had attended in England. One BAME student described her experience in a local school as quickly passed over and superficially dealt with, ignoring the achievements of black people in history and focusing just on slavery in a dismissive and non-critical way, in her view, to reduce white people's discomfort;

It was like: "We did black history. You were slaves. Now you are not. Get over it". That is how it.... that was exactly how I thought it was taught. You are not slaves anymore, you haven't to be upset, move on.. really?'

Another BAME student criticized some white students because they had no knowledge of black history. But she was even more shocked that '*my own people don't know their history*'.

The focus of history teaching was seen as misplaced;

Being aware of things and of identity and culture and of different cultural backgrounds and perspectives starts way deeper.....we have to learn about

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World War II.... we have to learn about Henry VIII.... I am thinking, "I don't care about that, because it has nothing to do with me.....where is my history?"

Whilst there was less discussion within the white student focus groups on the issue of black history, when and how it is taught and the impact this has, one of the white student focus groups highlighted that they thought that they needed more knowledge about this and did not have enough teaching on black perspectives and different cultures on the social work programme.

So, from the comments of both BAME and white students on the social work course, it seems they are starting to look at this important area of knowledge but from a low baseline.

An emotional divide

A BAME student emphasized the emotional impact of the teaching on black history;

I think some part of it is quite emotional as well... to know what black people have gone through in terms of racism and stuff like that so I think it is quite over-powering.....

From a BAME perspective, there was also a sense of separation and marginalization between the white students and themselves. One BAME student spoke of a feeling of marginalization because of the imbalance between the focus on dominant white perspectives over black perspectives;

It is bit of a sensitive, you know, a sensitive issue, but like... you think: "Ok, I step back and, you know, em, whoever wants to talk, because it is always, there is always no balance, if you know what I mean, you always definitely feel, em, the difference...."

Again, this points to the need for a sensitive approach in a contained and safe setting. One BAME student recounted how white lecturers trying to cover black perspectives in their lectures were criticized by BAME students... *'judging them for being a white person trying to explain black and minority ethnic groups'* and they *'get automatically told: "You don't know how it feels."'*

This same student felt that white lecturers needed to be afforded more space as well;

...to at least try to explain where they are coming from, but people don't give people the chance, so that makes it hard for lecturers to be right.

However, some white students specifically stated that whilst they found teaching on black perspectives and black history useful... *'it is depending on*

how it is delivered', because 'on some occasions, it is such a stark way of delivering it...it shocks us', although they see the importance of the teaching, because, even if it... 'sometimes feels uneasy...I know a bit more about black culture and that will hopefully influence my learning.'

The discomfort of white students had an emotional impact on black students. One BAME student reported that she felt uncomfortable when slavery was discussed in a lecture;

...because the way sometimes it is.... you can FEEL the tension and the eyes on your head.

Comparing the different group responses, the students' comments above highlight the emotional impact of the learning for both BAME and white students, albeit different emotions depending on their identity. Across the groups, there was little discussion or critical comment about the teaching of anti-racism or the diversity of reading lists and other teaching materials, though one student commented on the narrowness of theoretical approaches and the need... *'[to] bring in other theories that are not white eurocentric'*.

It seems from the themes and issues raised by the students in this section, that students were more preoccupied with their experiences on the course, in turn influenced by their pre-course experiences (highlighted in the first section of the findings (above)), that need to be addressed, before feeling able to think themselves into a practitioner role with the full significance of anti-racist practice in work with minority ethnic service users.

Confidence in discussing cultural background

BAME students felt that their contributions about their own culture and background were not appreciated in group discussions, which undermined their confidence. The main issue for BAME students was the sense of a lack of a safe space in which to have a meaningful discussion about differences. One BAME student reported on how a visiting lecturer made assumptions about her religion and culture from her dress and ascribed things to her as part of a cultural group which she felt did not relate to her at all. She felt angry and upset about his treatment of her.

Lecturer behaviour and control was seen as important in either establishing or undermining a safe space. Some students said they did not feel safe because sometimes in a discussion, a lecturer might stand back and... *'leave it to see where it goes.....(and) you are shut downand it doesn't go away'*. A supportive stance from the tutor or lecturer was seen as crucial here, given the sensitive, emotional nature of such discussions, as described above. One student felt aggrieved by how she was treated when she tried to stand up for herself;

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One of my tutors, when I tried to stand up for myself and tell them what I need.... I was told... (I was) aggressive...and then I was told.... manipulative.

Anxiety was seen as a barrier to meaningful discussions because of the lack of confidence it produced. One group of BAME students suspected that there are certain inhibitions among the white students because... *'there are a lot of people.... who are White-British.... that may feel quite...worried about offending....so they don't ask their questions'*.

White students acknowledged their anxieties... *'as a white person (you) can feel blamed.... for previous white atrocities'*.

Another white participant admitted... *'personally....quite a lot of cultural guilt, I suppose, I would call it...historically...a burden'*.

Two significant fears emerged amongst the white students' discussions—the fear of offending someone directly and the fear of not knowing or not being sensitive enough. White students lived with this uncertainty, acknowledging that they would not necessarily know how BAME students feel but they tried to imagine what they might be feeling, such as one white student who tried to use her own experience as a comparison;

Being female it feels like it is...a minority group in terms of power...in terms of numbers.

However, anxiety can also provoke withdrawal and several students admitted that they may want to say something, but they remain silent, preferring to... *'just get to the end of the course'*.

On balance, what these comments seem to indicate, is that there is little meaningful communication between the groups about these important matters. From a BAME student perspective, the insecurity that develops from their past and present awareness and experience of white privilege and racism affects their interactions with white colleagues, and from a white student perspective, their fear and uncertainty about how to explore these important issues, and a lack of awareness about their own white privilege, get in the way of meaningful exchange too. Jeyasingham (2012) Jeyasingham, D. (2012). White noise: A critical evaluation of social work education's engagement with whiteness studies. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(4), 669–686. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], , [Google Scholar] suggests that whiteness studies should form an integral part of the social work curriculum as this offers a way to explore how invisible power operates and permeates within our society. This moves the focus from being solely on the discrimination and oppression experienced by BAME students to a shared problem.

Most of the students expressed a desire to be more confident about having such discussions. However, there are powerful influences that prevent

students from taking risks, and in this respect, the creation of a safe space (see below) in which to try out their growing skills and self-awareness is crucial.

Areas of tension between cultural backgrounds and the expectations of professional practice

Fear of standing out as 'different'

This section of the focus group discussion did not yield significant comment from the white student groups, but BAME students voiced fears and anxieties that seemed to indicate that any critical thinking about a student's own culture and the expectations of professional practice would be blocked by anxiety and fear of standing out as 'different'.

Generally, BAME students seemed to think that because there was little felt interest in cultures other than the dominant white culture on the course, then it was difficult to explore, in any meaningful way, the tensions that may arise between cultural backgrounds and the expectations of professional practice, due to a fear of being judged. One BAME student was concerned that he would be marked out on placement and commented... *'like, you know, you would be painted with this brush, you know.'*

Anxieties that white students do not face

Other BAME students referred to tensions and anxieties that they take to placement settings about how they will be received and valued on a practice placement, which they thought white students would not face because they espoused dominant cultural values...

...you know, if someone is going into placement and you don't know what you going into....and you go into the voluntary sector, I don't know what other people are going to be there, and that is something on my mind, which other students, you know, white students, it probably won't even cross their minds.

It seems that BAME students feel a lack of confidence in raising potential areas of tension on placement for the same reason that they do not write about these in their portfolios, as noted by the lecturing team. This would appear to indicate that the tensions between cultural backgrounds and the expectations of professional practice is a whole area of learning that is not being adequately explored within the academic course. It may be that it is explored on placement between practice educator and student (through, for example, the use of the Mandela Model (Tedam, 2011 Tedam, P. (2011). The MANDELA model of practice learning: An old present in new

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wrapping? *Journal of Practice Teaching & Learning*, 11(2), 19–33. [Google Scholar]) which the course introduced in 2016). This model was developed by Tadam in response to a qualitative study she undertook with colleagues exploring the experiences of black African students on a social work programme in England (Bartoli et al., 2008 Bartoli, A., Kennedy, S., & Tadam, P. (2008). Practice learning: Who is failing to adjust? Black African student experience of practice learning in a social work setting. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 75–90. [Crossref], [Google Scholar]) and a lack of specific resources to support the teaching and learning of these students. The model is a strengths-based tool which enables practice educators to aid discussion and explore with students the differences and similarities in power and lived experiences, to develop a deeper understanding and to assist practice educators to avoid oppressive practice in their teaching, supervision and assessment of students. However, there was little commentary on the use of this model in the participants' responses which may suggest that it is not being routinely used by practice educators and more work needs to take place to ensure this tool is effectively used to open up conversations. The literature supports the view that tensions and expectations are not explored in significant depth within the practice placement (Bartoli et al., 2008 Bartoli, A., Kennedy, S., & Tadam, P. (2008). Practice learning: Who is failing to adjust? Black African student experience of practice learning in a social work setting. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 75–90. [Crossref], [Google Scholar]; Fairtlough et al., 2014 Fairtlough, A., Bernard, C., Fletcher, J., & Ahmet, A. (2014). Black social work students' experiences of practice learning: understanding differential progression rates. *Journal of Social Work*, 14(6), 605–624. [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]).

Improving the student experience of teaching black perspectives and anti-racism on the course

The students interviewed showed a strong sense of motivation for change within the programme, particularly, and not surprisingly, for the BAME students who felt marginalized by the dominant perspectives. As one BAME student put it... *'The solution is here.... when you keep it within yourself, how is the university gonna know to address the situation'*.

Discussing white privilege on the course

There was a clear message that white privilege needed to be explored more and led by white lecturers, as this would enable white students to hear the discussion differently. It was suggested that if this discussion was led by a black lecturer, then white students might dismiss the issues as coming from a personal perspective and not from the position of structural inequality;

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2019.1593355>

I think, that more white lecturers need to mention it, need to speak about it ...to be able to relate and go actually yeah, I get it, I can see it.'

White educators, both in this country (Ryde, 2009Ryde, J. (2009). *Being white in the helping professions*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publications. [Google Scholar]) and internationally (Diangelo, 2018Diangelo, R. (2018). *White fragility*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. [Google Scholar]) highlight the importance of white awareness training and how this can assist white students to unpick their unconscious bias and begin to see themselves in racial terms. Doing so enables them to acknowledge emotions, such as guilt, that often follow when there is a realization that racism is so deeply rooted in societal structures it is impossible not to experience the privilege of this as a white person.

A safe space

In her model of community cultural wealth and her discussion of this through the lens of critical race theory, Yosso (2005Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91.[Taylor & Francis Online], , [Google Scholar]) questions whether educators provide students with the opportunities to tell their stories. As discussed earlier, black students spoke about not feeling safe to discuss their cultural values and described experiences of feeling 'shot down', by either students or lecturers. Including spaces within the curriculum for the use of narrative and storytelling may provide opportunities for discussion and exploration of these issues without judgement or blame (Yosso, 2005Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91.[Taylor & Francis Online], , [Google Scholar]). In this respect, the role of the lecturer as highlighted by BAME students is crucial in establishing a safe space.

One thing that we should be looking at is the relationship between the lecturers and us. It should be more sensitive—the way they talk to us.

The white students expressed similar desires because the lecturers should act in an...

...open and....non-judgemental wayWe would hope that (their) behaviour would be respectful of whoever the person is in front ...because it comes from a background of social work, so they should be adaptable, to the person that is in front of them whether they might be young, old, black, white,whatever, they should be able to behave and deliver in a non-judgemental way.

But it is not just the lecturer's responsibility;

I expect all members of the discussion to be open to all views of all members.

A more sensitive and balanced approach

BAME students did not feel that a separate support group would be useful to them as this would separate them out again and label them, but instead, a sensitive inclusive approach was required by lecturers with more of a focus on exploring not only differences in culture and ethnicity, but also similarities. One BAME student commented;

people should be treated individually..... because like you said, people have different life experiences in addition to being an ethnic minority ...

Another BAME student advocated for a whole module on ethnicity, culture, religion and extremism to counter what they saw as media bias...

...there needs to be a whole module on like, race and religion and extremism and everything else, because the world as it is now, we gonna let people go out and have views of people and have assumption of people because the media said something, and the media is not always correct.

A Year 3 white student thought that more time should be dedicated to diversity;

I think all students would benefit from a module dedicated to diversity. Learning about different cultures, customs and values would make everyone more aware of the diversity in our society.

Whose responsibility?

In a previous study of marginalised social work students, Bernard, Fairtlough, Fletcher and Ahmet (2014) Bernard, C., Fairtlough, A., Fletcher, J., & Ahmet, A. (2014). A qualitative study of marginalised social work students' views of social work education and learning. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(7), 1934–1949. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar], p. 1935) said that BAME students reported that they were often called upon to be 'race experts' by lecturers, and these students also felt there was an expectation that they would pro-actively challenge racism. These views are echoed in this study with a BAME student who said;

But why should we have to challenge? Like...I have got enough to do, and I don't need any extra work from challenging when no one else.. if other people don't have to challenge about things then why should I have to?

In other instances, students saw that they had a responsibility to promote change through their behaviour and expectations. A BAME student encouraged fellow students in the group discussions to reach out to the lecturers with their issues because...

...it is for you to let them know in a subtle way in a conversation..... so that they know that stuff has been said that affects you.

Discussion

Students' responses identify barriers and difficulties that get in the way of meaningful exchanges and discussions. They have clear ideas about what is wrong and what needs to be changed in teaching and learning on the programme. BAME students express feelings of frustration that there is a lack of sensitivity to their feelings, for example, about insufficient time or interest in learning about their different cultures. They highlight the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) Hochschild, A. (1983). *The managed heart*. Berkeley: University of California Press. [Google Scholar] involved in managing this disappointment (for instance, their management of feelings they experience internally and what they reveal externally). This is an essential response for managing themselves on the programme that does not arise for white students. The sense of being burdened is increased further by resentment about having to challenge when other students fail to see racism, or having to justify or explain when others were not sufficiently aware of their culture and being expected to take on the role of 'expert'.

Additionally, there are issues about identity and white privilege that are insufficiently addressed and feelings about these remain trapped beneath the surface of group discussions. BAME students expressed frustration and anger about what is not said, whereas white students expressed fear and uncertainty about how to express themselves on these matters. The impact of the emotional responses for each group of students (BAME and white) then appears to have further emotional impact on the other group.

Both BAME and (some) white students thought they arrived at university with a poor appreciation of the histories of BAME people and cultures (of black history for example) and whilst it is outside of the scope and power of this particular social work programme to change this in the short term, it is something that requires further consideration more widely, in the longer term and some current political thinking does see the significance of increasing a more critical approach to teaching in schools about imperialism and colonialism (The Guardian, 2018) The Guardian. (2018) 'Jeremy Corbyn vows to increase teaching of black history in schools' <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/11/jeremy-corbyn-labour-vows-to-increase-teaching-of-black-history-in-schools> [Google Scholar]).

It is clear from the comments of some BAME students that interpersonal interactions on the course, between students or with lecturers, that are felt as racist, or marginalising, such as comments from white students about accents, names, countries of origin and so on, or expectations that they are 'experts' in

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all things African (as set out in the first section of the themes and issues), contribute, alongside the other issues such as poor knowledge of other cultures and histories, wider experiences of racism and white privilege, to a negative perception for those BAME participants in this study about their value as students on the programme.

This echoes Housee's (2011) Housee, S. (2011). What difference does difference make? A discussion with ethnic minority students about their learning experience in higher education. *Learning and Teaching*, 4(1), 70–91. [Crossref], [Google Scholar] research with sociology undergraduates, referred to earlier, which highlighted how, at an individual and internal level, BAME students' experiences prior to entering university shaped their ability to access learning in the classroom and negative interactions with other students in student groups, or with tutors, confirmed earlier negative experiences and a sense of failure that could be difficult to recover from.

The BAME students in our study clearly articulate a lack of confidence that speaking or writing about their own cultural heritage is worth the risk, resulting in the significant omissions in discussions and assignments as highlighted in the abstract above. And these omissions, if not addressed will continue to impair the students' emotional well-being and their professional functioning, and undermine the programme's ability to promote effective teaching and learning in a way that practices what we preach in a truly anti-racist way.

To turn this around, a key preoccupation of both BAME and white students in this study is the need for more safe spaces in lectures and tutor groups to exchange learning about cultural differences, values and experiences. Students recognise the importance of this for their learning and professional development but need the leadership of the teaching team to facilitate this more consistently.

Conclusion

Social work's different regulatory bodies over the years have recognised the importance of actively and consistently addressing ethnic and cultural diversity to ensure that practitioners adhere to culturally appropriate standards in line with the Equality Act 2010. Taking an anti-racist perspective suggests an emphasis on resistance and challenge to forces that disadvantage and exclude members of society subjected to racism at an individual and institutional level by virtue of 'cultural markers'

(Singh, 2013) Singh, S. (2013). Anti-racist social work education.

In A. Bartoli (Ed.), *Anti-racism in social work practice* (pp. 25–47). St Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd. [Google Scholar], p. 30).

Students need to feel comfortable about critically examining their own cultures in order to competently explore those of others and the impact of racism on

individuals and groups. Comments from BAME students about their experiences of teaching and learning about cultural differences on the course, and about the way in which their own ethnicities and cultures feel devalued, indicate that more work needs to be done to facilitate this. In the need to create safer spaces to increase students' confidence to discuss cultural diversity, agreed ground rules for discussion on cultural differences across the course, held in a context of openness, honesty, non-judgementalism, mutual respect, sensitivity, with an expectation that racist attitudes will be challenged appropriately, have not been enough. More work needs to be done by lecturers (who may need more support/training to prepare them for this) to explore and competently manage difficult feelings that arise, or are defended against, within such discussions.

The feeling from students that ideas of white privilege need to be explored and led by white lecturers is an area that needs to be considered. Davis, Mirick, and McQueen (2015) Davis, A., Mirick, R., & McQueen, B. (2015). Teaching from privilege: reflections from white female instructors. *Journal of Women and Social Work*, 30(3), 302–313. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]) suggest that it is necessary for educators with privilege to be aware of their own power in order to understand and anticipate the dynamics within the teaching and learning environment and be open to discussion as well as being willing to make themselves vulnerable. By doing so, lectures and tutors are able to model skills and values for students who are able, in turn, to adopt these in their work with people who have been oppressed. It is acknowledged that more training may be required for white lecturers who may be working against the grain of their own socialisation (Monaghan, 2010) Monaghan, C. H. (2010). Working against the grain: White privilege in human resource development. *New Directions For Adult & Continuing Education*, 135, 53–63. [Google Scholar]. The collective guilt and shame experienced by white students and white lecturers about histories of slavery, racism and 'racial cleansing' can be supported by mindfulness training for example, which engenders self-compassion (Birnie, Speca, and Carlson (2010) Birnie, K., Speca, M., & Carlson, L. E. (2010). Exploring self-compassion and empathy in the context of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). *Stress and Health*, 26(5), 359–371. [Crossref], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar]), cited in Parkes and Kelly (2014) Parkes, R., & Kelly, S. (2014). Mindfulness for resilience in social work. In L. Grant & G. Kinman (Eds.), *Developing resilience for social work practice* (pp. 110–127). London: Palgrave Macmillan. [Crossref], [Google Scholar])). According to Parkes and Kelly (2014) Parkes, R., & Kelly, S. (2014). Mindfulness for resilience in social work. In L. Grant & G. Kinman (Eds.), *Developing resilience for social work practice* (pp. 110–127). London: Palgrave Macmillan. [Crossref], [Google Scholar]), it can also facilitate collaborative learning in student groups and, in relation of anti-discriminatory practice, it can engender greater tolerance and understanding of difference because it encourages the individual to see

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different perspectives and thereby enhances cultural competence (Parkes & Kelly, 2014). Parkes, R., & Kelly, S. (2014). Mindfulness for resilience in social work. In L. Grant & G. Kinman (Eds.), *Developing resilience for social work practice* (pp. 110–127). London: Palgrave Macmillan. [Crossref], [Google Scholar], pp. 122–123).

Increased emphasis on cultural diversity, BAME perspectives and anti-racism across all teaching, including the integration of non-Western theories and values is also important with a recognition of the knowledge and expertise within the student body to which lecturers and tutors should give due positive recognition. Hillen and Levy (2015). Hillen, P., & Levy, S. (2015). Framing the experiences of BME social work students within a narrative of educating for a culturally diverse workforce. *Social Work Education*, 34(7), 785–798. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science®], [Google Scholar], p. 788) undertook a similar study in Scotland and as a result recommend that a strengths-based approach is taken which critiques ‘race’ and ‘whiteness’ whilst ‘valuing other knowledges’. These points may well have been considered as having been addressed within the programme, but a student perspective, as presented here, strongly suggests that from a student point of view, this was not the case. The project has provided an important reflective ‘moment’ for this particular social work programme, and sharing these reflections may be helpful to other social work programmes too.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Language and terminology

It is important to consider the impact that language and terminology has had on social work education and the interplay with contemporary practice. We use the term *ethnicity* (preferred to ‘race’), as it suggests group membership on account of heritage, culture (inclusive of religion), language and ancestral identification and through the shaping of political status and socio-economic circumstances (Burck, 2007). Burck, C. (2007). *Multilingual living: Explorations of language and subjectivity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. [Google Scholar]; Institute of Race Relations, 2018). Institute of Race Relations. (2018). *Definitions*. Retrieved from <http://www.irr.org.uk/research/statistics/definitions/> [Google Scholar]). In recent years, the term ‘ethnic minority’ has been reversed and expanded upon, for example, ‘minority ethnic’; ‘black and minority ethnic’ (BME); ‘black, Asian and minority ethnic’ (BAME) to underline the fact that we ALL have an

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ethnicity, whilst at the same time, highlighting the discrimination and oppression minority groups still encounter (Richardson, 2006 Richardson, R. (2006). To BME or not to BME. *Race Equality Teaching*, 25(1), 11–16. [Crossref], [Google Scholar]; Thomas et al., 2004 Thomas, L., Wareing, S., Singh, I., Stillwell Pecci, J., Thornborrow, J., & Jones, J.(2004). *Language society and power; An introduction* (2nded.). London: Routledge. [Google Scholar]). Whilst acknowledging the evolving nature of language, its impact on identity and the problems associated with using a generalised term to describe a group of people that is highly diverse, the authors have settled on Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME) as the chosen terminology, which will be reflected in this journal article, focusing mainly on those students who are Black and Asian as these were the groups that self-selected for the study.

Appendix 2

Interview schedule

1. Have you ever had experiences on racism at the university (or on the social work programme)?
2. How much do you think 'whiteness' and a white perspective characterizes the teaching and learning on the programme?
3. How (well) do you think anti-racism and black perspectives are taught? How responsive are tutors to discussing cultural difference and diversity? How diverse are reading lists and other materials for module teaching?
4. How confident do you feel about discussing your own culture and background in ... lectures, group tutorials or individual tutorials, your own written assignments and practice portfolios? On what does this depend?
5. Do you see any areas of tension between your cultural background and the expectations of professional practice? How comfortable are you in exploring these either in class discussions or in written assignments/portfolios?
6. What would you change in the social work programme if you could increase anti-racist education?
7. Ending. Anything that should still be said or hasn't been asked?

Appendix 3

The main campus of University of Suffolk is located in a large county town within a rural county in England. Forty-eight percent of students studying at the university (including all campuses and part-time students) reside within its area postal code, with an additional thirty-one percent travelling in from surrounding counties. The student and local population are synonymous with each other, reflecting the dominant ethnic group (White/British—80%; rising to

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84% when 'White Other' is included). The next largest ethnic groups are 'Black' (including African, Caribbean and 'Other')—7.1%; Asian (including Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese and 'Other')—4.8% and 'Mixed' (that is White and Caribbean; White and African; White and Asian; White and 'Other')—3.4%. Interestingly, successful completion and progression rates across all university programmes also reflect the ethnic group sizes—90.8% of White and 'White Other' students successfully complete programmes; Black—85.94%; Asian—82.17%; 'Mixed'—80.50%. Results from national figures obtained via Stevenson's (2012) Stevenson, J. (2012). *Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment*. York: HEA. [Google Scholar] HEA research report suggest similar attainment in relation to White (90.4%) and Black students (88.7%) being likely to qualify. The gap, post-qualifying, also appears to be evident, as according to Stevenson et al.'s (2019) Stevenson, J., O'Mahony, J., Khan, O., Ghaffar, F., & Stiell, B. (2019). *Understanding and overcoming the challenges of ethnicity targeting*. Retrieved from <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/d21cb263-526d-401c-bc74-299c748e9ecd/ethnicity-targeting-research-report.pdf> [Google Scholar] recent report to the Office for Students...

'...regardless of entry qualifications, subjects studied, degree outcomes and other socio-demographic characteristics, differences in employment outcomes between White and BAME graduates persist even three years after graduation' (OFFA, 2018) OFFA (Office for Fair Access for Students). (2018). Topic briefing -bme students. Retrieved from <https://www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/guidance/topic-briefings/offa-topic-briefing-bme-students/> [Google Scholar], cited in Stevenson et al., 2019) Stevenson, J., O'Mahony, J., Khan, O., Ghaffar, F., & Stiell, B. (2019). *Understanding and overcoming the challenges of ethnicity targeting*. Retrieved from <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/d21cb263-526d-401c-bc74-299c748e9ecd/ethnicity-targeting-research-report.pdf> [Google Scholar], p. 11).

Where figures for religion were obtainable, most students (41.7%) described themselves as 'non religious'; Christian (in various denominations) was the next largest group (28.5%), followed by 'Unknown' (20.4%); Muslim (2.68%) and 'refused to state' (2.65%). (All figures taken from the university's most recent Equality and Diversity Report, 2017–2018).

The majority of the students fall within the 18–24 category (47%) followed by 25–34 year olds (25%). In terms of highest level of qualification on entry, 19% of students had A/AS levels; 12.5% a UK undergraduate degree with Honours; 12% a diploma Level 3; and 8.5% a Diploma in Higher Education. Less than 4% had an HE Access Course/QAA recognised award.

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Garfield Hunt

Garfield Hunt started his career in social work in 1990, working in residential care with adolescents. He qualified as a social worker in 1995 and whilst in practice worked in organisations across the statutory, voluntary and private sectors, in fostering, adoption and child protection. He is an experienced trainer and group facilitator, specialising in anti-discrimination/anti-oppression, equality & diversity, leaving care and safeguarding children. Garfield joined University Campus Suffolk, now the University of Suffolk, as a social work lecturer in 2013. He has a particular interest in student feedback and engagement and is Student Experience Lead for the School of Law and Social Sciences.

Heidi Dix

Heidi Dix has been a qualified social worker since 1997 and has experience of both adult and children's services. She currently holds a part-time management role within a Youth Justice Service where she supports research-informed and relationship-based practice. Heidi is also a Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Suffolk where she teaches on a range of modules. As a practicing social worker Heidi is passionately committed to social justice and her interests include feminist social work, practice teaching and learning and co-production within the youth justice system.

Anja Wagner

Anja Wagner was a social work student in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Landshut in Southern Germany when she undertook an Undergraduate Student Internship in the final year of her course between March and May 2017 at the University of Suffolk. She qualified as a social worker later that year and has since embarked on studies in psychology in Germany. She is very interested in anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice in social work practice and in social work education.