Mandela Model

Nelson Mandela, the former President of South Africa is well known for his long and committed struggle to end apartheid. His many national and international awards said to number around 250, including the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 is further testimony to his dedication towards alleviating the disadvantage of masses of African people. Few will be unaware of the struggles and successes of Nelson Mandela and the values he promoted. He epitomises fairness, justice, equality and reconciliation and has been referred to as ‘a revered statesman’.

Mandela’s core values very much reflect those of the social work profession in that he has declared ‘war on poverty’ stating that poverty leads to hunger, depravation, homelessness and ill health (Speech, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, 17 October 1996). He is concerned about the vulnerable including the elderly, disabled, children and women. He urges us not to consider the eradication of poverty as an act of charity, but rather as an act of social justice.It is therefore the view of the author that a person with such exemplary values of social justice, anti-racism, equality and fairness is one worth knowing about and remembering. With this in mind, the model being proposed is built upon the values of respect for diversity and fairness.

Make time

Acknowledge

Needs

Differences

Educational Experiences

Life Experiences

Age

The MANDELA model is presented as a teaching and learning tool for use within a supervisory relationship between the student and the practice educator. It is cyclical in nature with a clear starting point and flexible enough to be used at different paces in recognition of the student’s learning style and comfort in engagement. The cycle is representative of most aspects of a student’s identity which together with the practice educator can be used to understand and appreciate the similarities, differences and life experiences which the student brings to the learning process. Razack (2001) argues that practice educators set the tone and pace of practice placements and therefore if discussions about a student’s race, ethnicity and needs are not undertaken, their learning and development is compromised.

**Make time**

Whilst one appreciates the time constraints on practice educators and managers, it is important to avoid fast tracking the student into difficulty and/ or failure. There is the need to ensure that the student has sufficient time to understand the context of the work to be undertaken and their role within the organisation or agency. Practice educators will draw on their own experience in terms of time allocated for supervision. Some Universities provide guidance about the frequency and timing of practice supervision, however the practice educator, in consultation with their student, must make the final decision about how much time will be spent with their student and the frequency of such meetings. Practice supervision sessions which are not rushed and which allow for critical exploration of the students’ learning are recommended. Interestingly, one critical friend who is also a practice educator commented that ‘time was something MANDELA had more than enough of’ and that he is often portrayed as a ‘patient and tolerant man’.

Practice Point: We make people feel more important when we make time for them.

A**cknowledge** N**eeds**

The second area is about the needs of the student both within the practice learning environment and also in the University setting. These needs should be specific and could include areas such as: English Language proficiency, general communication skills, relationship building skills, critical writing and reflective skills. They may also include discussions about the use of a car/transport for placement and the implications this might have on the student’s learning. Students will undoubtedly have a variety of needs some of which may be unrelated to their practice learning experience but which could ultimately impact on their learning, such as part-time employment, health needs etc as was the case in the Bartoli et al., (2008) study. Whatever the needs, practice educators should be able to view these from the perspective of the student and address them in a timely and appropriate manner.

Practice Tip: Every person has needs which they need to be addressed.

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D**ifference**

Once the student’s needs are identified and discussed, issues of difference should be explored and understood. For example, simply stating the difference in race and ethnicity may be sufficient to begin with; however practice educators and students are encouraged to examine this in more depth throughout the placement. Gatmon and Jackson (2001) concluded that honest discussions about difference and similarity between the practice educator and student, (not their cultural or ethnic similarities), is central to the formation of a good working relationship. If there is a gender difference, this must be examined with an understanding of the student’s perspective on this and any implications for practice. In the view of Thompson (2011), difference does and can form the basis of equality or inequality and so every effort should be made to achieve the former i.e. equality in the practice educator-student relationship.

Practice Point: Celebrate and respect diversity and practice acceptance.

E**ducational Experience**

Educational experiences are a significant dimension to bring into the learning and supervisory relationship as this will provide some insight into the student’s understanding about the role and purpose of education generally and their attitudes to learning. During the discussion of educational experiences, it is crucial that the student’s preferred learning style is discussed and any strategies explored early on about expectations and levels of writing. Bartoli (2011) concluded that the black African students in her study sample fared better in exams, where short answers were required, than in essay type assessments which required lengthy narrative writing. This information is important if practice educators are to provide learning opportunities for students to develop areas which may require attention such as their report writing skills. In addition to this, understanding a student’s prior learning experience either in the UK or abroad will assist the practice educator in devising an effective practice learning plan.

Practice Point: Learning may be enhanced if your teaching and enabling style takes into account the student’s preferred learning style.

L**ife Experiences**

A student’s life experiences which may or may not include experiences of poverty, war, migration, HIV/AIDS, ill health, abandonment, unemployment, abuse, neglect, racism, asylum and domestic violence will be significant in terms of their own approach to service users with similar experiences. Caution is advised when discussing these due to the sensitive nature and students may not always feel able and/or willing to provide this information until they feel comfortable and safe to expose themselves in this way. Awareness of such experiences may help the practice educator understand better the student’s levels of motivation and resilience. Shepherd (2003) posits that we can only understand the resilience and strengths that have enabled marginalised people to survive by embracing and understanding their lived experiences. Practice educators should be mindful that the discussion of life experiences could generate emotions which had not been envisaged. As with all discussions of personal experiences, practice educators should support the student to make links, wherever possible with service user’s experiences. For many black African social work students, issues of faith and spirituality will be an important part of their lives and they may openly question the relevance or otherwise of faith during their interventions with service users. The response to this is important and the practice educator must ensure that their response is clear to the student.

Practice Point: Experience is a source of knowledge

A**ge**

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the age of the student. Within most African contexts, age is an important variable used to understand relationships and social interactions among and between people. It gives permission for issues of age/generation to be discussed. This is not new as reflective students will usually be required to consider issues of power in the learning relationship and it is not uncommon to find students highlighting age as a potential source of power inequality. This is not to suggest that students should be interrogated about their age, nor should students feel obliged to provide this information if they do not feel able to do so. However some discussion about broad age ranges might be useful in understanding each other’s perspectives on the various issues that affect the users of social work services.

Practice Tip: This is an opportunity to discuss the significance of age.