

***Practice Reflexions* Volume 1, No. 1 - December 2006**

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Editorial: *Practice Reflexions*?

My colleagues and I are very pleased to be associated with reviving a proud AIWCW tradition of producing its own journal. *Welfare in Australia* was published by AIWCW throughout the 1980's and early 1990's and its editorship was rotated among a number of tertiary providers of welfare education. Our new venture is between Monash University and AIWCW with an initial three year agreement.

You will see from our vision statement that *Practice Reflexions* aims to present the voices and interests of all who have a stake in the social and community welfare work and human services sectors*: practitioners, service users, communities, researchers, policy makers and academics, through refereed and non-refereed articles, letters, photographs, and book reviews, and by engagement with the discussion forum. One way of using the discussion forum may be to shape up ideas for publication and we, as editors, are keen to assist in transforming creative practice into published articles.

We like the ambiguity of our title. Jan Fook (2002: 39-40) discusses the meanings and convergence of reflective and reflexive approaches. Reflectivity is a *process* of reflecting upon practice in order to gain new insights and knowledge, inductively. It shares with feminism and postmodernism the valuing of intuition and artistry in practice, the importance of context and interpretation, of holism and of non-positivist and experiential approaches. Reflexivity 'is a *stance* of being able to locate oneself in the picture', recognising the way we influence the situations and contexts in which we operate (Fook 2002: 43, 130). She argues that in practice, these terms frequently converge. To prove the point, the Dictionary of Social Work inverts the terms by defining reflective practice as, inter alia: 'an awareness of the impact that the individual worker will have upon the service user in terms of race, gender, age, disability and class'; and 'an awareness of the worker's own prejudices and the impact that these will have on practice issues' (Thomas and Pierson 2002: 396). Fook argues for an approach of critical reflection which challenges oppressive external structures and social relations, recognising diverse constructions, which in themselves can challenge domination. She stresses the need for negotiating inclusive structures, relations and knowledge-building through dialogue (Fook 2002: 41). We intend to adopt Fook's convergence in our 'misspelling' of *reflexions*.

We are keen, therefore, to encourage *reflexions* on practice and on the implications of theory that deepen our shared commitment to a more just and equitable world. A *shared* commitment involves all of us who can lift our heads beyond the material and individualist concerns that neo-liberalism encourages. It offers us an opportunity to partner those many social movements who share our values and our concerns, while recognising the knowledge, skills and critique that the human services can contribute. *Practice Reflexions* endorses the search for common ground rather than unique professional turf, but not at the expense of challenging oppressive practices and discourses, and of embracing diversity and multiple perspectives, which can only enrich our understanding and collaborative engagement.

Common ground, both symbolic and material, is evident in convening the inaugural combined conference of the four professional bodies: the Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Workers, the Australian Association of Social Workers, the

Australian Association of Welfare and Community Educators and the Society of Professional Social Workers, at which this e-journal has been launched. Writing in anticipation of this event, but judging by the program, professional, theoretical and ideological differences will be greater within than between either of the two professional groupings and their organisations' actual or potential memberships. Educators in social work and in social welfare found common ground years ago.

The next few issues will present papers from the conference, as I am sure, will *Australian Social Work*, the journal of the Australian Association of Social Workers. *Australian Social Work* announced in June this year that it planned to extend its reach to becoming a more international journal, and hence our arrival on the scene is timely.

This first issue commences for us the exploration of our eponymous theme of reflecting on practice. The papers presented illustrate an exemplary range of models of *reflexion*. We journey with Donna McAuliffe and Lesley Chenoweth in exploring the creative and collaborative process of developing a first year social work and human services textbook, conceptualised through their reflecting on their practice and teaching lives. Bob Pease calls for a critically reflective approach in arguing that while social work and welfare practice seeks to challenge internalised oppression, it may allow our own internalised dominance and privilege to remain invisible, when privilege is 'normal'. We must 'analyse our own social location as a precursor to analysing the social location of others'. In reflecting on her experience in an international development program and her subsequent teaching of anti-oppressive practice, Debra Manning illustrates Bob's concerns. She seeks to interrogate the dominant discourses of expertise and white privilege, and the internalised assumptions they carry for both 'expert' and 'receiver of wisdom'. Debra explores the expectation that meaning will be conferred in culturally familiar ways, while Jan Richardson and Margaret Bain deconstruct this notion. They provide a powerful insight into differing world views between traditional Australian Indigenous culture and those of the west, that offer considerable explanatory power for some of the mutually experienced frustrations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working together in culturally strong Aboriginal communities. The companion piece for their article is Jan Richardson's review of Margaret Bain's book, which expands this analysis. Karen Crinall presents us with an unsettling reflection on a 1930's photograph of Aboriginal children that challenges both the racism of the time and its contemporary manifestations. The photograph projects the privileged certainties of a single world view that create cultural chasms. Chris Laming brings us back to an explicit challenge to male privilege, embedded in men's violence against women in intimate partner relationships, analysing an integrated programmatic focus on the need for violent men to take responsibility for changing their behaviour.

We hope you will enjoy reading these papers and will tell us, and their authors, what you think of their ideas by joining us on the discussion list which you will find on the journal pages of the AIWCW website.

**Terms which we shall from hereon use interchangeably. Journal articles may also reflect social work perspectives and terminology.*

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Marg Lynn

Reflections on Practice: Collaborative Writing as a Critically Reflective Activity

DONNA MCAULIFFE AND LESLEY CHENOWETH

Abstract

This article chronicles the collaborative partnership that was established to submit a book proposal to an Australian publisher, and reflects on the process of writing an introductory text aimed at building a literature bridge between social work and human service practice. The book, entitled 'The Road to Social Work and Human Service Practice: An Introductory Text' (Chenoweth and McAuliffe 2005) was published by Thomson Learning. The authors are social work practitioners turned academics, who worked together in an Australian school of social work. The idea for this book was borne from the author's shared experiences of social work practice and education, and awareness of the increasingly contested space that professional degrees occupy in the field of human services. At a time when common ground is being sought between those working in designated social work positions requiring eligibility for membership of the professional association, and those with a range of other degrees in human services, community practice, counselling and social policy, the development of common purpose, values, frameworks and theory is critical. The writing of texts for social work and human service practice in this contemporary environment is challenging, and this article gives examples of some of those challenges within a context of reflection on social work education and practice. This paper argues that collaborative writing can be a powerful strategy for critical reflection on practice.

Keywords: *Critical reflection; reflective practice; collaborative writing; human service education*

Introduction: Forming the Collaborative Partnership

Collaborative writing partnerships present many challenges and require some key elements for success. The first of these is an understanding of common purpose, and agreement of the primary aims of the project. In conceiving the idea of co-authoring a book about introductory social work and human service practice, it seemed that this was a natural extension of the endless conversations and dialogues that we had engaged in over more than five years of teaching and researching together. We had already established solid and cooperative ways of working with each other and shared common practice experiences and a view for the future. It was a regular occurrence for one of us to consult the other about dilemmas in teaching, or seek advice about ways to resolve conflicts that often rear their heads in tertiary education. While this initially was a mentoring kind of relationship it soon progressed and developed into a mutual and equal partnership of peer support. We used each other as sounding boards on all kinds of issues and dilemmas. We respected each others' opinions and guidance and encouraged each others creativity. Often we would spark off each other in creative and innovative ways that enhanced our teaching, writing, research and practice. And somewhere in all of this, friendship also developed.

Recognition emerged over time as our discussions continued, that we were, in fact, using our collegial relationship to foster elements of critically reflective practice within the context of a tertiary education system. Maidment and Egan (2004: 14) describe critical reflection as 'a deeply personal process that can lead to workers developing greater self-awareness and changing the way they see themselves in relation to practice, broader social issues, questions of ethics, and interpersonal relationships'. Trevithick (2006: 251) notes that reflective practice provides a way of learning lessons from the past, and 'provides a vital link between theory and practice'. We had both written independently of each other (but with other colleagues) on reflections on other issues such as experiences of collaborative field research (Stehlik & Chenoweth 2005; McAuliffe & Coleman 1999), development of a research method of qualitative interviewing using email (McAuliffe 2003), design challenges of ethics education (McAuliffe & Ferman 2002), and processes of deinstitutionalization (Chenoweth 2000). Our dialogues about social work education, fields and methods of practice, theoretical developments, student-centered learning, professional responsibilities, and articulation of values formed the foundations for beginning to document these reflections in a more systematic and ambitious way.

We had often discussed the need for a text that was pitched at the beginning of the student journey. We recognized this from our experiences of teaching introductory social work courses at the second year level, and designing introductory courses for students coming into social work with a prior degree in another discipline. We were acutely aware of how easy it was to 'lose' students in the early stages by submerging them in texts that were too advanced in concepts and language. Also, failure to spend sufficient time in assisting students to reflect on their motivations for interest in human service work could result in problems later. It was our shared belief that students would benefit from a text that they could easily identify and feel comfortable with – one that would not 'throw them in the deep end' but would still orient them to the complexities of practice from the outset.

The other consideration was the need for a book to be located within a broader context. This was partly in response to the increasing numbers of international students coming to study in Australia. Students from Asia, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific mostly return to practice in their own countries and in their own cultural and political contexts. We wanted to ensure that the importance of context (as articulated by Healy 2005) in understanding social work and human service practice was highlighted so the text needed to provide the basics which then could be applied in other cultural contexts. As well, we were committed to offering some different perspectives on practice for Australian students who will of course also work within diversity. For example how do students from Aotearoa New Zealand or Singapore or Vietnam perceive or understand professional registration or ethical codes? This aspect was a struggle for us given the limit of words and pages (to keep the text affordable) and the risk that the inclusion of some other cultural identifications would be interpreted as tokenism.

One of the primary challenges that formed part of our motivation for embarking on a book project was our perception of the need for a bridge to be built between social work and human service practitioners. This issue was raised for consideration by O'Connor, Smyth and Warburton (2000: 8) who argued that the restructuring of the

labor market had serious implications for employment in human services. The increasingly 'permeable professional boundaries' around the practice of social work, community work and welfare, human services, social policy, program management, and social research (to name some but not all) are also seen in the differing yet similar nature of various degree programs. Students starting out in any of these programs often face similar dilemmas with understanding core values, ethical standards, applications of theory and generation of knowledge, practice frameworks and the nature of the work across organizational contexts. The differences come with the status of the degrees attained, often related to length of study, but sometimes to claims of professional territory that need to be preserved and regulated.

DM: Having worked in delegated social work positions for a great deal of my practice life, but also having a practice background in community development and youth work, I was very aware of the divisions that can emerge from perceptions of 'professional status'. In reality, I was doing the same work, and used the same skills, but the way others related to me was different when I held the title of a 'social worker' and when I had the position of 'community development officer'. It was important in the writing of this book to focus on the commonalities, with a view to bridging the gap.

LC: In more than 30 years of practice I think I was in a delegated social work position for about 10 of these. But as an educator in human services and disability programs and then in social work programs I became aware of a range of views across students, practitioners and employing organizations. Of course this changing permeability of roles in the human service workforce has been well documented in the literature (Healy 2005; McDonald 2006), but for students it can be utterly confusing.

Constructing the Scaffolding

Embarking on the book required not only commonality of purpose, but agreement on content and how the material should be presented. We realized that we needed a robust yet flexible framework as a starting point for constructing the book proposal. This was a new endeavor for both of us. While LC had written several monographs for small publishers, and we had both completed doctoral theses and written articles for publication, we had never worked with an international publisher before and had little idea of what to expect. Our first meeting with the publishers left us excited but anxious. The prospect of immovable publishing deadlines that had to be fitted into already overflowing academic schedules was daunting. We knew that a strong framework would help us to structure the text and organize our writing agendas.

Endless conversations ensued about how we might construct the book, and how we could blend social work and human service practice in a relevant and helpful way. We reached consensus on some important points, and at this juncture established:

1. The book would be a **signpost text** – i.e. it would cover the whole terrain but not provide too much detail. Students would be directed to further reading, thinking and action to augment the knowledge base. This meant that references that we were directing students towards had to be the most up to date and most relevant, and activities/exercises needed to be grounded and linked to reflection. The emphasis was on an ‘introductory text’.
2. We needed a metaphor that could be used to guide the student through the text and integrate the new knowledge into practice situations. We had already used the ‘journey metaphor’ in our teaching of introductory courses and agreed that it had provided a workable and logical framework. It also appealed to students who could relate to ideas of maps, landscapes, and hazards. The weekly lecture topics became the initial chapters and provided a way of conceptualizing the journey to facilitate a truly student-centered text whereby students’ own sense of practice and practitioner identity could develop. As Wheatley (2005: ix) states ‘we make the road by walking’.
3. The book needed to be affordable in cost, accessible in language, and relevant to contemporary practice. It therefore should include a range of case studies and examples. It also needed to have visual appeal in a marketing sense and should include original diagrams, artwork, and the odd Leunig cartoon.
4. The book should be inclusive of professional and other associations that covered not only social work, but community work, counselling, and international perspectives. To this end, it was decided to include information about the various professional bodies for practitioners in Australasia, including the International Federation of Social Workers, the Australian Association of Social Workers, the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, The Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia, and The Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Workers.
5. The book should include divergent perspectives on critical issues and debates (for example, the controversial debate about registration of social work), and this should be achieved by incorporating a range of practitioner perspectives throughout each chapter. We agreed to use our own networks to invite practitioners that we knew and respected to write short extracts that we could include in strategic places in the text.
6. The book should be a reflection on our own practice, and should ultimately convey ‘practice wisdoms’ that we had gained from our collective clients and service users, mentors, colleagues, and students over the years. When we thought about it, we had a cumulative 50 odd years of experience between us, covering fields of health, mental health, disability, community development, women’s issues, legal and advocacy practice, youth work, aged care, social policy, working with volunteers, research, training and education. The problem was not so much about what to put in, but what to leave out.

The original book proposal was much longer than the final product, with the publishers seeking critical reviews prior to offering a contract. The review consensus was that this could be a useful addition to the available books in the tertiary sector, and there were positive comments on the journey metaphor and the introductory focus. There were also some constructive comments as to how we could improve the text, and this provided a different vantage point from which to revisit the original proposal.

DM: I was surprised to find such support for the book from a range of academic peers (unknown to us) – it felt as though we were being entrusted with quite an important task, and we were compelled to commit to completing it once the reviews were in and a contract was on the table. I remember thinking that this was our chance to put some things in writing that we had been saying to our own students for years – it seemed a great way to gather thoughts all in one place about the importance of the work that we do and the need for us to have integrity above all else.

LC: There were of course a couple of reviews with legitimate criticisms and one suggesting a particular practice perspective. Reviews are extremely useful – they provide a glimpse into how others see your work. And that offers another opportunity to reflect on your purpose, your framework, your approach. While we didn't necessarily make all the changes that were suggested, reflection at this juncture affirmed much of what we had decided, helped us to rethink some things and jettison a few too.

Firming up the Foundations

Once we had settled on the chapter structure, we found that making decisions about carving up the writing of the text was not difficult. We relied on our knowledge of our own and each other's particular interests and areas of strength and found a logical path through the allocation task. Fortunately, we had very similar styles of writing and use of grammar, and were able to offer constructive critique on each other's work at very regular intervals. We both had substantial academic libraries with historical as well as contemporary texts, (and colleagues who had equally literature-laden offices) and this proved very useful when searching for an elusive reference. There were times through the writing stage when we both collected our laptops and headed to a room in the library where we sat among mountains of books and ploughed our way through sections that demanded space and minimal distraction.

DM: It seemed logical that I should write the two chapters on values and ethics as these were the areas of my teaching, and I had always struggled with articulating history, knowledge and theory – I knew that Lesley could do this easily and wouldn't get herself tied up in semantic knots over the terminology. I was also happy to set my mind to the first chapter but we worked together on thinking through much of the content. The Chapter on the stages of the helping process was a challenge until I found a workable structure, but it appealed to my practical nature so I was able to use a lot of examples and anchor it in reality as much as possible.

LC: I have always been fascinated by history and have collected old books about the origins of human services and social work for years. In preparing for writing I became absorbed in accounts of nineteenth century philanthropy, of early efforts to alleviate the effects of dire poverty and struggles for rights for women. Writing this chapter was an exercise in frugality of words – it constantly needed to be précised. I remember a text on the wonders of eugenics - I couldn't put it down.

As we reflected back on the writing of the text, it became clear that there were a mixture of challenge points and exciting moments that we could pinpoint easily. We were cognizant of the fact that this was our original text so we were not constrained to simply regurgitating the ideas of others. We did, however, need to acknowledge previous work and find the balance between this and our own ideas. The parts that were most difficult to write were those that required synthesis of previous ideas, or those that needed to move a step further in definition.

DM: I clearly recall the day that I tried to write the paragraph on the purpose of practice. I wanted to revisit previous definitions and see if I could move on a little further. I banished the family, sat on the back deck under a tree with pen and paper, and agonized for a full day. For some reason, I felt a real weight of responsibility. There were certain words that I wanted to capture – words about 'passion' and 'hope'. Trying to get them into a cohesive paragraph alongside concepts of human rights, justice and the nurturance of diversity was really difficult, but I look back now on that small section and feel satisfied that I said what I wanted to say. It will be a long time before I make any changes to the wording of that section.

LC: While Donna may have thought I would not get tied up in semantic knots over knowledge and theory, I was utterly immobilised by this chapter. Having relished the thought of finally "getting something really clear on knowledge and theory" that a beginning student would cruise through, I didn't! Writing the knowledge chapter was a real struggle. For days I wrestled and sweated, feeling elated as I grasped a lucid sentence from the depths of my brain only to be despairing within hours at how obtuse and awkward it really was. I had watched students struggle with this material, their eyes glaze over, their questioning looks of why-do-we-have-to-know-theory-anyway-can't- we-just- do- it? So I wanted to create a pathway through which they could engage more readily. I think I got someway there but I'm still not happy and feel I want to rewrite a lot of this chapter for another edition.

As well as the challenges and the parts of the text that required much rewriting, there were the parts that led to a sense of excitement and a feeling of breaking through into new territory. These seemed to mainly take the form of new diagrams and visual representations of concepts.

DM: There were three diagrams that I felt excited about. The first was the 'hub of social work and human service values' where I pulled together all the literature and summarized it in a visual way around ethical practice; the second was the ethical decision-making model and diagram (that still needs work in a visual sense); and the third was the family genogram where I was determined to ensure that same-sex families/partnerships were also represented – I had never seen this before on an

example of a genogram – it was important to me to be able to develop something much more inclusive of diverse families.

LC: Two diagrams got me going. The first was in capturing human service history and taking Andrew Jones' ideas of eras and developing them further. The second was the knowledge one where I tried to cover a lot of territory in one diagram. I'm still wrestling with that one. As a visual person, I am a big fan of the map or diagram for students' learning and I get them to develop their own too in class. Teaching practice can be a swampy, uncertain terrain and certainly not as crisp as diagrams would suggest. But I think you have to unpack all the elements and then lay them out for exploration and scrutiny and then put them all back together again.

Writing apart and together: Moving towards the summit

One of the structural advantages that greatly assisted the collaborative writing process was having close physical proximity in our work environment. We shared offices next to each other, and it wasn't long before we found ourselves literally talking through the walls. We were both very aware of the separate and yet highly collaborative nature of the project. A supportive partnership was crucial, as was a sense of individual and shared ownership of the outcome. We were acutely aware of each other's work patterns, academic obligations, and family responsibilities.

DM: We always knew exactly where each of us needed to be up to with writing on a daily basis. Knowing that Lesley knew what I should have written by the end of a week spurred me on to get it done...I respected our partnership and didn't want to let her down. It was a huge incentive that resulted in us never breaking a deadline, and often submitting work to astonished publishers before a deadline was due.

LC: I have written and still do write with another close colleague of many years. So I had some ideas about what works and what gets tricky. Are we on the same wavelength here? How can we smooth differences of perspective? What do we need to work on together and what can be divvied up and written separately? We did keep each other on task. It was a shared responsibility so despite being exhausted or totally bereft of the next sentence, we kept going. Over the whole time we didn't have one major disagreement!

Looming publisher deadlines and the start of a new semester meant that we were engaged in both teaching and writing simultaneously. It was common to write through the night, and then take new material to students or colleagues for their impressions and critique. Having student and practitioner input into diagrams, case studies and activities meant that the project became that much closer to what we had anticipated as a student-centred text. It also took us back to our own experiences of social work education and gave cause to reflect back on the literature that we had been exposed to so many years before, and how we could integrate the 'old' with the 'new'. This process was illustrative of the way social workers actively create knowledge and theory in practice (Healy, 2005: 219). We generated ideas and 'new' knowledge from our joint writings, tested them out in our field of practice, i.e. education, and then refined them into the writing again.

DM: I had a particular group of students who were just starting out in social work having all completed previous degrees in other disciplines. I had many discussions with them through the writing of some chapters and found their suggestions invaluable. They certainly weren't afraid to tell me if a case study was too far-fetched, a diagram didn't make logical sense, or a definition wasn't clear. They provided an important reality check from the student perspective and I will always be grateful for their willing assistance.

LC: I adopted a similar process with practitioners I knew. New ideas were placed before colleagues in various fields who in turn considered how they might reflect the realities of their own practice. Again suggestions were made, concepts modified, some ideas refined or further developed and then re-integrated into the text.

On reflection, writing the first draft of the book was easy compared to the rigor required in the editing process. We were extremely fortunate that the freelance editor assigned to our project was a person who had a background in human services and community practice. This meant that we shared common language and the attention to detail in many sections was largely due to the editor's skill in fine-tuning concepts and clarifying terminology.

DM: As I wrote sections of the book, there were many times when I knew that a paragraph was clumsy or a title didn't really capture a section, or a diagram wasn't entirely accurate. The editor picked up on virtually every piece that I had my own secret misgivings about, and gave suggestions that added clarity and ultimately made the final product much more readable.

LC: Having an editor with a human service background was a godsend. As well as the meticulous attention to commas, word meanings and repetitive awkward language, she had thoughtful suggestions about concepts, case material and 'technical' language. There is though a sense of not being finished with it – no closure yet. I find I am still re-reading sections, wanting to get better examples, cut this out, do that differently etc. That will have to wait for another version I guess.

Conclusion

Several 'learnings' emerged for us during this collaborative writing endeavor. The first was that writing became an extension of our own reflections on practice, from our early experiences of social work education through years of casework, group-work, community work, policy work, activism, administration, research and teaching. Writing became a way of passing on these reflections to future generations of social work and human service workers. The conversation and dialogue became a way of generating new knowledge, refining ideas, clarifying definitions, and encouraging students to develop their own ways to reflect on their practice.

Our second learning was that there is great merit in understanding that the common ground between the many faces of human service work far outweigh the differences. There are common threads that join those who make up the human service industry. These threads rely on commonality of purpose, shared values and commitment to principles of social justice and human rights, and a dedication to quality practice and

ethical responsibility. The growing body of literature that defines the Australasian human services context bears testament to the strength of this shared purpose.

The third and final learning is that collaborative writing, and the development of a supportive and constructive partnership, intensifies and increases the potency of the reflection. We are convinced that critical reflection is a powerful learning strategy, in all of its many forms, and our experience has highlighted some of the essential ingredients that have moved us forward to new and deeper understandings of ourselves, our practice, collegial relationships, organisational contexts and social systems. This example of collaborative writing is only one illustration of reflection on practice, and this 'reflection on the reflection' takes us to yet another level of understanding that will move us further again along the road to social work and human service practice.

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Encouraging critical reflections on privilege in Social Work and the Human Services

BOB PEASE

Abstract

Critical reflection is promoted by many progressive social work writers as a process for facilitating practitioners' capacity to reflect upon their complicity in dominant power relations. However, the critical social work literature tends to focus attention on those who are disadvantaged, oppressed and excluded. Those who are privileged in relation to gender, class, race and sexuality etc are often ignored. Given that the flipside of oppression and social exclusion is privilege, the lack of critical reflection on the privileged side of social divisions allows members of dominant groups to reinforce their dominance. This article interrogates the concept of privilege and examines how it is internalised in the psyches of members of dominant groups. After exploring the potential to undo privilege from within, the article encourages social work educators to engage in critical reflections about privilege when teaching social work students about social injustice and oppression.

Keywords: *critical reflection; privilege; intersectionality, internalised dominance.*

Interrogating critical reflection

In recent years, the literature on critical reflection has grown significantly in social work and human service practice. (Fook 1999; Bleakley 1999; Morley 2004; Yip 2006; D'Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez 2007, forthcoming). The professional social worker is encouraged to be critical and reflective about the assumptions underpinning his or her practice. In particular, professionals are asked to critically reflect upon how their values and theories are influenced by the social and political context of practice (Yip 2006). Fook (1999) has argued that critical reflection is fundamental to postmodern critical approaches to practice. She discusses the emancipatory dimension of critical reflection as a process that encourages practitioners to challenge dominant power relations.

Given that critical reflection in this context is meant to facilitate practitioners' capacity to reflect upon their complicity in dominant power relations, it would seem to have consequences for understanding the worker's role in reproducing privilege and inequality (D'Cruz et al. 2007, forthcoming). Carniol (2005) says that a critical consciousness of oppression *and* privilege is central to understand the ways in which our world views are shaped by our social positioning.

However, while acknowledging its progressive potential, many writers have noted that in practice, critical reflection can easily be appropriated by technical-rational approaches (Bleakley 1999; D'Cruz et al. 2007, forthcoming; Kondrat 1999). Critical reflection is often restricted to the personal and the decontextualised individual (Bleakley 1999). D'Cruz et al. (2007, forthcoming), in their systematic review of the

literature, observe that sometimes in critical reflection the social and political dimensions of the individual's problems are neglected and emphasis is placed on individual skills and intra-psychic processes. What seems to be missing in critical reflection is the way in which our thinking and sense making are influenced by social, historical and political factors (Ixer 1999).

Notwithstanding the above criticism, critical social work writers point to the potential that critical reflection has to assist the worker to understand the socio-political context of the lives of clients and service users (Fook 1999; Morley 2004). Hart (1990) identifies parallels between critical reflection and consciousness raising in this regard. However, this assumes that the professional is working with a marginalised or oppressed group. Carniol (2005) acknowledges that social workers are developing more of a critical consciousness about the psychological impact of oppression on individuals. However, he expresses the concern that there seems to be little awareness among social workers about the impact of privilege or dominant status on individuals' subjectivities and world views.

One of the main tenets of critical approaches to social work and community development is to explain the sources of oppression in society and encourage those affected by oppression to take action to transform it. Critical social work theory thus places a significant emphasis on the capacity of oppressed people to challenge existing institutions and dominant ideologies (Mullaly 2002).

Considerable attention is given in critical social work to how oppressed groups reproduce their own oppression (Mullaly 2002). One concept that has been utilised to explain this accommodation is 'internalised oppression' which is 'the incorporation and acceptance by individuals within an oppressed group of the prejudices against them within the dominant society' (Pheterson 1986: 148). The literature on oppression is thus concerned with strategies to assist subordinate groups to challenge their oppression. Critical reflection is potentially a useful tool in this regard.

The struggle for social justice is thus usually conceived of in terms of empowering clients who may be oppressed by class, race, gender and sexuality. Little attention is given to the ways in which the positioning of the professional worker may embody class, race, gender and sexual privilege. Social workers need to be aware of how their own power and privilege are maintained or challenged in their encounters with both clients and other staff (Rossiter 2000).

Badwall et al. (2004) have noted how social workers have ignored the ways in which their practice and the conduct of social agencies are shaped by the social construction of whiteness and white privilege. They demonstrate the way in which white privilege dictates how issues of importance are identified and how the institutionalising of that privilege in the organisation shapes the limitations of critical reflection.

Carniol (2005) is one of the few critical social work writers to discuss the importance of analysing our own social location as a precursor to analysing the social location of others. He emphasises the importance of using our critical consciousness to deepen our awareness of our privilege as well as our oppressive circumstances. Such an

awareness is an important first step if we are to become involved in challenging oppression and undoing those privileges.

Even though social workers are advocates for oppressed groups, it may be just as difficult for them to recognise their privileges as it is for members of other privileged groups. Social workers thus need to understand how their social positioning as educated people, some of whom are white, male and heterosexual, accrue privileges which are reproduced in their personal lives as well as their professional practice (Swigonski 1996).

Privilege as the other side of oppression

Following Bailey (1998: 117), I suggest that by focusing solely on oppression, we 'reinforce the structured invisibility of privilege'. If we are going to develop a comprehensive account of the sources of oppression in society, we must understand how privilege is constructed and maintained. Furthermore, we need to be 'attentive to the ways in which complex systems of domination rely on the oppression of one group to generate privilege for another' (Bailey 1998: 117).

Bailey (1998: 109) describes privilege as 'systematically conferred advantages individuals enjoy by virtue of their membership in dominant groups with access to resources and institutional power that are beyond the common advantages of marginalised citizens'. Sidanius and Pratto (1999) identify the main benefits that accrue from privilege: 'possession of a disproportionately large share of positive social value or all those material and symbolic things for which people strive. Examples of positive social value are such things as political authority and power, good and plentiful food, splendid homes, the best available health care, wealth and high social status' (Sidanius and Pratto 1999: 31-2). Individuals come to possess these benefits 'by virtue of his or her prescribed membership in a particular socially constructed group such as race, religion, clan, tribe, ethnic group or social class' (Sidanius and Pratto 1999: 32). An individual's privilege is thus more a product of their membership of privileged groups than it is of their individual capabilities.

While privilege is something that one possesses, it is also something that is 'done'. It is in part through the processes of 'accomplishing' gender, race, and other forms of difference that social dominance is reproduced. That is, people live their lives trying to attain certain valued aspirations associated with these statuses. Thus, rather than seeing the concepts of race, gender and class as reified categories, we should be more interested in the processes of gendering, racialising and classing. Race, gender and class constitute 'ongoing methodical and situated accomplishments' (Fenstermaker and West 2002: 75), in which people's everyday conduct legitimates and maintains wider social divisions.

The characteristics of privilege

To critically explore the concept of privilege, we need to identify the key characteristics. Most privilege is not recognised as such, by those who have it. In fact, 'one of the functions of privilege is to structure the world so that mechanisms of privileges are invisible – in the sense that they are unexamined – to those who benefit

from them' (Bailey 1998: 112). So not being aware of privilege is an important aspect of privilege.

We are thus more likely to be aware of experiences of oppression than we are likely to be conscious of aspects of our privilege. As Rosenblum and Travis (1996) note, members of privileged groups occupy what they call an 'unmarked status'. By this they mean that people in unmarked categories do 'not require any special comment. The unmarked category tells us what a society takes for granted' (Rosenblum and Travis 1996: 142). One of the consequences of this is that members of privileged groups are unlikely to be aware of how others may not have access to the benefits that they receive and thus they are unlikely to be able to acknowledge the experiences of those who are marginalised. Many privileged individuals may thus participate in the oppression of people without being aware of it.

Peggy McIntosh (1992) distinguishes between 'earned strength and unearned power conferred systematically' (1992: 78). In this much published and classic article, McIntosh constructed a list of forty-six advantages that were available to her as a white person that were not available to people of colour under racism. Such advantages include: being able to be in the company of people of my race most of the time; turning on the television and opening the front page of the newspaper and seeing my race widely represented; being sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race; not having to educate my children to be aware of systematic racism; never being asked to speak for all of the people of my racial group; and easily finding academic courses and institutions which give attention only to people of my race.

McIntosh (1992: 70) notices in relation to men, that while some men are willing to acknowledge that women are oppressed, they are less willing to recognise that they are correspondingly 'over-privileged'. She realised, however, that there were parallels between the unwillingness of men to come to terms with their male privilege and white women's reluctance to accept their white privilege. She refers to white privilege as being like 'an invisible weightless knapsack' (McIntosh 1992: 71). To partly explain this invisibility, she regards much oppressive behaviour as being unconscious. She says that she did not regard herself as racist because she was taught 'to recognise racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring racial dominance on my group from birth' (McIntosh 1992: 81). Thus members of dominant groups are taught not to see themselves as privileged or prejudiced because they are able to only identify the more blatant forms of discrimination enacted against marginalised groups. They do not recognise the ways in which society confers upon them privileges associated with gender, racial and sexual dominance.

Privileged groups have become the model for 'normative human relations' and this explains in part why they do not want to know about the experiences of the oppressed (Baker Miller 1995: 61). The privileged group thus comes to represent the hegemonic norm whereby 'white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure' people come to embody what it means to be normal' (Perry 2001: 192). The normativity of privilege means that this becomes the basis for measuring success and failure. Thus, those who are not privileged are potentially regarded as aberrant and

deviant. The negative valuation of difference is thus reproduced by the establishment of the normative standard. Because the privileged are regarded as 'normal', they are less likely to be studied or researched because the norm does not have to be 'marked'.

The normativity of privilege provides some insight to the process of 'othering', as the flipside of the 'other' are the insiders who constitute the privileged group (Dominelli 2002). Pickering (2001: 73) reminds us 'that those who are 'othered' are unequally positioned in relation to those who *do* the 'othering' (emphasis mine). The latter occupies a privileged space in which they define themselves in contrast to the others who are designated as different'.

The social divisions between the privileged and the oppressed are further reproduced through their attributed 'naturalness'. Rather than seeing difference as being socially constructed, gender, race, sexuality and class are regarded as flowing from nature. Beliefs about social hierarchy as being natural provides a rationale for social dominance and absolves dominant groups from responsibility to address social inequalities (Gould 2000).

Members of privileged groups either believe that they have inherited the characteristics which give them advantages or they set out to consciously cover up the socially constructed basis of their dominance (Wonders 2000). When we understand the way in which difference is socially constructed, we are more able to develop strategies for challenging inequality.

Tillner (1997) also believes that part of the process of interrogating dominant identities is to question their appearance of naturalness. 'It means to lay open their contingency, their dependency on power relations and to particularise them' (Tillner 1997: 3). He proposes an important strategy of endeavouring to represent non-dominant identities as 'normal' and representing dominant identities as 'particular' as a way of subverting the tendency for dominant groups to always represent themselves as 'the universal'.

Another aspect of privilege is the sense of entitlement that members of privileged groups feel about their status. As Rosenblum and Travis (1996: 141) state: 'The sense of entitlement that one has a right to be respected, acknowledged, protected and rewarded – is so much taken for granted by those of us in non-stigmatised statuses, that they are often shocked and angered when it is denied them'. Lynn (1992), in reflecting upon her own situation as a white woman, describes how she had come to believe that she deserved whatever benefits and status she had attained because she had struggled for them. She did not recognise how her class and race facilitated that struggle.

Intersectionality and privilege

We are increasingly aware of how various forms of oppression intersect. However, we tend to focus on multiple oppressions and ignore the way that privileges are also interconnected. What an intersectional analysis makes clear is that 'all groups possess varying degrees of penalty and privilege in one historically created system' (Collins 1991: 225). Black feminist criticisms of white feminism draws attention to the fact

that while white women are oppressed by their gender positioning, they also receive privileges through their whiteness. Similarly, while working-class men are oppressed by class, they still receive some dimensions of gender privilege. These examples demonstrate just two of the ways in which one may be both privileged and oppressed at the same time. Collins (1991) coined the phrase ‘the matrix of domination’ to describe the way in which oppression operates on three levels: the personal, the cultural and the structural. People were seen to ‘experience and resist oppression’ on these levels. However, people also experience and reproduce or challenge privilege on these three levels. Given that most people can be seen to exhibit both some degree of penalty and privilege, it is equally important for individuals to see themselves as belonging to dominant groups as well as to oppressed groups.

We all need to locate ourselves in the social relations of domination and oppression. If everyone were simply privileged or just subordinated then the analysis of systems of privilege would be easier. But each of us lives at the juncture of privilege in some areas and subordination in others. Thus, we are never just a man or a woman or a black person or a white person. We all experience these intersections in our lives.

Privileged social locations and the internalisation of dominance

Those in dominant groups will be more likely than those in subordinate groups to argue that existing inequalities are legitimate or natural. Hurst (2001: 199), for example, argues that ‘groups in economic and political positions of dominance exploit their positions for their own and at the cost of others’ benefits’. Sidanius and Pratto (1999: 61) formulate the notion of ‘social dominance orientation’ to explain ‘the value that people place on non-egalitarianism and hierarchically-structured relations among people and social groups’. They argue that people develop an ‘orientation towards social dominance’ by virtue of the power and status of their primary group. They argue that this social dominance orientation is largely a product of one’s membership within dominant groups, although they seem to allow that some members of dominant groups may identify with subordinates.

It certainly seems to be so that most members of privileged groups appear to actively defend privileged positions. In this context, government interventions aimed at addressing inequality and mobilisation by oppressed groups (important as they both are) seem unlikely to fundamentally change the social relations of dominance and subordination (Crowfoot and Chesler 2003).

A concept that has been used to understand some of the ways in which privileged people sustain their dominant position is ‘internalised domination’. Pheterson (1986: 147) defines internalised domination as ‘the incorporation and acceptance by individuals within a dominant group of prejudices against others’. The concept of internalised domination may explain in part ‘why significant numbers of people from the dominant group seem to hold oppressive thoughts and exert oppressive behaviour but do not consider themselves to be oppressive’ (Mullaly 2002: 145).

Tillner (1997: 2) usefully takes this notion of internalised domination a little further by defining dominance ‘as a form of identity practice that constructs a difference which legitimises dominance and grants the agent of dominance the illusion of a

superior identity'. In this process, the identity of others are invalidated. Thus, dominance is socially constructed and internalised. To challenge dominant identities, we will need to explore different models of identity and construct subjectivities that are not based on domination and subordination.

It is not possible for members of dominant groups to escape completely the internalisation of dominance (Johnson 2001). Negative ideas and images are deeply embedded in the culture and it is unlikely that men, whites and heterosexuals will not be affected by sexism, racism and homophobia. As noted earlier, prejudice is not necessarily always consciously enacted by members of dominant groups.

The concept of internalised domination helps us to understand the seeming paradox that Minow (1990) identifies in relation to those who publicly criticise social inequality, while at the same time engaging in practices that perpetuate these inequalities. While she emphasises the task of examining and reformulating our assumptions about the social world, she acknowledges that this requires more than individuals learning to think differently, because of the ways in which the individual's thinking is shaped by institutional and cultural forces. Thus while it is important for individuals to acknowledge the privileges they have and to speak out against them, it is impossible to simply relinquish privilege.

So what likelihood is there that members of privileged groups might form alliances with oppressed groups against their privilege? What would encourage them to do so? To address the potential for members of privileged groups to develop a critical distance from their privilege, it is useful to turn to feminist standpoint theory. Feminist standpoint theory posits a direct relationship between one's structural location in the world and one's understanding of the nature of the world (Bailey 2000: 284). For Swigonski (1993: 172, 179), a standpoint involves a level of awareness about an individual's social location, from which certain features of reality come into prominence and from which others are obscured.

Thus, a standpoint emerges from our social position in relation to gender, culture, ethnicity, class, and sexuality and the way in which these factors interact with our experience of the world. If where we stand shapes what we can see and how we can understand it, from what standpoint can members of dominant groups study dominance and privilege? Is it possible for members of dominant groups to develop knowledge that would contribute to the erosion of their own power and privileges?

While it seems clear that many people in dominant groups cannot escape their materially-embodied position, I argue that it is possible to escape our ideological position. The idea of standpoint relates both to structural location as well as the construction of subjectivity. Just as oppressed groups can develop a self-conscious engagement with their own position, so too can members of dominant groups develop a self-critical engagement with their dominant position. Sandra Harding (1995), for example, has argued that members of dominant groups can understand the viewpoints and experiences of marginalised groups. In this view, profeminist men can challenge patriarchal power and anti-racist whites can challenge white privilege.

Harding expands upon standpoint theory to consider how 'traitorous identities' might be able to develop what she calls 'liberatory knowledge'. She distinguishes between insiders who are 'critically reflective' of their privilege and insiders who are oblivious to privilege. In her view, making visible the nature of privilege enables members of dominant groups to generate liberatory knowledge. Being, white, male or heterosexual presents a challenge in generating this knowledge but it is not an insurmountable obstacle.

Bailey (2000) also argues that members of dominant groups can develop 'traitorous identities'. She differentiates between those who are unaware of their privilege and those who are critically cognisant of their privilege. Traitors are thus those who refuse to reproduce their privilege and who challenge the worldviews that dominant groups are expected to adhere to. Because of their awareness of their privilege, these dominant group members are able to identify with the experiences of oppressed groups. It is from this basis that white people will challenge racism and that men will challenge patriarchy. So from this premise, while it is difficult for members of privileged groups to critically appraise their own position, it is not impossible.

May (1998), for example, differentiates between a 'traditional male standpoint' and what he calls a 'progressive male standpoint'. A traditional men's standpoint is based on the privileges and powers men have, and excludes the perspective of women. A progressive male standpoint involves an ability to be critical of men's position in society and how it contributes to the inequality of women and developing an ethical and moral commitment to addressing that inequality and discrimination because of the harm it causes. This progressive standpoint could be applied to other areas of dominance as well.

Similarly in relation to whiteness, Frankenberg (1993) develops what she calls a 'white anti-racist standpoint' from which to research white women's experiences. Flagg (1997: 629) argues that white people can develop 'a positive white racial identity' that is 'neither founded on the implicit acceptance of white racial domination nor productive of distributive effects that systematically advantage whites'. This means that the white person has to accept their own whiteness. So in this view, whiteness as domination can be unlearned, just as men can unlearn hegemonic masculinity.

Teaching Social Work students about privilege

What can social workers and human service practitioners do to increase their awareness of privilege in order to challenge it? In social work education we spend a lot of time examining the experiences of being oppressed and the social forces that discriminate and exclude oppressed people.

In my privileged position of teaching in social work, I have been challenging students to reflect upon their privileged statuses as well as their subordinated positions in relation to the major social divisions in society. I ask students to position themselves in relation to class, gender, race, ethnicity, age, ability, sexuality, religion and other positionings. I also suggest that such positionings generate standpoints which partially shape how we make sense of the world. I ask them to reflect upon the construction of

their own identity, status and values so that they may more easily see both the disadvantages and privileges that individuals experience as a result of their membership of particular social groups.

In this context it is important for me to situate myself as a white straight middle-aged, temporarily able-bodied middle-class man from a working-class background. I am a father with two adult children and a six-year-old child. When I speak or write, I thus do so from this privileged position filtered through my values and theoretical perspectives. I also emphasise how my knowledge and understanding are shaped by the partiality of my experiences (Schacht 2003).

If they are members of one or more privileged groups, I ask them to list the privileges they think that they have as a result of that membership. I also ask them to reflect upon times when they were conscious of using any form of privilege they have and how it felt. By encouraging students to write their own personal narratives of oppression and privilege and by engaging in dialogue with others about their experiences, I hope to increase students' awareness of the ways in which privilege as well as oppression intersects in their lives. If social work is to be committed to social change and social justice, social workers will need to face the predicament of their unearned advantages and find ways to undo their privileges.

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Note

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Walk the Talk: the journey towards deconstructing the education environment as a model for anti-oppressive social and community welfare practice

DEBRA MANNING

Abstract

As an experienced social welfare practitioner, two years spent living and working as a volunteer in Botswana forced me to reflect critically on my practice, but it was not until I returned that I recognised the pervasive power of our culture to oppress, most visibly, Indigenous Australians. That realisation has led me to focus on issues of power, racism and oppression in my social and community welfare teaching and I am endeavouring to develop a model of teaching that not only raises these issues and strategies to address them for practice but provides an educational environment that enables students to experience such a model. This paper examines the process of integrating my personal experience with my professional teaching and welfare practice and offers some ideas about how social and community welfare students might learn to be genuinely inclusive professional workers through their educational experience.

Keywords: *social and community welfare; social work; education; anti-oppressive practice.*

Introduction

In 1986, under the auspices of AVA (now Australian Volunteers International), I left North-East Victoria for Botswana, southern Africa, to spend two years living in the rural village of Kanye and working as an Extension Officer for an appropriate technology centre. The anticipated 'adventure of a lifetime' proved challenging and, as an Anglo-Australian woman, I learned as much about my own culture as I did about life in Botswana. Over the last fifteen years I have been grappling with the impact of this experience on my social welfare practice and on the way I engage our social and community welfare students around issues of discrimination and oppression.

As I write, I am aware of my continuing struggle with the many ways my culture induces (even seduces) me to support discriminatory belief systems. At the same time, along with my colleagues, I am responsible for preparing students to use an anti-oppressive approach in their future practice. This paper explores some of my experiences and offers some thoughts about an educational process to help prepare students for the challenges of anti-oppressive practice in an increasingly materialist and individualised society. Most importantly, I invite you to join this conversation and share your experiences and ideas about this important issue.

Reflections on life in Botswana

Prior to leaving for Botswana I had worked in the social and community welfare field for some ten years. I was committed to non-discriminatory practice which I understood to mean providing everyone with the same level of respect and care regardless of their circumstances or background. I believed I was a good practitioner and did not see myself as ethnocentric, let alone racist. The extent of my self-deception was revealed during my time in Botswana. Daily, in the way I lived and worked, I saw my culture reflected in the bemused or uncomprehending eyes of people of a very different culture.

I was astonished to learn how so many of the things I said and did, how I felt and responded to people and events, reflected my own cultural values and beliefs and were unfathomable to others. I had previously travelled overseas but I realised that as a traveller I had essentially been a cultural 'tourist' and had simply moved on to another country or retreated to the familiarity and comfort of a Western hotel if I found others' values or beliefs too confronting. I had also worked with Indigenous families and people from different cultural backgrounds and I have memories of retreating behind the safety of my Anglo-Australian culture and my professional role, "This is the way **we** do things", when challenged. I realised that I judged other people's cultures entirely through the lens of my own. My culture was taken for granted, assumed to be 'right'. It remained almost totally unexamined. My commitment to two years in Botswana meant living with the frequent discomfort of cultural dissonance. Increasingly, I realised that my previous social welfare practice had been ethnocentric and, at times, overtly racist. A couple of examples may help you understand how my struggle to come to grips with cultural clashes in Botswana enabled me to see my social welfare practice in Australia in a very different light. They will also explain my search for ways to enable social and community welfare students to become more aware of the power of cultural mores on their social welfare practice.

The rules of supplication and gratitude

Negotiating cultural differences occurred on a daily basis in Botswana. I became aware of how strongly I held my cultural values and beliefs and I was unnerved by the power of my emotional response to having them challenged. Women and children regularly came to my home seeking basic items such as matches, bread, sugar, candles, kerosene or soap. Opening my door to a called greeting, 'Koko', my visitor would then say 'I want soap.' This was not accompanied by 'please', nor followed by 'thank you' and my initial astonishment was quickly followed by indignation and at times, outrage. My Batswana¹ colleagues told me that their language, Setswana, only has the words 'tswee, tswee' for begging and 'ke e tumetse thata', in appreciation of a gift, adding that, in their culture, basic goods were shared. Undaunted, I insisted that my culture, too, needed to be respected and I told the children to 'ask nicely' by adding 'please' and 'thank you'. They obeyed, but I was still not satisfied. Why did their

¹ Batswana, pronounced something like Butswana, are the people of Botswana.

requests continue to sound like demands? I realised it was because there was no upward inflexion at the end of the sentence, indicating a question in our culture. I also realised that despite being a guest in their country I was applying the rules of my culture and responding punitively when these rules were not met. I felt 'put upon' and resentful and would often mutter 'ungrateful', 'greedy', 'spongers' as they left. No matter how hard I tried my feelings would constantly threaten to override my rational thoughts.

How could I have been so unaware of the pervasive power of these cultural rules when I lived and worked in Australia? How many times have I 'assessed' who was 'deserving' or 'undeserving' of my assistance or my resources on the basis of how well people obeyed the rules of supplication and gratitude? How often have I rejected the requests of people because I perceived them to be demanding, rude, greedy, sly, scheming and ungrateful? I do remember times when I felt I was being 'had', or 'taken for a ride' and in spite of my understanding of the structural causes of disadvantage, I used my professional power to refuse their requests. I remember calling this my 'intuition' or 'practice wisdom', but I now see my actions as discriminatory and, in relation to Indigenous people or refugees and migrants, racist.

The seductiveness of professional status

In Botswana part of my role as an Extension officer was to encourage local villagers to embrace the appropriate technologies developed at R.I.I.C. (Rural Industries Innovation Centre). I became aware that the predominantly British, American and European engineers had developed appropriate technological, rather than cultural, solutions for pumping water from 100m under the Kalahari Desert. One was a wind pump. Batswana men were very reluctant to climb the 12 metre towers either to service the machines or to furl the spinning blades in a storm. In response to my queries they asked me to look around. I could see nothing over 3 metres high and what vegetation existed was covered with vicious 10 cm long thorns. They had never been so high off the ground. Additionally, in a storm, the fast rotating pumping shaft would grab the men's shirt-tails ripping them from their backs or pulling them off the tower. The engineers responded to my attempts to explain these difficulties by emphasising their technical expertise and professionalism, clearly valuing their knowledge over that of the villagers.

For similar reasons the Batswana also showed reluctance to embrace other technologies being developed and I began to hear some expatriates expressing increasingly racist beliefs. At a meeting with my Batswana Extension Officer colleagues, I suggested that we ask the engineers to meet with the villagers to hear their concerns. This was enthusiastically supported. At the meeting, however, the villages applauded the engineers for their expertise and nothing was said about the (in)appropriateness of the technologies. At that moment I realised that we had all been seduced by a reverence for Western professional knowledge and status. The engineers valued their professional expertise more highly than the knowledge of the people they had come to assist; my colleagues valued my professional expertise and ideas over their own local knowledge by agreeing to a meeting that they knew would not resolve the issues; and the villagers applauded the skills and knowledge of the engineers rather than expressing their own needs and concerns. Nothing changed. The

technologies, funded by aid projects, were built and distributed, but were mostly unused or poorly maintained. The engineers felt unappreciated by the 'lazy', 'ungrateful' Batswana. I, too, was complicit. I had been happy to accept, unquestioningly, the 'expert' status accorded me by my Batswana colleagues.

I have since wondered how often I am seduced by my culture's reverence for professional qualifications and the expertise that is assumed to accompany them. Do I use my qualifications to claim greater status for my expertise over the knowledge of service users or students? How do I respond to perceived challenges to my 'expertise'? As my professional identity is integral to my sense of self do I perceive such challenges as personal and draw on my 'professional' status to support me? Do I ignore, dismiss or denigrate knowledge that does not accord with my professional knowledge? How do I respond to service users' religious or spiritual knowledge, Indigenous knowledge, cultural and ethnic knowledge? I am now much more consciously alert to the abuse of professional power but how often am I unaware of my seduction by the dominant culture from which I benefit as a member?

Through my experiences in Botswana I learned that powerful emotions are generated when cultural values and mores are challenged. I also learned that those of us who benefit from the status quo will, often unwittingly, use our status to reinforce our cultural 'rules' to the detriment of those we consider 'different'. On returning to Australia I realised how little we understand about the role we each play in maintaining our cultural oppression of 'others'.

Australia's cultural malaise

Arriving back in Australia I discovered I had an 'outsiders' view of my own culture. I 'saw', with shocking clarity, that racism towards Indigenous people and their culture was omnipresent. I felt the oppressive weight of negativity and oft-times contempt with which they were regarded by so many non-Indigenous Australians. I had heard comparable attitudes from white South Africans and Zimbabweans I had met in Africa, and the faces of the Aboriginal youth similarly expressed the despair and anger I had seen in black South Africans and Zimbabweans who had suffered under British colonisation.

Soon after my return I began a job in Child Protection and met an Aboriginal woman who said to me "You sound Australian but you're not from here, are you? You're different." I explained that I had just returned from living overseas and she nodded, but said no more. I was puzzled until I realised that I had related to her if she was a Motswana² or any other woman. How do I explain this? Firstly, I don't think I saw this Aboriginal woman as someone who was 'different'. In Botswana skin colour or 'blackness' had become 'normal' to me. Almost everyone I saw was 'black'. The degree of someone's 'blackness' was the mark of 'difference' as evidenced by my Batswana colleagues' frustration at my initial inability to recognise individual Batswana. In desperation they might say, "You know so and so, the black one!"

² Motswana refers to one person from Botswana ie. singular. Batswana refers to people ie. plural.

Secondly, I had no cultural 'past' with the Batswana, while my past relationships with Aborigines were imbued with the beliefs and attitudes that were all around me. Perhaps this Aboriginal elder could see that I was free of their influence, at least for a time. She later asked me "Why did you go overseas to help the Africans? Why didn't you stay here and help us?" I had said nothing. The only answer I could have given reflected the racist attitudes of which I had suddenly become so much more aware.

I had tried to explain to colleagues in the public welfare and justice systems what I 'saw' around me, but I found it almost impossible to penetrate the cultural malaise with which our culture is afflicted. I found few non-Aboriginal people able to hear anything positive about Aboriginal people. I tried to do my Child Protection job differently. I resisted removing Aboriginal children from their families, arguing their evident abuse in the context of the past and future long term damage of removal. The evidence of immediate abuse, however, was more compelling. Aboriginal family and community support systems, both formal and informal, were stretched beyond breaking point. I continued to remove Aboriginal children from their families. I began to lose my capacity to 'see' Indigenous people 'differently', struggling to see their strengths and potential, not only their failures. The dominant cultural view was engulfing me like a creeping, high country 'white-out'. Trying to challenge our pervasive culture of negativity towards Indigenous people was exhausting. I left direct practice. I don't know how Indigenous Australians and their culture survive, carrying the burden of our cultural condemnation, every day of their lives. And yet, as an Aboriginal elder responded when asked his people's greatest achievement, '(w)e have survived.' (Burney 2006:13).

Now, some 12 years later, I wonder whether the attitudes and beliefs of non-Indigenous Australians have changed towards Indigenous Australians. Linda Burney, delivering the 7th annual Vincent Lingiara Memorial Lecture in May, 2006, said '(t)his country is sitting on a time bomb. If you can't hear the ticking, you are not paying attention.' She related the statistics about Aboriginal disease, death, unemployment, imprisonment that we know well, adding '(b)ut I suspect that most Australians accept them as being almost inevitable. A certain kind of industrial deafness has developed. The human element in this is not recognised. The meaning of these figures is not heard - not felt.' She added, '(h)istory tells so many horror stories of what can happen if humanity is denied' (Burney 2006:8-9).

It is imperative that we recognise our cultural values and beliefs that oppress Indigenous people and address our own role in their continuance. As social and community welfare workers we must heed Galloway (2005:273) who cautions 'against assuming that the welfare sector is any more willing than other sectors of Australian society to move beyond symbolic acts of reconciliation (such as walking across the Sydney Harbour Bridge; Gratton 2000), to engage the gamut of issues that comprised the original reconciliation agenda.'

Those of us involved in the education and training of social and community welfare workers must find ways to render 'visible' the unseen values and beliefs of our culture that impact so devastatingly on those we 'see' as different. We can then choose to challenge oppression rather than contribute, often unknowingly, to its continuance. Lena Dominelli asserts that while realising the aims of anti-oppressive practice is

‘fraught with difficulties, their continued endorsement is crucial to social well-being at both individual and collective levels’ and thus ‘has to remain on the social work agenda for the foreseeable future’ (Dominelli, 2002:181). The rest of this paper will draw on literature that has led me to think about a way of engaging students with the lived experience of oppression by deconstructing our participation in our ‘knowledge’ culture, a system in which we are both oppressors and oppressed. This approach is seen as a starting point, as it is important for anyone who wants to become an ‘ally’ of oppressed groups to reflect on his/her own experience of being a member of oppressed and oppressor groups (Bishop, 2000).

Modelling anti-oppressive practice for students

Theoretical and practice approaches to anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory social welfare work have been developed by a number of authors (see, for example Dominelli 2002; Mullaly 2002; Thompson 2001). There is an understanding that oppression operates across and between three levels; personal, cultural and structural or institutional and that social welfare workers need to acknowledge and challenge these in their daily practice (Mullaly 2002:50; Maidment & Egan, 2004: 5). More elusive, however, is advice about educational approaches to assist students to develop an anti-oppressive practice approach. The texts referred to above examine the nature of oppression and outline the social welfare worker’s role, but answers to the question of ‘how’ an educator assists students to develop their own understanding of and approach to challenging oppression is the focus of my enquiry. Research clearly identifies the need to address this question, stating that there is a distinct gap between anti-oppressive and anti-racist theory or rhetoric and real life practice as reflected in student placement and field supervision reports (Butler, Elliott & Stopard 2003; Maidment & Cooper 2002; Collins, Gutridge, James, Lynn & Williams 2000) and the personal attitudes and beliefs of students and practitioners (Heenan 2005; Galloway 2005).

In one approach, frameworks have been developed that comprise measurable goals or standards by which students can demonstrate their anti-discriminatory or anti-oppressive competency (Roer-Strier 2005; Butler et al 2003). Wilson & Beresford (2000:560) have warned that such approaches run the risk of students ‘feeling that they have ‘done’ anti-oppressive practice and are competent therefore in its usage at all times.’

An anti-oppressive approach to working with Indigenous Australians, according to Michelle Blanchard (2005) and Stephanie Gilbert (2006) both Indigenous Australian academics, requires workers to demonstrate an understanding and respect for Indigenous people. Gilbert says ‘(i)f this requires workers to revisit their beliefs, values and understandings of Australian history, then they must take this on as their challenge.’ (Gilbert 2006:72). My efforts to encourage students to undertake this challenge has been fraught. As McMahon (2005:79) explains, this approach may either alienate workers ‘by presenting harsh facts they find difficult to deal with personally or are unable to respond to adequately’ or be seen as belonging in the past and thus unrelated to current situations.

Most of the practitioners and authors referred to above emphasise the importance of practitioners developing self-awareness through a process of continual, critical self-reflection for an anti-oppressive approach to working with difference. Fook's (1996:4) approach uses a series of reflective questions to examine practice experiences by exploring thoughts, feelings, actions and the assumptions and biases they reveal. If this process of self reflection includes a focus on the context in which we work it can help us become more reflexive in our practice. Fook explains that reflexivity 'refers to a *stance* of being able to locate oneself in the picture' recognising how we influence the situations and contexts in which we work (Fook 2002:43,130).

Analysis of case studies offers an important way of developing self-awareness and practising self-reflection. Case scenarios familiarise students with the situations they may face in practice, however, my experience is that for many students, especially those with little knowledge or experience of practice, they present situations that are remote, involving 'others' who live 'out there' and reflexivity is difficult to develop. I have at times explored other ways of helping students to gain an understanding of the lived experience of oppression through films such as *Babakiueria* (1986), which, by reversing the roles, portrays the Indigenous colonisation of modern day Australia with irony infused with humour; and with cartoons, poems, biographies and physical activities, for example fish bowl role plays and sculptures exploring oppressive relationships. All these techniques attempted to engage students at an affective as well as cognitive level, however, whilst student feedback attested to their partial effectiveness, I had still not been able to bring the experience 'in here' for students, akin to the way my experience in Botswana impacted so powerfully on me at a personal level. Tesoriero (2006:139) recognises the importance of lived experience as a way of providing students with opportunities to learn to engage competently with difference and "contributing to upholding respect for human rights in times when world leaders promote difference as something to be feared and hated'. He takes social work students from the University of South Australia to a partner agency in southern India for their final placement to provide them 'with the opportunity to develop intercultural skills and intercultural sensitivity' (Tesoriero 2006:126). Along with other tools he uses Fook's (1996) process of reflective questioning to assist students to explore the meaning of their experiences and 'as a bridge to increase the sophistication of their intercultural sensitivity' (Tesoriero 2006:131). The excerpts he provides from students' journals mirror some of my own experiences and insights in Botswana. Given, however, few students are able to take three months out from their commitments to experience another culture we must find other ways to assist them to recognise the cultural discourses that define and discriminate against 'difference' in our daily lives.

Social work educators, Taylor and White (2006) also use drama, literature and poetry to provide students with different representations of life and they use reflexive processes to help students recognise the complexities of practice. They urge that rather than seeking certainty through theories, models and frameworks, students need to be continually self questioning and to stay with the anxieties, confusions and ambiguities of practice, in order to developing a practice approach of 'respectful uncertainty'. Miehl and Moffatt likewise encourage educators to assist students to stay with their feelings of anxiety explaining that '[r]ather than looking for ways to calm anxiety, social workers might understand uncertainty and social tensions as

necessary for the development of an identity that is sensitive to the experience of the other' (2000:343). They suggest that by staying with the anxiety and other feelings generated through interacting with those who are 'different' we recognise our interconnectedness and are no longer able to see 'the struggles of another person or a group of persons from a safe distance' (2000:340). Most importantly for my enquiry, the authors see the classroom as a site of learning. They assert that role plays are no longer useful because they remove students from reality, while the classroom setting itself offers experiences of 'the many tensions that occur through attempting to speak across difference' (Miehls and Moffatt 2000:346).

Clifford and Burke (2005) urge educators to focus on the classroom adding that we should explicitly highlight the role we play in the learning process. They assert that '[s]tudents should learn not only from the theory of anti-oppressive ethics and decision-making, but also from the model of practice provided by teachers who struggle to live by the values that they recommend to others' (Clifford and Burke 2005:687). Graham (2004:214) responds to the incongruity that often exists in social work education between 'what' and 'how' we teach, by challenging 'the teacher [to become] a facilitator of a constructivist process rather than an expert who disseminates information to individuals.' She continues, '[t]he constructivist orientation, with its rejection of 'objective facts' and its emphasis on social constructions of reality, offers a lens through which diverse perspectives may be seen and experienced' (Graham 2004:16). Conflicting views are held in creative tension and privileged views are not valued over marginal ones. She urges teachers to create an environment of open enquiry by approaching topics with 'a genuine uncertainty' and participating in deconstructing their own meaning making processes, thereby becoming 'vulnerable' thus creating a 'dialogue with students based on mutuality' (Graham 2003:220). These authors have contributed a number of ideas to my thoughts about how to create a learning environment that furthers students' understanding and engagement with issues of difference and oppression. These are: our understanding of difference is enhanced by encouraging a position of 'uncertainty' rather than certainty; with uncertainty comes anxiety and other emotions that are important to encourage rather than eliminate; the importance of fostering and developing students' reflexivity; and the possibility that these could be learned through classroom experiences. Anne Bishop's writing further encouraged me to explore the possibilities of using the classroom as a learning model. Bishop (2002:112) asserts that

'...part of the process of becoming a member of an oppressor group is to be cut off from the ability to identify with the experience of the oppressed...When oppression is not part of your own experience, you can only understand it through hearing others' experience, along with process of analysis and drawing parallels.'

I have been searching for a link between these approaches to education and social and community welfare practice to ensure that my educational approach would have relevance in the 'real world' of practice. Christine Morley (2004) provided that assurance. She writes about her work with practitioners to deconstruct the entrenched power dynamics and structural barriers in their workplace, enabling them to make choices that changed their oppressive experiences and relationships. Using critical self reflection, the practitioners deconstructed the discourses that maintained their 'identities' as powerless workers becoming '...aware of our potential to unwittingly

comply with discourses that actively disadvantage us and our emancipatory values and analyses' (Morley 2004:303).

Morley (2004) challenges us to rethink our approach to education and practice in terms of how we engage with the dominant discourses that impact directly on us. I was encouraged to critically reflect on my earlier attempts to 'walk the talk' by modelling future anti-oppressive practice through my teaching. I realised that whilst I engaged the students in deconstructing oppression in our culture, I had failed to deconstruct the dominant education discourse that had had such a strong impact on the classroom experience. I abandoned my 'model'. I had engaged students in a learning 'partnership' to model anti-oppressive 'partnerships' in practice. They contributed to creating their own learning contracts, I emphasised the value of their knowledge and skills, tried to relinquish the role of 'expert' and involved students in peer assessment. The experience was fraught for us all. Standing at the front of a tiered lecture theatre, behind a bank of technical wizardry, there was no question about who is perceived as the 'expert'. I continually struggled against being seduced by the 'expert' role, reinforced by the expectations of students and rewarded by a culture which accords me 'lecturer' status. Students also struggled. They expected me to be the 'expert', indebting themselves financially to gain knowledge, skills and a professional qualification certifying their own expertise. Whilst some students embraced the opportunities offered by learning 'partnerships', others actively resisted, declaring that it was my role to teach them what they would need to know to become professional social and community welfare workers. Many students struggled to value what they and their peers brought to the learning environment and were thus reluctant to engage with peer evaluation processes. They understood their role as recipients, rather than partners in their learning and many sought to reinstate our culturally ascribed relationship. I now realise that I failed to recognise in these tensions and shared discomfort, frustration and resentment, any reflections of my own experiences to cultural challenges in Botswana and on my return to Australia. Instead of seizing the opportunity to actively engage with students in the process of cultural change, through articulating and deconstructing the ways our culturally ascribed roles as students and teacher draw us into oppressive relationships with each other, I retreated from the 'anxieties' created by this 'different' relationship to the safety of my culturally ascribed role as the 'expert' lecturer. We all agreed it was easier this way, but at what cost and to whom?

Given our cultural understanding of how knowledge is gained and whose knowledge is valued, it is not surprising that the roles of learner and teacher can be seen to be replicated in the roles of service user and professional social and community welfare worker. Graduate social and community welfare workers are expected by our society to be 'professionals', 'experts' in their field and so service users expect the worker to fulfil that role providing the expertise they seek. We, however, seek to educate students to practise anti-oppressively, to change this relationship, to form more equal 'partnerships' with service users (Maidment and Egan 2004; Trevithick 2000). We ask students to challenge the interpersonal, cultural and structural power relations that govern their relationships with agencies and service users. The classroom experiences outlined above, however, show the potential for this process to generate tensions, strong emotional responses and active resistance from all involved. My experiences of trying to address concerns about the (in)appropriate technologies in Botswana

similarly reflect the complex and powerful influence of cultural mores, albeit influenced by Western culture. It seems clear that unless we are able to deconstruct the oppression in its complexity in our own experiences, our attempts to educate and practise anti-oppressively will result in reinforcing rather than changing oppressive relationships.

At this point in my thinking I believe a more reflexive approach will enable us to utilise classroom experiences to deconstruct the dominant cultural discourses of education and expertise as a model for understanding the complexity of oppression and anti-oppressive social and community welfare practice. By articulating my own struggles to resist the role of the 'expert' and displaying my vulnerability and uncertainty about knowledge and knowing, I hope graduates will be able to live 'the examined life' and practise 'the examined practice' (Taylor and White 2006); be more open to questioning their own unexamined cultural 'certainties'; and will choose to live with the tensions and anxiety created by challenging cultural mores rather than retreat to the safety of culturally ascribed roles which preserve cultural and structural oppression.

Summary and conclusion

My experiences as a social and community welfare worker in Botswana enabled me to see my culture through others' eyes and to recognise its powerful influence on the way I think, feel and act towards others. I learned that, despite personal integrity and professional education, my practice was ethnocentric and discriminatory in ways of which I was previously unaware. On my return to Australia I was able to see that racism towards Indigenous people and their culture is omnipresent in our Anglo-Australian culture and that we have a crushingly negative and pessimistic view of Indigenous people. For many social and community welfare students, oppression is experienced 'out there' in other places, in the lives of 'other' people. I saw a pressing need to provide students with opportunities to 'see' and 'feel' the pervasive influence of culture on our lives and to understand how we benefit from and contribute to the continuance of oppression so that as individuals and practitioners they can make choices that challenge rather than, unknowingly, reinforce it. By creating learning 'partnerships', which challenge the culturally accepted roles of student as 'learner' and teacher as 'expert', we reveal the 'unseen' elements of this relationship.

Deconstructing the tensions that emerge illuminates how we contribute to and are oppressed by the traditional student-teacher/ learner-expert relationship. Students are then able to see how their personal experiences are reflected at cultural and structural levels revealing tensions between their employment as recognised professionals and their anti-oppressive approach to working in partnership with service users. It is hoped that students' personal engagement with the nature and structure of oppression creates opportunities for them to challenge and change culturally produced and structurally maintained power relations beginning at an interpersonal level. I invite you to join this conversation about culture, oppression and the education of social and community welfare workers. The *Practice Reflexions* discussion list provides us with such an opportunity, and I would welcome your comments, reflections and contributions.

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Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are warned that the following article may contain images of deceased persons

Judging a book by its cover: some reflexions on the portrayal of betrayal

KAREN CRINALL

Abstract

This paper reflects on the process of viewing and constructing meaning about a book cover illustration which appears on a collection of Stolen Generation stories edited by Carmel Bird. The grainy black and white photograph, portraying six young girls of part Aboriginal descent, originally appeared under the heading “Homes are sought for these children” in a Darwin newspaper during the 1930s. It is an iconic representation of the betrayal of innocence, signifying the human suffering caused by the inherent racism of the then Australian government’s Aboriginal assimilation policies. It is also an ironic image, communicating the incongruence between the meaning of social justice at the beginning of the twentieth century and at its end. Guided by Michel Foucault’s oft-repeated caution that, “not everything is bad, but everything is dangerous” (Foucault 1991: 343), my intention is to share a subjective reflexion, and thereby raise some issues about the way we interact with, and invest truth in visual objects, such as photographs and the discourses which embed them in historical, social, political and cultural contexts.

Keywords: *Photography, Indigenous Australian children, Stolen Generation, reflective research.*

Fore note:

I am aware of the problems inherent in assuming I have any right to comment on the subjects of this picture. As a ‘white’ Australian, I readily accept that any authority I might appear to assume in speaking about, or on behalf of, the Indigenous children represented, or of the experience of Aborigines in general is highly problematic. In this regard I feel it necessary to stress that I make no assumptions to speak for Indigenous people, or members of the Stolen Generation. Rather my concern here is to reflect on a photographic image and its usage from the position in which I am unavoidably located – that of a privileged non-Indigenous woman, with every intention that my words do not contribute to further objectification, demeaning treatment, or oppression of those who are directly and indirectly represented. I also acknowledge that there is no assurance this will not be the case. In anticipation of the possibility of this occurring, I sincerely apologise. That said, I remain committed to the anti-racist practice philosophy which stresses that to do or say nothing is equally racist, because to succeed a tyrannical regime only requires silence, and thus complicity, from (would be) opponents.

Portrayal *n.* the action or product of portraying; delineation, picturing; a picture, a portrait. (The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary)

Betrayal *n.* the act of betraying; a treacherous or disloyal act; a disclosure.

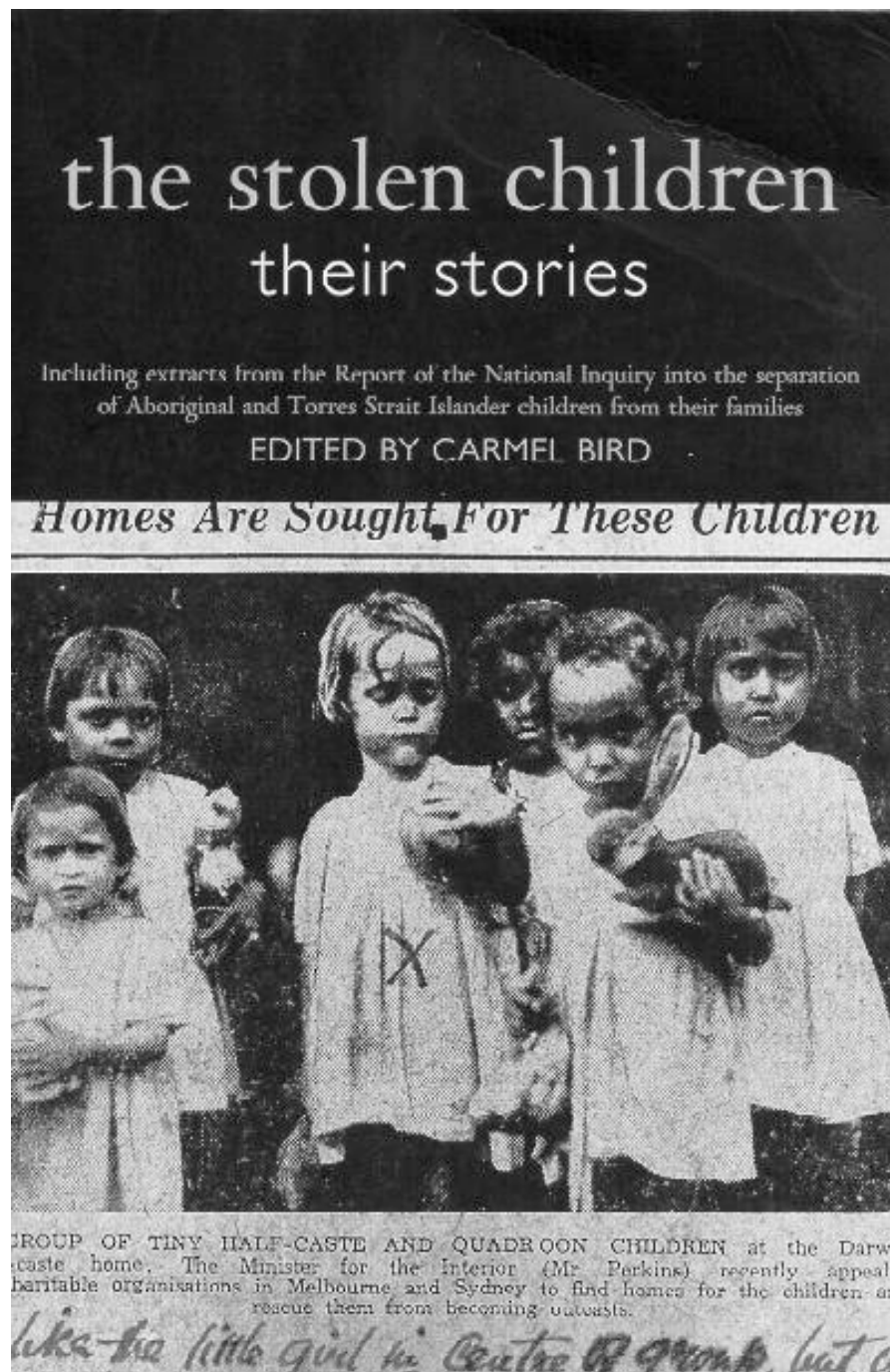


Figure 1

"Homes Are Sought For These Children"

Front cover of an edited volume of Stolen Generation stories by Carmel Bird.

Copyright 1998 © Carmel Bird.

My approach to inquiry in this paper draws on ideas and methods offered by poststructural theory, discourse analysis and reflective research. I do not assume to adopt the position of presenting an ‘authorised’ academic argument in pursuit of revealing and establishing ‘as yet’ unrealised ‘truths’ about social ‘facts’. Rather, my commitment here is to engage in a self-consciously reflexive process – aware that I am producing meaning as I seek meaning (Silverman, 1985:118) – by offering one possible reading in a flow of perpetual meaning-making activities (Kellehear, 1993:25).

In the attempt to understand how “the meanings of social phenomena are constructed” (Sarantakos, 2005:311) through a discursive text, such as an old newspaper photograph used as a book cover illustration, I have adopted the principles of reflective research which “affirm the importance of experiential and interconnected ways of knowing the world [and] blur the traditional boundaries and separations between ‘knowing and doing’, ‘values and facts’, ‘art and science’, ‘theory and ‘practice’ ‘subjectivity and objectivity’” (Fook, 1996:5). Thus, the observations contained within, and the act itself of writing this paper, become research and knowledge–production activities. In addition, although as I write this I am in the position of observer, my words, (and the construct of ‘my’ self that this discourse presents to you) become the objects of your observations as you read these words.

A broad aim is to draw into focus the discursive ‘burst’, or flow of thoughts that occurs in ‘split-second’ textual encounters such as looking at a book cover illustration and attempting to make sense of what it represents. How do we receive, shape and process the messages that are communicated by this inert hand-sized object? How do we retrieve and select information from our own life contexts and bring this to bear in the act of sense-making? How and why does the text urge us to seek more information? How are decisions made about whether or not to look beyond the cover, and to purchase or read the book? Closer to the practice level, my aim is to further understanding about how we, as individuals and as practitioners in the social, welfare and community fields comprehend, construct and thus respond to injustice through the discursive objects which inform us about social causes. As Patrick Fuery observes, “[m]eaning and processes of signification are artifices. It is therefore imperative that we develop methods of analysis in order to see how things come to mean and have signification, rather than merely what they mean and signify” (Fuery, 1995:39). It is my hope that this paper will make some contribution to this endeavour.

Six young girls in white dresses, all standing to face the photographer, they must be no older than four or five years (figure 1). Four of these girl children, positioned in pairs at either end of the image, look warily out at their observer/s. Mid-picture two girls stand one in front of the other; the face of the child at the back is half obscured, both look down at the ball the front girl has gripped in her left arm. All six children seem to have been given a toy to hold for the photographic event, one has a stuffed rabbit, another has a doll, two also appear to have a bag, possibly containing food of some kind. The image is too unclear to discern details with certainty. Not one face bears a smile. The headline boldly states, “*Homes Are Sought For These Children*”. Beneath the picture, the partially visible newspaper text reads, “GROUP OF TINY

HALF-CASTE AND QUADROON CHILDREN at the Darwin [hal]f-caste home. The Minister for the Interior (Mr Perkins) recently appealed [to] charitable organisations in Melbourne and Sydney to find homes for the children and rescue them from becoming outcasts” (Bird 1998: front cover). Under the typeset are handwritten words, “I like the little girl in centre of group, but i[f taken by anyone else, any of the others would do, as long as they are strong]”¹ (Bird 1998:1). There is a cross drawn in ink on the dress of the child to which this note refers.

The child marked with a cross appears to be the fairest, her face and hand are pale skinned, and her hair seems blonde-streaked and slightly wavy. A lock curls onto her forehead, drawing connections with the girl in the English nursery rhyme, ‘who had a little curl, right in the middle of her forehead’. Her attention averted from the photographer, she appears submissive and at the same time curiously defiant. Carmel Bird reflects, “this beautiful child is carelessly and so distinctly marked with a cross at the centre of her being, as if to signify the ruthless severing of the umbilicus that connects her to her mother and her race” (Bird 1998:1). With these words the image adopts yet another dimension, becoming emblematic of the “systemic genocide” practised in the implementation of Australia’s assimilation policies (Bird 1998:1).

The limited information provided in the publisher’s acknowledgements reveals the image is housed in the Australian Archives under the subject and category: “Between Two Worlds: The Commonwealth Government and the removal of Aboriginal Children of part descent in the Northern Territory” (Bird 1998: publisher’s note). In this text the children are redefined as, ‘of part descent’, a contemporary, more politically correct term, arguably less racist, and as such less demeaning and insulting than ‘half-caste’ or ‘quadroon’, but still not rid of the will to establish racial difference based on biology.

Wider reading reveals that in 1934 J.A. Perkins, as the Minister of the Interior, took out a number of advertisements in newspapers “seeking people or institutions willing to take on the care and education of some fifty fair complexioned part-Aboriginals, mostly girls” (McGregor 1997:155). His strategy was to relocate ‘mixed-race’ children who had been taken from their ‘full-blood’ Aboriginal families and housed in over-crowded half-caste homes in the Northern Territory, in the belief that these children would have greater chances of assimilation interstate. Perkins’ actions were supported by others, such as J.W. Bleakley, who conducted a government inquiry in 1928 titled *The Aboriginals and Half-castes of Central Australia and North Australia*. This report, together with recommending the relocation of children interstate, also proposed that:

[C]ategories of part-Aboriginals should receive differential treatment according to their percentage of white blood ... [with a view to solving] ... the half-caste problem by encouraging the marriage of mixed blood women to white men, so

¹ On the book cover the words are framed out, Carmel Bird provides the full text in the introduction.

that within a few generations all apparent traces of Aboriginal descent would be 'bred out'. (McGregor 1997:153).

On the other hand, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, Cecil Cook, argued against this relocation scheme, claiming that ultimately the assimilation of Aborigines in the Northern Territory would be undermined. His view was that 'half-caste' girls needed to be retained as potential wives for the Territory's white men. At the same time, neither Perkins, Bleakley, nor Cook saw the assimilation program itself as problematic.

This book cover illustration is likely to be at least the fifth reproduction in a chain of transpositions which can be traced from the original negative, to this newspaper illustration, to the place where I am viewing it now as the cover illustration of an edited collection of stories and excerpts from *Bringing Them Home, The Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (1997). The digital reproduction which you are viewing constitutes yet another version of this visual data. Between my position as the writer/reader and your own, as the reader/writer, we share in a convolution of viewing, reading and writing about a reproduction of a representation of a moment in the lives of six young girls, a split second that enabled (amongst other deficit labels) their definition and advertisement as homeless and without race or family.

To which category of image making does this photograph belong? It could lie anywhere on the continuum between photojournalism, and social documentary. Although it is a newspaper illustration, it could also be seen as a mass-media version of a snapshot or a *catalogue* image displaying *available* homeless children; it seems, after all to be one of Perkin's 'advertisements'. More pertinent, perhaps are the different meanings that operated about this photographic document between the mid-1930s and the late 1990s when it became a political statement on a book cover. There are significant grounds for doubting whether this visual object should even continue to be considered a photograph. Viewing this reproduction – a piece of light and pigment affected paper archived in an Australian Government library – from the ideological, political, cultural and moral locations of the twenty-first century, its functions can reasonably be argued to have included social, evidentiary, promotional and political purposes. As such, in each guise credibility is dependant on the viewer/reader accepting what they see before them as evidence of particular human and social needs. My response as a viewer self-righteously positioned in sympathy with members of the Stolen Generation, is to accept that much is revealed here about early twentieth century attitudes of Australians of European descent towards Aborigines. I anticipate and therefore read: racism, paternalism, xenophobia, colonial imperialism, inhumanity and misguided philanthropic intentions.

Looking at the book-cover propped up to the left of my computer screen I am simultaneously reminded of portrayals of emancipated slave children², cupids in

² See for example, the photograph titled *Emancipated Slaves brought from Louisiana by Col. Geo. H. Hanks* in Kimball (1985) 'Portraits of Emancipated Slave Children' in *History of Photography*, 9(3) p.191.

Renaissance and Romantic artworks, and the allegorical child subjects of Julia Margaret Cameron's pictorialist Victorian photographs. Any romantic wistfulness however is halted by the hesitant wariness and slightly fearful but still potentially challenging curiosity of the four girls who look out at their observers, and instead associations shift to the faces of Indigenous people depicted in colonial anthropological photographs³. This assembly of small girls also evokes other memories of flickering documentary film and newspaper images showing Jewish war orphans huddled together; children with nothing to smile about and everything to dread. In spite of the text telling the reader it is the children who require assistance, it is as if together the young girls are saying, 'Who are you? What do you want?' I wonder whether the photographer encouraged them to adopt unsmiling poses, whether their joylessness reflects their grief, or perhaps simply their first experience of being posed for a photograph.

The 1930s newspaper image labels each of the six girls as homeless, in need of 'rescue from becoming outcasts', threatened with exclusion because of their partial Aboriginality. The *fin de siècle* book cover illustration suggests that the reporter's forecast was realised – many of these children were socially excluded, they did become outcasts. This was not the worst of their experience, these children were made race-less, family-less – they were 'stolen' and robbed of kin, community and place – dispossessed in order to be rescued by the regime that fixed them in these photographic images, that purported truths about their present and future existence. According to the news story of *then*, they were to be damned *and* saved by the portion – the half, or the three-quarters, that was *not* Aboriginal. Taken from their mothers, and thus families and communities, each child was then to be permitted (an always partial) access to the culture of 'white' Australia, and thus notionally rescued by the benevolence of its power to obliterate by absorption. Viewing this image/text object *now*, having read and heard the testimonies of women with similar histories to the girls in the photograph, I know the gateway into Australian society via white families led to a path far different from that promised, or even imagined by the 'Protectors' of Aborigines.

The gender divisions revealed by this image and its context also warrant consideration. Female rather than male children were selected for public advertisement and display, even though the newspaper alludes to both genders; "tiny half-caste and quadroon children" [my emphasis]. Russell McGregor (1997) explains that females outnumbered males in the half-caste homes, as boys were often cared for and employed on pastoral stations, while girls, on the other hand, were institutionally confined, because, "their chances of respectable employment were small, the likelihood of them falling victim to male lust was high, and their role in the procreation of the next generation of part-Aboriginals [was] a concern" (McGregor 1997:154). The person who marked the central child with a cross seemed less concerned with which girl was sent, as long as they were 'strong', suggesting that whomever was chosen would be destined for physical work, supporting Humphrey

³ See for example, *Anthropological Study of South Australian Aboriginal Woman*, in Hamilton and Hargreaves (2001) *The Beautiful and the Damned*, p.9.

McQueen's claim that the reluctance of 'white' Australian families to take in 'black' children was overcome by placing girls in domestic service (McQueen 2002:7).

Already dressed in the clothing and hairstyles of non-Indigenous children, holding European children's toys, these tiny girls are displayed as already partially assimilated. The blackness of their bodies is obscured by the white dresses, and also by the technical in/efficiencies of the photographic and printing process. In their imagined future as women, 'rescued from becoming outcasts' these girls' bodies carry the potential to annihilate their own race, even as their faces and bodies are used as signifiers of vulnerability, need, potential and hope. The image and its layered messages express and expose this neo-Darwinist state paternalism that was mobilised in the early twentieth century through a confluence of patriarchal, colonial and maternal desires. Emotive appeals are directed at both personal and collective levels, tapping into readers' notions of parental and national responsibility. Additionally, the use of this image in both of the historical contexts discussed here supports the observation that 'documentary' photographs which portray women and children as innocent, and at the same time physically and emotionally strong victims, are most likely to arouse middle-class sympathies (Eisinger 1995:88).

The view that Aborigines were a dying 'race' was supported by the commonly held 'truth' in the early twentieth century that the Aboriginal blood-line constituted an early stage of Caucasian evolution which, already surpassed by the Europeans, would disappear through interbreeding (McGregor 1997:157-158). In 1925 Herbert Basedow claimed that "Aboriginals represented the root stock of the Caucasian race" (cited in McGregor 1997:157). Perhaps these views, ridiculous to us now because science has since disproved its own findings, helped relieve anxieties about children of mixed Aboriginal and Caucasian parentage. That said, although unions between European men and Aboriginal (or mixed descent) women were tolerated, encouraged even, as seen here, and the marriage of 'half-caste' girls to 'white' men was a governmental strategy, relationships between Aboriginal men and European women were considered shameful and taboo (McGregor 1997).

The black-and-white newsprint format authorises this image as actual, telling us that the children are real, the moment happened. In its use as a contemporary book cover illustration, age – the passing of time – is signified by the newsprint's fuzzy texture. Facial details, parts of the girls' bodies, and the background, obscured by shadow (darkness) are contrasted against the white dresses, the lightness of their toys, the highlights in their hair and their (mostly) pale faces. Although the text tells us the children are from the 'Darwin half-caste home', visually the group exists in no place, they have no definable environment either encircling and protecting, or claiming them. The face of the girl half hidden at the far back blends with the indefinite background, and contrasts against the fairness of the child marked with a cross, creating the impression that she is the darkest of the six. It is as if the girls are caught in limbo, and must either be drawn *further* into the place of the viewer, or recede into some dark and threatening no-place (the place of outcasts, Aborigines).

The distraction of the two middle girls, their absorption with their *gifts* creates movement and tension. Disengagement from the observer's gaze assures the viewer of the authenticity, and thus the seriousness of this moment, and establishes the

photographic event in a real time space. There is some comfort in the knowledge that the 1930s function of this image would not be tolerated by contemporary society, this being clearly an intention behind its usage on Bird's text. What this image and its accompanying text portray now is popularly considered inappropriate and unacceptable. An informed contemporary audience participates in its viewing, because we can at the same time reject what it represents. The image is invalidated as its meaning is validated. One only has to pick up a weekend newspaper, particularly the tabloids, however to see that contemporary media perpetuates this legitimised hypocrisy, in which we are safely able to renounce as rapidly as we confirm. The desire to photographically document and look upon distressing human circumstances has seen little diminishment⁴. 'Human' documents in the mass media do not represent everyday trauma, but rather events that are unusual or abnormal. This allows the reader to be emotionally responsive and at the same time reassured that it is not likely to be a circumstance they will experience. Self and otherness are simultaneously re/confirmed while the reader is able to face a horror that is likely to be worse than anything they might have to confront (Stott 1973:17).

The reality this message relies upon is already a representation of reality, a construction. On *the* day when this image was produced and publicly circulated, it carried the overt purpose of eliciting public sympathy for children experiencing the scripted misfortune of being without family, and of 'mixed race'. The covert meaning is more insidious, its imbedded message is that these children would not be accepted, in fact had been rejected, by their Aboriginal parents. Thus the other is deliberately constructed and positioned as physically *and* morally inferior. The imagined reader, as a European Australian, is able to *save* these children not only by providing them with 'white' homes and lives, but also by rescuing them from their Indigenous family's alleged rejection; a circumstance as potentially fictional as it is real in relation to their non-Aboriginal parentage. Where are their European fathers? Why do they not support them? Why have they not claimed them?

As the Stolen Generation testimonials made so abundantly clear, Aborigines were far from passive over the removal of their children. The documentation of the Aboriginal Protection Board, who advocated for, and enacted the removal of children from Aboriginal families, describes the resistance to this systemic State-driven child abuse. Thomas Garvin (of the Aboriginal Protection Board), when arguing for greater legislative power to remove children wrote on the 9th of June, 1912 – "there will be great heart-burning and opposition to the separation of children from their parents, who will not give them up unless compelled by law to do so" (Garvin cited in Goodall 1996:127). Goodall further observes that the first Aboriginal political organisation to cover a wide area in New South Wales, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA), considered its first imperative was to "try to help the children who had been taken from their families" (Goodall 1996:151). One of the AAPA's

⁴ For example, on Saturday August 18, 2001, the front page of the *Herald Sun* displayed in colour a two year old boy with Down's Syndrome under the headline, I NEED A HOME. The article appealed for adoptive parents for William, 'because after weeks of agonizing, William's natural parents decided they could not give him the care he needed'.

most active campaigners, Elizabeth Hatton⁵ wrote of the distress of the parents of young girls who had been ‘apprenticed’ into domestic service:

Day after day, letters come from the people, pleading for their children, asking me to find their girls, long lost to them – in service somewhere in the State – taken away in some cases seven years ago and no word or line from them.

(Hatton cited in Goodall 1996:153)

It is reasonable to assume these six young girls were forcibly removed from their mothers and communities, and would join those described above, streamed into a system and culture with little or no respect for their Aboriginal culture and heritage.

As Derrida (1978) insists, the text cannot be extracted from either the context in which it is read or out of which it derives, at the same time these sites are never stable, they continually fold back on themselves. The antithetical use of *Homes are sought for these children* as a book cover illustration over seventy years after it was first published in a newspaper, makes it difficult to comprehend the intention in using the image as a political comment in the present as anything other than testimony to the history of racism in Australia. Comprehension by a contemporary readership of the meaning of this image as it operated in the 1930s is circumscribed by interpretations which call for difference from the present. This is in part achieved by promoting the belief that at the time European Australians were acting under the authority of misguided good-will based on ill-advised ‘truths’ and scientific ‘facts’ which were driven by the enduring culture and power of colonial imperialism and/or white supremacism. At the same time, there are some parallels in the moral and affective currency of this image between the 1930s *and* the present. In both locations the image uses⁶ the bodies and faces of non-white, homeless, family-less ‘stolen’ girl children to elicit emotional reaction, moral indignation and social obligation. While moral attitudes and social values may have shifted, the portrayal of unhappy, ‘half-caste’ girls/children/babies condemned to social exclusion calls for moral action and emotional response, whether the year of its viewing is 1934 or 2006. At the end of the second millennium, as a re-presented visual document introducing a volume of Stolen Generation stories, the photograph confronts us with the past *in* the present. The reassurance of difference in social beliefs (we are not racist like they were) and the discomforting suggestion of similarity in practice (or are we?) hang suspended in discursive tension.

The political knowledge which now surrounds this representation, in combination with the emotive force of the children’s evident innocence – another feature which does not vary between the two time periods – produces a cultural sign denoting the

⁵ Elizabeth McKenzie-Hatton was a ‘sympathetic white-woman’, who joined with the AAPA in the early 1920s. Goodall describes her as a ‘stalwart and vigorous member of the Association, and apparently the only one who was not aboriginal’ (Goodall, 1996, p. 151).

⁶ I am only discussing the image as news illustration and book cover here, but as indicated, it was also used for selecting a suitable child.

‘systemic genocide’ committed by the Australian government, its institutions and its non-Aboriginal population. As a moderately well-informed viewer, and *responsible* adult/citizen, it is difficult to contain my own *protective* emotions. Although reticent, even at this point to accuse and blame, I feel anger at, not only the Australian Government of then, but also the Government of now – the one that still will not take responsibility by saying sorry. As I write this, the second child from the right catches my gaze; foremost on the picture plane with inclined head she appears to be staring directly out at me. Wide-eyed, questioning, she seems to be appealing for reassurance of some kind, and it is directly to her that I want to apologise, gravely, deeply and regretfully. Thus, essentially through its affective power, this image of these white-froked angelic girl children becomes (for me) an icon of Indigenous people’s experience of dispossession and colonisation.

Lucie-Smith argues that the power of photography lies in the camera’s ability to “simply halt the flow of time at a chosen moment”, and thereby afford the image with emblematic significance (Lucie-Smith 1975:65). The transportation of this image across seventy years requires faith in this time-arresting quality. As a viewer, and potential reader of Carmel Bird’s book, I need to be convinced that *the* moment I see before me, *the* day that *this* picture appeared in the newspaper and the appeal made by the Minister of the Interior for homes for these children and others like them, really did happen. From the temporal location of now, confidence in the image’s authenticity enables me to experience and express anger, indignation, regret and sorrow. At the same time I am allowed a safe distance from any direct association with the injustices that were committed. I can choose not to open the book and read its contents. And this I am tempted to do, recalling the pain of reading similar accounts of human suffering.

This image also represents the welfare system established in Australia for accommodating children who were destitute, neglected and from poverty-stricken homes⁷. In keeping with practices throughout the modernising world, Australia’s response to child destitution included the provision of large-scale institutional homes and foster care or ‘boarding-out’ for unaccommodated babies and infants (Dickey 1980: 59). Boarding-out or ‘baby-farming’ (Jaggs 1986:73; James 1969:195) was a common and often preferred response to the sizeable, unmanageable population of destitute children in Australia at the time. Contemporary notions of ‘child welfare’ however were far from the concerns of the Victorians who, according to Donella Jaggs, acted primarily to protect the interests of the middle-classes:

They had no intention of protecting children from ill-treatment or setting up a public child-rearing system. Their aim was to prevent the proliferation of a class

⁷ Some kind of patriotism urges me to believe the very concept of ‘homeless’ children in a country where everyone is entitled to a ‘fair go’ would have challenged the *Australian* identity as a generous and inclusive nation (no matter how flawed this really was), and yet as Jaggs points out, the colony was faced with the problem of large numbers of destitute and orphaned children from its early days (Jaggs 1986, p.19). For further discussion on child destitution in the early years of Australia’s settlement see also van Krieken, 1991, pp.45-60.

of criminal slum-dwellers similar to those which had plagued other advanced urban countries ... Like their counterparts in those countries, they were motivated by fear of the dangers which idle and disaffected lower classes posed for society, as much, if not more, than compassion for the young concerned.

(Jaggs 1986: 2)

Robert van Krieken, on the other hand argues that these institutional responses to child welfare were driven not only by middle-class ideals, but also by divisions within the colonial working classes themselves, between those who were considered 'respectable' and the 'non-respectable' (van Krieken 1991:24). Despite the real effects and motivations of Australian policy makers, even during the depression years between the first and second world wars, the nature of an Australian national identity required the illusion of generosity, inclusion and certainly not heartlessness. The Australian government still provides care for 'unwanted' and neglected children through the foster-care system, a system still wanting in many respects, despite principles of culturally appropriate placement.

The social and political climates in which this image/object is read allows certain interpretations and silences others. Looking at it again, I want to believe that no amount of technical interference or recontextualisation can conceal the apprehension and mistrust these girl-children express as they gaze out at their observers. On the book cover their image sits beneath the title, which tells us that these children were 'stolen children' and that this text contains 'their stories'. Thus the Australian government and those complicit with its policies become child abductors. The child who stands second from the right, holding the toy rabbit and the two girls on the far left deliver this accusation with their furrowed gazes. As much as one might will it, however there is no possibility of the last say remaining here with these tiny subjects, they are messengers only of these possible discursive constructs. This assembly of 'homeless' children is an invitation to read further about the betrayals and abuses to which children such as they were subjected.⁸ And, because I have faith in the image's facticity as a document I believe that each of these girls stood in front of a camera roughly seventy years ago, leaving behind "something like an essence of the photograph[ic]" moment (Barthes 1993:72). It is highly probable some of the women are no longer alive, and those that are will be close to eighty years old. Perhaps they were able to tell their stories in the Stolen Generation testimonies, I hope so. Through this desire for the representation to speak the narrative that constructs it, looking at this reproduction of a reproduction becomes simultaneously an act of authorship and listening. In that convergence I become a willing participant in the political narrative of Carmel Bird's edited book, and open the cover to read further about the betrayals that this text portrays. As I do so, however I find myself wondering how this image

⁸ For further discussion on the resistances enacted by Indigenous people through photographic representations see Lydon, *Regarding Coranderrk: Photography at Coranderrk Aboriginal Station*, May 2000, PhD Thesis, The Australian National University.

and its text might be read and used seventy years from now, how this discourse might be implicated as evidence of further prejudice, ignorance and injustice.

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A Constructivist approach to challenging men's violence against women

CHRIS LAMING

Abstract

Men's abuse and violence in intimate partner relationships is a worldwide problem of which there is a growing awareness. This paper will look at a model of practice developed in rural Victoria that seeks to enable men to take responsibility for their abusive behaviour and to commit to a process of behaviour change. The SHED (Self-Help Ending Domestic) Project uses a constructivist approach to challenging men's violence against women and children and it encompasses assessment, groupwork, and an integrated, collaborative model of intervention between agencies.

Keywords: *men's violence against women; intimate partner violence; men's behaviour change; personal construct theory.*

Introduction

This paper discusses one approach to challenging men's violence against women. The approach is based on applied research into best practice frameworks for men's behaviour change programs and the utilizing of personal construct theory as part of a repertoire of intervention strategies. The aim of this approach is to increase safety of women and children as well as addressing subtle controlling behaviours by men. This reflection will describe the approach taken and how it works in practice in a particular setting, as well as some of the key issues and insights from the experience.

Setting

Almost thirteen years ago at Moe, in the Latrobe Valley of Victoria, the Men's SHED (Self-Help Ending Domestic) Project began at the request of women workers at the local community health service, tired of picking up the pieces after incidents of family violence. Their intention was to use the small amount of funding available to them at the time, for family violence prevention, to establish a project for men to take responsibility and to learn to relate non-abusively and non-violently with their families. The underlying aim of this continuing project is the safety and well-being of women and children (Laming, 1996; 1998; 2000; 2003; 2005b; 2006)

At the outset of the SHED Project in 1994, a reference group was established representing some of the key local agencies at the time. Since 1996 the various coordinators/managers of the Regional Women's Domestic Violence Support Service have been members of the SHED reference group, along with representatives from Community Corrections, the Community Health Service, other relevant welfare agencies, and in more recent years, Victoria Police. The membership of the reference group reflects the need for men's behaviour change programs to be accountable, to consistently support women and children's right to safety and well-being and at the same time, hold men responsible for their abuse and violence (Younger, 1995; Strategic Partners, 2003; Wheeler, 2006).

Such accountability to women's DV support services in particular, is essential for the efficacy and credibility of a men's behaviour change project like SHED and is fundamental to an integrated approach to family violence within the wider context of patriarchy and male privilege in our society, where men commonly use power and control to serve their own ends.

Gender inequality

Male privilege is prevalent in many parts of the world as witnessed by WHO statistics (2002), and closer to home, the recent report *The Health Costs of Violence: Measuring the Burden of Disease Caused by Intimate Partner Violence* (VicHealth 2004). This Victorian report states that intimate partner violence is 'prevalent' with one in five women reporting being abused in adulthood; is 'serious' since for women of 15-44 years of age, it is the single biggest factor contributing to sickness, disability and death in Victoria; and is 'preventable' since inequality of power and resource distribution between men and women is a major factor underpinning the likelihood of abuse according to WHO (2002) and OWP (2002) (VicHealth, 2004:10). Structured inequality between genders supports and enables women's vulnerability to abuse (WHO 2002). This is not new knowledge and women's groups worldwide have been instrumental in raising public awareness of these issues for at least the past twenty-five years.

Most abuse is not at the hands of strangers. 'Women are more vulnerable to intimate partner violence than to violence in any other context (OWP 2002) and are overwhelmingly more likely than men to be the victims of this form of violence (ABS 2003)' (VicHealth 2004:10). If the health costs of men's violence against women are not compelling motivation enough to challenge it, then the economic costs might be. The economic cost to the Australian economy is \$8.1 billion per year (Statewide Steering Committee Report 2005:12). Perhaps this is the reason there now seems to be the political will to address the problem of family violence effectively (OWP, 2001; 2002; Strategic Partners, 2003; Statewide Steering Committee Report, 2005).

As well as the huge costs listed above, intimate partner violence also has long term effects on children (VicHealth 2004). According to a recent Victorian report, children were present at 48% of police attendances for family violence in Victoria in 2002-3. The resulting possible harmful effects are depression, withdrawal, low self-esteem, poor performance at school, truancy, aggression, tantrums and anxiety, so that, family violence is the greatest single predictor of future intimate partner violent behaviour by those young people, when they are in relationships themselves (Statewide Steering Committee Report 2005:12). This picture is replicated again and again in the stories that emerge from men in the SHED groups.

Integrated inter-agency response

An integrated inter-agency response to family violence utilises 'men's behaviour change programs that are able to support women and children's rights to safety and challenge men to end their use of violence without police or judicial involvement' (SSCRFV, 2005:8). This is also a preventative measure that presents the opportunity for abusers to change their behaviour before it escalates. If the violence escalates then 'well-managed criminal justice based projects delivering a structured program

focusing on the offender and the offending behaviour are more likely than other forms of criminal justice interventions to reduce or eliminate violence and intimidating behaviour' (Dobash et al. 1996: x). Men's behaviour change programs such as the SHED Project, provide an integrated approach to family violence that is both preventative as well as engaging with the criminal justice system.

The commitment by men's behaviour change programs to protocols or memorandums of understanding, with other agencies (for example, Domestic Violence Services, Department of Human Services Protective Services, Corrections, Magistrates' Courts, Victoria Police, Alcohol and Drug Services, Centres Against Sexual Assault) as indicated by a consistent inter-agency referral process, are essential (Office of Women's Policy, 2001:20; Strategic Partners, 2003:101; Wheeler, 2006:64).

The SHED Project

The SHED Project is based on research in which I developed a framework for a men's behaviour change program, based on best practice overseas and in Australia, as part of a Master of Social Work degree. The SHED Project has five main components: first, assessment and counseling; second, the men's ongoing group (intake); third, the men's responsibility program, (a closed twelve week group); fourth, the inter-agency family violence network; and fifth, community education. A full description can be found in the *SHED Manual: For workers engaging in men's behaviour change to shed abusive beliefs and violence* (Laming 2005b), which places men's behaviour change programs in an integrated response to family violence.

Assessment

Men are generally referred to the SHED Project by local welfare agencies or by statutory organisations, or by family members. Indeed, this latter category makes up about fifty per cent of all referrals. It is true to say that no-one wants to attend a behaviour change program initially, though for some, that changes over time. Every man has some degree of resistance, denial, and resentment regarding the predicament he finds himself in and most men want to blame someone else and avoid taking any responsibility for their destructive behaviour.

In such situations the role of the intake worker is to engage and establish rapport by encouraging and inviting the man to tell his story as part of the assessment, and to listen with an incredulous approach. This is not the same as colluding, which needs to be avoided and guarded against stringently. It is more akin to trying to make sense of the offender's reality and story, how he constructs his world, how he sees his relationship with his family, how he constructs his abusive behaviour, and what meaning it has for him. And yet this is only part of the worker's role in the assessment interview. Another major part is to challenge the man about his abusive beliefs, especially by presenting him with alternatives to violent behaviours and the chance to learn strategies to change by joining similar men in a regular group. By identifying with the man's struggle to stay non-violent and letting him know that he is not alone, the facilitator strengthens the man's resolve to change.

Groupwork

For men who have been violent at home, the understanding that they can opt for change is very relevant. It means that they need not be victims of their biography, or see themselves as such, nor feel sorry for themselves. They can create their own interpretation and hence, reconstruct their lives. They are presented with the possibility that they do not have to remain violent: they are able to change. There is reason for hope, and they are able to choose which direction their life might take.

When working with abusive men, practitioners must act reflexively; they are continually challenged to ask themselves whether they also use this type of behaviour in their own family. Otherwise, an occupational hazard for the male worker is to collude with the abuser and feel sorry for him, or to identify with him and support his sense of threatened privilege that is used to justify his abusive behaviour.

Groupwork is a key part of the men's behaviour change program and it is essential on the one hand, to challenge individual men about their abusive and violent behaviour, and on the other to also address the structures in society that support and allow such abusive behaviour. These structures take many forms; inequality in the work place, in management, in politics - in every sphere of life male privilege sustains abusive behaviours. When men who see it as their right to be in power and control, feel threatened, they often see the use of force or intimidation or violence as legitimate to maintain what they regard as the just order of things.

What we need to do, as Fisher (2000:436) says, is to 'provide help and assistance to the individual in order to allow them to make immediate sense of the feeling of threat, chaos and fragmentation that can occur during the early stages of change'. Fisher goes on to say that in assisting someone to take on a new construction of themselves, a slow and careful process has to be adopted 'in order to overcome the fear, threat etc from a future that is unknown' (2000:436). Similarly, Bannister (1970:31) compares the process to a rotting ship that has to be rebuilt at sea if it is to be saved from sinking. It can only be rebuilt by replacing one plank at a time and 'rapidly replacing it so that, given good fortune, we may eventually sail in an entirely new ship'. Taking change gradually is also echoed by Kelly's (1955/1991) exhortation to clinicians to ensure that when they invite a person to find a new meaning in an aspect of their life, or to change their construing (for example, the meaning of yelling, intimidating, threatening, mind games or hitting, where the man justifies it on the grounds that she or the children deserve it), they do it at the client's pace. This is a central part of the SHED group facilitator's role.

Group facilitators are there to promote and facilitate a process in which the participants provide each other with multiple examples of alternative behaviours and multiple points of support for respectful 'newly developing beliefs' as well as confrontation for old, 'socially pervasive' abusive beliefs (Russell, 1995: 51). A multifaceted therapeutic environment offers many supports and opportunities for men to reinforce their change process from abusive to respectful beliefs and behaviours. In this way, 'therapeutic groups, rather than individual therapy', are regarded as the best intervention strategy (Russell, 1995: 51). A central role of the group facilitators, is to ensure that the group process is one that fosters change towards non-violence, and not one that colludes to perpetuate it.

Questions help to enable and engender the required change in a group process, especially those questions using an incredulous and invitational approach. The posing of 'what if ...?' is an important strategy of practitioners in the SHED groups. In working with violent men, the strategy of putting to them the question 'what if?' regarding their behaviour change to non-violence can be very powerful (Laming 2005a). For example, a SHED group facilitator might ask questions like "how would you feel if you were threatened in a jealous rage and then told it was a sign of love for you!?" or "what might happen next time if you decided to trust your partner and not be jealous?" or "what would you feel like if you were humiliated or intimidated in this way?" and facilitate a group discussion about these questions. Macrae and Andrew (2000:35) note how it is part of the role of group facilitators in men's behaviour change groups to ask questions that invite the participants to investigate a range of possible constructions and interpretations of their situation. They relate the philosophy of Paulo Freire (1972) to the work of Pence and Paymar in Duluth (1993), as they both believed in initiating and facilitating change through asking people to think critically about relationships and justice by inviting them to tell their stories. For example: "who holds the power in this relationship and how, specifically, do they do that?" or "how is this power used to control others and what beliefs underpin the inequality and abuse?" or "what would happen if there was equality in this relationship and both parties had an fair say in important decisions?" The asking of such questions consistently of an abusive man, no matter with whom he comes into contact, or which welfare agency he has to attend, is well supported by an integrated collaborative response to family violence by agencies.

Feedback from partners

Partner contact as part of the ongoing assessment of the man, is fundamental to best practice and is used whenever possible and always in an independent and confidential manner (Laming, 2006; Wheeler, 2006). This however, is a problematic area of practice since the safety of the partner and children is paramount, and in about half the cases of men who attend the SHED, they are already separated. At the same time, there is clear evidence that when a man's account in assessment and group interventions, is tested against the account of his partner and he knows that his behaviour is under regular review, the chance of his taking responsibility and being committed to ongoing behaviour change increases (Laming, 2005b).

The men attending the SHED groups know that limited confidentiality applies in regard to their threatening of violence to family members, or to themselves. They also know that where appropriate, the facilitator will check with the man's partner about his progress,, as this is the only true indicator of change. It is also important to give the man's partner feedback about his participation or not, and about any risk indicators that he is displaying.

There is an increasing demand for evidence of the effectiveness of men's behaviour change programs in getting men to take responsibility and stop their abuse. 'The evaluations of programs for men and perpetrators need to be ongoing with identified performance indicators of effectiveness and methodologies that include feedback from partners and ex-partners' (Strategic Partners 2003:99). Such evaluations would give women an opportunity to make an informed decision about whether they and their

children are safe on the basis of what is indicated, which includes the limitations of any program.

A man who knows that his account will be compared to his partner's story is less likely to continue to engage in denial of his abuse, excusing it in some way, minimizing it or blaming his family for what he has done. This is especially so if the behaviour change group that he is part of, consistently holds him responsible, does not collude in his excusing or blaming, challenging him to be 'fair dinkum' and supporting him in facing the awfulness of what he has done and in staying committed to changing his behaviour towards his wife and children. Often a key moment for a man is when he realises that the fear, anxiety, pain and uncertainty that his partner and children feel as a result of his behaviour, is very like what he felt at times as a small child. This link is regularly re-inforced during the group sessions to enable the man to gain a deep sense of the ramifications of his behaviour. Since more than half the men attending SHED for their violent and abusive behaviour, have themselves been victims of physical or emotional abuse in childhood, the question of how to prevent further abuse is crucial (Laming 2005b).

Prevention

One of the underlying motivations for initiating the SHED Project was the recognition that it makes more sense to prevent this abuse, if possible, than to keep trying to pick up the pieces after family violence incidents. It is better to identify and stop the men who are at the top of the cliff pushing the women off, than to only rush around with ambulances picking up the dying and injured at the bottom. It seems to me that it is essential to do both the rescuing and the preventing of further risk, which includes educating the community about the ramifications of such behaviour, in order to change attitudes and social constructions of what it means to be a man, including being non-controlling and non-abusive.

As a community, we have to ensure that 'domestic terrorists' who scare and terrify their families, are challenged consistently and held responsible. By educating men to change their controlling and abusive behaviour that keeps their family in fear, victims are supported. Paradoxically, men are generally appalled at the realisation that their families are living in fear of them. Hence, the way a man is challenged, and the timing, is as crucial as the way a victim is supported and empowered, if he is to change his abusive and controlling behaviour. An abusive man needs both support in his efforts to change and strong and consistent confrontation about his bullying behaviour, in order to see that he can make different, respectful, choices about how he treats his family.

That men's violence against women is socially constructed and individually willed (Dankwort and Rausch 2000:937) means that men attending the men's behaviour change program should be given some basic tools to recognise the structured nature of men's power and control in our society, as well as learn ways to change their own individually chosen abusive behaviour. Behaviour change for individual men is problematic without the society as a whole shifting its social construction that engenders men's violence against women. No matter how much an individual man takes responsibility for his abuse in a program like SHED, he still lives in a

patriarchal culture that more often than not, condones and allows his abusive behaviour, sometimes overtly but mostly subtly.

However, one way that a man can be supported and challenged to change is by enabling him to tell his story and being ready to hear what his abuse means for him. Proposing the use of personal construct theory does not discount other ways of working with men, rather it is used to complement existing approaches, such as narrative therapy (Jenkins 1990), crisis intervention and individual counselling.

Ten years ago, there was very little published about the application of personal construct theory specifically in relation to men's violence and abuse. However, Houston (1998) focused on offenders in general and she sums up the applicability of personal construct theory (PCT) to working with violent men by making a number of points that are very relevant to our discussion: (i) PCT offers a framework for understanding the world as offenders see it; (ii) it enables the possibility of a better understanding of the reasons why offenders fail to learn from their past; (iii) PCT gives an insight into offenders' resistance to change; (iv) PCT offers a more collaborative means of working with people, in which some responsibility for the change process is taken by them; (v) it creates space for offenders to change; and (vi) it provides the tools for understanding better how offenders view and construct their world, and also provides a means for measuring changes in that construction (Houston 1998: 26–27).

Underlying principle of choice

Personal construct theory holds that everyone has to acknowledge their responsibility for their own behaviours and attitudes (Dalton and Dunnnett, 1992; Winter, 1992) and hence, that violence, like any behaviour, is a choice that is learned and can be unlearned. For someone to change, they must first acknowledge their behaviour and take responsibility for it. According to personal construct theory, 'all our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision or replacement' (Kelly, 1955/1991). This relates to the philosophical assumption of 'constructive alternativism' (Winter, 1992) which is very applicable to working with men who behave abusively or violently. It says to them and to the world at large that they do have a choice about the way they behave, that if they are abusive they are choosing that alternative out of a range of options, and that there is hope for change if they accept their 'response-ability'. This is usually a very new and confronting re-framing of their position as abusive men.

Response-ability

It is the applicability of constructive alternativism for working with men who have been abusive or violent that is most appealing. This is because it presents the possibility for change, links it with response-ability and then skills them up to be non-violent. Because the stakes are so high, so, potentially is the motivation. Constructive alternativism for the practitioner can mean that there are many different methods, tools and strategies, as well as perspectives, views and constructs to choose from. For the abusive man, it means that he can choose to construe his life and relationships differently and to live non-violently, even though this may be very difficult for him. He is able to make such a choice because he has been enabled to anticipate that the

results will be better for him if he does (e.g. not lose his family, not get a conviction nor go to gaol). The realisation of this choice available gives the man hope.

Most abusive men do not seem to entertain the possibility that there are other ways of interpreting a situation. Constructive alternativism confronts their traditional excuses of having no control over their behaviour because it is the result of anger, reaction to being 'wound up', being intoxicated or a range of other reasons.. At the same time, to state that there is a choice and that '... no one needs to be completely hemmed in by circumstances ...' (Kelly, 1955/1991) offers hope to both the perpetrator and to the victim that he can and will cease being violent. This latter as a source of hope for victims is also problematic if it leads them into further danger, an important factor to be considered by the group facilitator in terms of being circumspect about offering unrealistic hope of change (Frances, 1997).

Choosing a different track

Working with 'domestic terrorists' in the SHED Project involves educating them about both the abusive 'track' (Kelly 1955/1991: 694) they have been following as a result of lessons learnt growing up, and also about other alternative tracks they could choose instead of the abusive one. A boy growing up with abusive role models may never have had a chance to choose something different or even to know that an alternative track exists.

Hence, SHED is about providing men with a chance to experience such an alternative and it is also about empowering women to see that they have a right not to be left on an abusive track, looking over their shoulder anxiously to see whether the 'train' is approaching to run them over. The initial stage of assessment is crucial if the chance of change is not to be derailed. In a men's behaviour change program, it is the meanings of individual men that can lead to the possibility of their individual change.

Conclusion

Our experience in the SHED Project research regarding the application of personal construct theory and its tools is that it can make a contribution to challenging and preventing men's violence against women. This article has reflected on the place of a constructivist approach in an integrated response to family violence and has provided another piece of the jigsaw that represents challenging and preventing men's violence against women. The place of assessment, groupwork, questions and prevention are linked to a constructivist philosophy that is respectful of people, yet consistent in confronting abuse and bullying behaviour by men, against women and children.

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Different Worldviews: Aboriginal and Western cultural effects on delivery of VET courses

MARGARET BAIN AND JAN RICHARDSON

In the remote parts of northwest Australia, VET teachers deliver courses to culturally strong Aboriginal communities. The guiding principles of this culture can be respected yet can bewilder teachers' most enthusiastic intentions to impart the knowledge and skills that community people need to support their aspirations for employment and self-management. Why is this so, when cross-cultural knowledge, government funding to overcome Aboriginal disadvantage, and good will, is greater today than ever before? Research conducted in the 1970s by anthropologist and community development worker Margaret Bain introduces some concepts that mirror research into cultural types in the international arena of business by culturalist Fons Trompenaars (1993). Bain discovered a key difference between Aboriginal and Western conceptual systems and worldviews that affects the communication processes between them. This difference extends the understanding of culture and can be summarised in two statements:

- (1) Thinking linked directly to the real versus thinking that severs that link: the Aboriginal system retains a direct link to reality whereas the Western system breaks that link by introducing hypothetical situations. Cross-cultural communication can indeed be crossed when one person talks about what is actual and the other talks about what is possible.
- (2) Kin responsibilities versus role responsibilities: the Aboriginal system is inextricably bound to kin relationships whose rights and responsibilities cannot be denied, whereas the Western system recognises kin relationships but allows different behaviour towards kin when they are acting in the kinds of roles negotiated in the work place.

The significance of these findings is yet to be fully explored, but immediately they explain why there is often not the anticipated result that employability will follow training. For example, a VET course in mechanics is conducted in a remote area Aboriginal community. The cars used for training are old wrecks. The trainees are keen, smart and attentive, eventually attaining certification as qualified mechanics. The community is satisfied, as they want their own people to work in and manage their mechanical workshop. They celebrate their boys' graduation with singing and dancing, and tell the Council to terminate the white mechanic's contract.

The newly qualified mechanics turn up for work on Monday. One man's uncle brings in his car and tells his nephew to put in a new engine. The nephew has the technical skill to do that, but how, under his cultural rules, can he charge his uncle for the new engine and his labour? His relationship to, and responsibilities towards, his uncle are fundamental to his social world and cannot be changed. Equally, his uncle and his community have rights to his work. The Western mechanic, on the other hand, could work in his own community and repair his own uncle's car but charge him for the cost

of the engine. The Aboriginal mechanic cannot do that (see Statement 2, above). He must fix his uncle's car and not charge, so from day one of the community's management of the workshop, a financial loss is incurred. This situation quickly becomes non-profitable for the Council Mechanical Workshop. At the end of the week and numerous other jobs for which he cannot expect payment, the mechanic receives his wage. According to his cultural imperatives, that money must be shared with relatives. This situation quickly becomes problematic for the mechanic as he is not increasing his wealth parallel to the Western mechanic, and is facing stressful dilemmas between his cultural and professional obligations. He may choose to absent himself from work, and once again the community must employ a Westerner. He may drive off in his own car, which soon breaks down as he did not put oil in the motor - he was not trained on that vehicle (see Statement 1). In the community this situation can generate anger towards the VET teachers for not training the boys well enough, or at White people generally for withholding some secrets about running a business 'so that they can get the jobs'.

Bain saw that if the community and the individuals involved in such a scenario understand how this situation has come about, anger, job losses and disillusionment are not inevitable. Training is not the problem; rather there is a clash between two economic systems. Unless this is understood and managed, difficulties arise when the trainee attempts to work in his/her own community but in a Western role. The community can be helped to see that to run a Western business, workers must take up a Western role and the community must let them do so rather than running it according to kinship rights and obligations.

Such fundamental systemic differences have been noted in other cultures. Fons Trompenaars (1993) conducted research into how persons from different cultures do business with each other, and identified five fundamental differences, summarised based on contrasting value orientations governing relationships between people:

Dimension	versus	Dimension
<u>Universalism</u> (favours abstract rules)		<u>Particularism</u> (favours the obligations of relationships)
<u>Individualism</u> (focuses on the rights of the individual)		<u>Collectivism</u> (focuses on the rights of the group)
<u>Neutral</u> (favours detached and objective interactions)		<u>Emotional</u> (favours expression of appropriate feelings)
<u>Specific</u> (favours prescribing the relationship by a contract)		<u>Diffuse</u> (favours involving the whole person)
<u>Achievement</u> (favours according status by what an individual does, accomplishes)		<u>Ascription</u> (favours attributing status by what an individual is, by birth, kinship, gender or age)

This diversity affects business if the people involved are from different cultural types, but dilemmas can be managed. Trompenaars' cultural types reflect many of the distinctions between Aboriginal and Western cultures. For example, the position of mechanic/manager is a Western job where status is achieved through certification of a young man/woman who may have no status in a culture that ascribes status through age, ceremonial or other means.

Bain's and Trompenaars' theories point to a real clash of cultures occurring that requires Aboriginal people to forget their own trusted economic system, with its rights and obligations between kin. This is a profoundly confronting idea for it requires the worker and the community to work outside their cultural imperatives, but can help explain why the enthusiastic attempts of trainers to transfer skills and knowledge to traditionally-strong Aboriginal individuals so often do not lead to sustainable employment. The theories suggest that leaders and a substantial number of the community, including the trainees, need to understand that Western training for Western jobs is insufficient to ensure success in a Western type enterprise. In such a work setting, Western cultural processes will need to apply. Paradoxically, while offering Western training and jobs to communities in remote areas as a key to community survival, if taken too quickly and without due attention to the foreign cultural practices that are implicit in the training, it can contribute to community breakdown.

To take Bain's findings seriously is to ensure that all job-specific training in Aboriginal communities is accompanied by discussion about the cultural expectations and underpinnings of the Western economic system.

Then the people who should benefit from the transfer of Western skills and knowledge can do so, should they decide that the price is worth it in terms of their cultural adaptation. This process could be likened to occupational health and safety training; only it would be cultural health and safety. In the example given above, it would mean explaining that when one of their own gained the qualification to become the manager of the mechanical workshop, certain consequences would need to be considered before the community did in fact decide that it was worth it.

Conclusion

Westerners discuss issues in dialogue around theoretical possibilities, using ideas about future potential couched in sentences containing "if" ("if government money dries up" etc). For the Aboriginal person whose cultural ear does not hear the "if", this conversation goes nowhere. Western business requires that the community relate to the worker in their role rather than to them as kin, and this requirement is diametrically opposed to the Aboriginal system in which obligations to kin are non-negotiable. Discussions attempting to canvass theoretically possible options that are reframed by linking to the real (if possible!) may allow genuine Aboriginal participation and decision-making. VET course delivery practices that make explicit this implicit dimension of the training-employment plan, may offer a sound alternative to despair and anger over why Aboriginal people are qualified but unemployed in their communities.

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Book review**‘White Men are Liars’ – another look at Aboriginal-Western interactions****MARGARET S. BAIN (2006), Alice Springs: S.I.L., 43 pp. ISBN 0 86892 451 2**

Liars? Such a title is hardly designed to make ‘Whites’ read this booklet. However, those with sufficient curiosity to investigate further will find an explanation for the statement that is mind-blowing - one of those ‘ah ha’ experiences that change the way one understands the world. In this case ‘the world’ is ‘cross-cultural dealings that involve traditional Aboriginals, that is, people for whom an indigenous language is their first language and who may well live on a remote community’ (p. vii), and ‘Whites’. Bain draws on her linguistic and anthropological training to analyse the Aboriginal perception that White Men are liars. Her thesis is presented in a small, concise and inexpensive booklet that belies its academic authority and its significance to cross-cultural interactions in contemporary Australia.

The term ‘Westerners’ rather than ‘Whites’ is used throughout and becomes meaningful to the reader when Bain extends her analysis from language as linguistic exchange to language as a reflection of its cultural system. Although drawn from research in the 1960s and 1970s, the findings remain relevant to current attempts to ensure that Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians enjoy the same level of health and prosperity. In essence, the findings show that equality and rights are inaccessible if the differences in cultural systems are not addressed. Bain’s fitness for this task is exemplary: over 20 years’ working in remote area communities, practical competence in Pitjantjatjara, a Science degree, and a Master of Arts (Anthropology and Sociology) from Monash University.

The aim of the treatise is to ‘assist Aboriginals and Westerners to achieve greater mutual understanding and productive relationships’ (p. vii). Bain therefore writes for members of both cultures, and meticulously investigates the differences in terms of cultural systems. To explore the component parts of each system, she provides some examples of communication failure. These examples gain in significance as she works through her data and forms a theory that the ‘both Aboriginal people and Western people abstract, but what they abstract and to what degree they use abstraction are the points of difference’ (p. 3). Before the reader has time to disconnect from the argument by this use of the term ‘abstraction’, Bain captures interest by explaining that it shows up since Aboriginal abstractions ‘prefer to retain a link with the concretely real, while Western abstractions often break this link’ (p. 3). ‘Mother’ is a word that, while abstract because it is a kinship term and an intellectual notion, nevertheless describes a real person’s relationship to real others, and therefore has a tangible quality. Its extension by Westerners to the concept of ‘motherhood’ is, however, not tied to anyone in particular and is therefore at a different level of abstraction. This difference may seem trivial, but as the examples and analysis progress, become startlingly obvious and painfully serious.

Bain develops her argument cautiously and thoroughly, working through her research data by looking at ‘clues’. The first clue is cultural ways of thinking and the use of

language to convey that thinking. For instance, an abstract notion such as 'poverty' will be interpreted by a traditional Aboriginal person as talk about a specific person, a person known to them and maybe even themselves, which can be offensive. The belief that 'White Men are liars' can arise when Westerners put forward purely hypothetical ideas often introduced by 'if'. These are ideas only, and not linked directly to reality, as 'we might go to town tomorrow. If we go, we'll ...' (p. 9) but the Aboriginal will interpret this as 'when we go to town tomorrow....'. The absence of pure hypothesis affects also any discussion of alternatives and possibilities, which remain no more than ideas, merely possible, not real, until one is chosen. Such difference affects interactions where comprehension is vital, such as planning and discussions about funding.

The second clue is derived from examining world views, that is, the ideas undergirding notions of how the natural world works and of people's place within it. These are represented in the more familiar paintings, singing etc. Examination shows that again, Aboriginal and Western understandings differ substantially.

Bain's analysis of the third clue, social relationship, is original, sophisticated and deep. Traditional Aboriginal society is based on a non-negotiable kinship system where there are no strangers, whereas in Western society relationships can be with kin or can be negotiated with unknown persons. In addition, the Western social model relies heavily on the use of numerical calculation, but it is absent from the Aboriginal model. Both these features are pivotal to successful management of Western businesses. This may explain why many Aboriginal communities employ Westerners to run Councils and operate stores.

Recognising that social structure and practice, while differing in the two cultures, are complete in themselves, Bain uses the metaphor of gears to suggest how a cross-cultural operation can be successful. Accordingly each system is envisaged as a cog and the cogs are brought into association by the use of a gear, a mediating element that meshes with both, resulting in a resolution of the problem.

This booklet is too short to engage with international cross-cultural business analysts who have identified similar differences in world cultural systems but who have not included Australian Indigenous systems in their research. Bain's scholarly contribution should excite them. For me, however, the most electrifying insight is that White Men are not liars, but certain differences between Western and traditional Aboriginal cultures frequently skew understanding, causing serious communication breakdowns. While often interpreted as individuals' failures, they can now be understood more accurately. Educators, community and social workers and administrators – in fact, just about everybody – can learn how to work with these differences rather than ignoring them. Educationalists can incorporate system difference into courses rather than assuming that transferring knowledge and skills alone provides the keys to the kingdom and its riches. By acknowledging that the context of work and education in Australia is Western culture, inter-cultural gears can be developed to produce something concrete and thus bring reality to the notion of justice. White men don't have to be liars.

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Book review**Community Development: community-based alternatives in an age of globalisation (3rd edition)**

JIM IFE & FRANK TESORIERO (2006) *French's Forest*: Pearson Education Australia, 374 pp, \$62.95rrp, ISBN 0 7339 7724 3

This third edition confirms the status of the text as an Australian classic among community development books. In 2006 it is less an idealistic vision and more a practical response to the challenges of global sustainability than it ever was. I suspect it may resonate with even more people than earlier editions had, as recent events have left few people in doubt that our planet is besieged by problems of our own making. It deserves an audience among policymakers and politicians, as well as practitioners, teachers and students. For readers unfamiliar with the earlier editions, it takes as its premise that the limited life expectancy of the welfare state and the rising tide of environmental crisis impel us to act differently, and that change from below requires an integrated form of community development, informed by understanding the interconnectedness of the social, environmental, political, economic, cultural, and personal or spiritual domains that constitute our experience.

In noting that the welfare state exists only in the minority world (a term Tesoriero substitutes for Ife's earlier use of 'the north'), and is receding under the weight of globalisation, they challenge us to examine our social democratic assumptions of the continuing role of the state in resourcing programs and services as we know them, (however frequently they are restructured), and to look to alternative ways of meeting human need through community groundedness and ownership. They are critical of the current community-building approaches of government that impose agendas and objectives onto communities rather than allowing and facilitating community self-reliance and the development of their own solutions. Importantly, this edition also highlights and critiques the rise of individualism in the neoliberal climate and the contradictions it produces in debates about working in communities, collectively, non-competitively, and for the greater good.

The authors challenge modernist assumptions of progress in the form of economic growth, which defies the finite nature of resources and the capacity of the environment to support it, and they suggest that living sustainably requires us to develop capacities for living and working differently. Their thesis integrates social justice and human rights with ecological sustainability, and rolls out an ambitious intellectual and practical mapping of the principles and strategies that support their theoretical framework.

Jim Ife's partnership with Frank Tesoriero, who is responsible for the new edition, has produced a more coherent educational text than its predecessors, enhancing its value for teaching and for practice, as well as further illuminating its possibilities for policymakers. It is sixty pages longer. All chapters now have two sets of excellent questions at their conclusion: one set for discussion which is designed to test understanding of the content, and another set for reflection, well aimed towards readers examining their own responses to the material and making connections with

their own life or community experience. Each chapter also has a number of brief case studies, drawn from local and international community development practice, which illustrate the principles very well, make them achievable, and demonstrate the way in which practice that strives towards a more just and sustainable world is always contextualised, always partial, yet a meaningful and authentic step that all practitioners could take.

The one new chapter is a great addition. I had looked in previous editions in vain for a useful discussion of participation. Perhaps the most fundamental principle and most contested and challenging aspect of community development practice is how to engage communities or groups, how to maximise their participation, how to deal with (others'?) often victim-blaming accusations of apathy, how to value the local (knowledge, skills, culture, resources and processes) and expect local ownership, not tokenism. This chapter deals effectively with these issues in the broader context of participatory democracy and the significance of achieving change from below.

This edition also strengthens the analysis of human rights as an inalienable aspect of social justice and in permanent dialogue with it. They note that human rights debates are essentially "a discourse of the powerful about the powerless" (p. 59), but that the synergies between human rights and community development rest on the reciprocity between rights and obligations in community and the commitment of community development to raise the voices of the marginalised. They draw on Ife's earlier work on human rights (Ife 2004:5): 'Community development sees its goal as the establishment of human community, while human rights emphasises the goal of achieving a common humanity. The two terms are both linguistically and semantically similar, if not synonymous' (p. 62). Human rights provide the 'moral scaffolding' for community development, without which it operates in a moral vacuum (p. 62).

This book provides plenty of intellectual as well as moral scaffolding. Its great strength is its analysis, but its last three chapters concentrate on application of the principles to practice, on roles and skills and on some specific practice and contextual issues. The case studies however, as mentioned, provide examples throughout of how key aspects of the framework are manifest in practice, and therefore there is no sense of the book being divided artificially into theory and practice, nor of it offering a 'cookbook' approach of 'how to do it' methods, a style that all editions have distanced themselves from. It is a stimulating text; as the authors suggest, it assumes a level of understanding of basic social and political ideas, and it will challenge many taken for granted ideas about the nature of the state's social responsibility (an idea rapidly losing its taken for granted status under neo-liberalism), about the nature of professionalism, the future of human services, but it may also stir your enthusiastic support for a more fundamental identification with integrated community development. It may change our world – we may need it to.

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