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Innovative Teaching in Social Work with Diverse Populations: *Critical Reflections from South Australia*

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In social work education, the use of self sits alongside other professional hallmarks such as social justice and self-determination. With other processes, self-reflection and peer reviews of practice are crucial parts of critical reflexivity but also innovation. In this article, two social work educators from Flinders University in South Australia critically reflect on the design, delivery and review of a third year Bachelor level topic; SOAD3103 *Social Work with Diverse Populations*. We reflect on the opportunities but also challenges and constraints as we try to be 'innovative' social work educators, committed to social justice oriented praxis.



In social work education, the use of self sits alongside other professional hallmarks such as social justice and self-determination. With other processes, self-reflection and peer reviews of practice are crucial parts of critical reflexivity but also innovation. In this article, two social work educators from Flinders University in South Australia critically reflect on the design, delivery and review of a third year Bachelor level topic; SOAD3103 *Social Work with Diverse Populations*. We reflect on the opportunities but also challenges and constraints as we try to be 'innovative' social work educators, committed to social justice oriented praxis.

Our Approach to Innovation

Innovation may be defined as creative thinking productive of new ideas or new and better ways of doing something. Innovative people usually demonstrate the personal traits of resourcefulness, commitment, perseverance and insight. They have energy and vision. Others admire them and try to learn from them. *Who would not want to be innovative?*

References to innovation are now abundant, reminiscent of the use of the term 'sustainability' in Australia some years ago. From government agencies, to businesses, to the professional marketing of selves, there is an injunction to be innovative. *How* and *why* we are being innovative are usually left unproblematized. This is an issue for social workers because any uninspected popular discourses, especially those so actively promoted by corporations and business agencies emulating corporate life, have a nasty habit of justifying cuts to programs, services and benefits for our main client groups; mostly the impoverished, dispossessed and violated.

There is a not-so-innocent underside to innovation. In a corporate or business sense, innovative people are entrepreneurial, able to spot new markets as they 'turn ideas into money'. Limited resources are presented as a 'challenge for growth and renewal' so that 'more can be done with less'. Ethical dilemmas, if they exist, are quickly overcome. As individuals they seem to be (overly?) optimistic people with 'drive', and expect others around them to be likewise. So it is with these cautions in mind that we ask not how we might shine as 'innovative individuals' but how we might be collectively innovative for the purposes of promoting egalitarianism. As with all good (critical) social work practice, appreciating the wider context and recognizing the operations of privilege and oppression is a first step (Pease, 2009).

The Australian Context of Higher Education

Our consideration of teaching innovation takes place in the context of the higher education system in Australia, an area that has undergone significant changes. In the past 40 years,



universities in Australia have shifted from being conceptualized as contributors to a common public purpose and the social, cultural and economic good of the nation, with university education provided *free of charge* between 1974 and 1988. After this period, the goals of the university sector have been largely redefined in terms of a narrow economic perspective emphasizing profit and loss in the service of Australia's competitiveness in the emerging, lucrative, global knowledge economy. Market forces in Australian higher education have been extended and intensified, with the government injunction that, 'to survive and prosper in a rapidly changing world, universities must embrace the marketplace and become customer-focused business enterprises' (Currie, 1998, p. 15). Higher education in Australia is now a competitive and commercialized system underpinned by neoliberalism (Peck, 2010). The increased emphasis on privatization is apparent in the purposeful exposure of universities to market forces by increasing their dependence on private sources of funding (i.e. international fee-paying students, fee-paying domestic students and research partnerships with private corporations).

With the growth of social inequality in Australia there has been a rise in demand for social workers, enabling professional degrees in social work to fare reasonably well in this marketized context. In this context students are offered a distinct and recognized educational 'product' that qualifies them for entry to a specific profession (albeit a lower paid one). However, even though participation in Australian universities has widened since the 1970s, Indigenous students, rural students and poor students remain consistently under-represented across the board (Bradley et al 2008), including in social work programs (Flinders University, 2012). This is not a reflection of intellectual ability, but rather the operation of a range of factors that work to constrain access to and continuation in higher education.

Audit Culture and the Questions of 'Quality' and 'Innovation'

Our approach to innovative teaching sits in this broad educational context, the values of which are disseminated and expressed through higher education institutions. Indeed, our jumping off point for thinking about the teaching approach described in this article emanated from one of the quality control mechanisms that now characterize the managerial Australian university—the requirement to provide peer reviews of colleagues' teaching.

In principle, accountability and ongoing attempts to improve a product or process can be valuable. Our concerns rest with the ways these activities are linked to the audit culture of neoliberalism that has developed in liberal western democracies as part of the broader incursion



of neoliberalism (Apple, 2005). Auditing can be defined as "the use of business derived concepts of independent supervision to measure and evaluate performance by public agencies and public employees (Leys, 2003, p. 70) which frames many university activities and is associated with techniques of supervision and discipline that are, in turn, aligned with the economic imperatives of the 'enterprise university' (Marginson & Considine, 2000). There are serious implications for social work given it is a profession not designed to make a profit but to pursue a social justice agenda, and one that prizes fair processes not just products or outcomes.

Neoliberal accounts of innovation, with their emphasis on market driven efficiency often assume that the only activities that *count* are those that can be measured (Olssen & Peters, 2005). However, rather than simply reflecting existing activities, auditing regimes can actually *change* the activities that they seek to measure. Those subject to audit regimes may alter their behaviour according to the perceived requirements of the regime. Furthermore, work that is hard or impossible to capture in measurements risks being devalued, decentred, and even erased. It is important, therefore, to recognize auditing as a transformative process (Shore, 2008) that contributes to the production of different subjectivities. A case in point is student evaluation of teaching whereby students complete surveys of the topics and individual teachers they have encountered. These surveys generally produce decontextualized mean figures (from Likert scale scores) to denote satisfaction with quality. They are called Student Evaluation of Teaching scores, or SETs, at Flinders University and students use these tools regularly to evaluate our teaching.

Buchanan (2011), argues that student surveys universities tend to be stark and reductionist representations of educational quality that do not acknowledge the contexts or causes of their scores. Over-reliance on such tools rests on the assumption that students, as 'consumers' or 'clients', are the best arbiters of the quality of their educational experiences and can encourage the use of populist rather than pedagogically sound teaching practices. This is problematic for social work if student feedback is unhinged from our social justice mission, specifically the promotion of the needs of people socially disadvantaged.

While we are very committed to improving our teaching and the classroom experiences of students, we read the current injunction to be 'innovative' through the prism of neoliberal audit culture and approach the topic critically. The teaching described in this article therefore takes place in the context where we are very aware of the evaluation of their work by students, of the need to score well in such measures and to demonstrate innovation, in some way or another.



In the next section we take a closer look at the social work program at Flinders University in which we have navigated and responded to these demands.

The Flinders BSWSP Program, Students and Staff

Flinders University is a public university situated in South Australia that offers a large, on-campus Bachelor of Social Work and Social Planning (BSWSP) four year undergraduate degree. Student interest in this accredited program has been strong and enduring. In 2012 we had 358 BSWSP students enrolled either full or part time (across the four years), alongside another 400 postgraduate social work students.

The Discipline is located within the School of Social and Policy Studies and is funded by Commonwealth Government grants and tuition income from (mostly) international Master of Social Work (MSW) students. Flinders BSWSP students undertake many topics that help them make sense of the social, political, cultural and environmental contexts within which they are living and will be working post-graduation. Part of this involves them understanding the processes and constraints to change, as well as the latest trends in the development of service systems.

The AASW *Code of Ethics* (2010) is used in many topics. As per the Australian Association of Social Workers professional standards, priority is given to students developing a basic awareness of and skills in Indigenous and cross-cultural work, mental health and child protection (Flinders University, 2012).

The BSWSP aims to: (1) equip students to work in a wide range of areas related to the provision of social welfare services and planning; (2) provide significant work placements, including opportunities for placements overseas; (3) introduce students to ideas from a range of disciplines, including human rights and social development; and (4) produce independent thinkers who can apply their skills to a range of settings, including working effectively in teams. All BSWSP students are expected to recognize inequalities and practice in ways that reduce barriers and injustice. To achieve this, we try to educate students in the critical analysis of design, implementation and assessment of social welfare policies and services.

We have a mix of BSWSP students in terms of age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexuality, ability, and religion. However, the majority of students are (still) white, heterosexual, able-bodied women from Christian backgrounds. Data from 2011 used for the 2012 Australian Association of Social Work Accreditation (AASW) showed that 98% are non-Indigenous Australians, 80% are aged between 20-40years; 71% are from



either middle or upper class backgrounds; and 76% of our students are female (Flinders University, 2012). Foundation or bridging programs allowing a range of pathways into the BSWSP helps attract some ‘non-traditional’ students. Student support and retention efforts, which include support for students with disabilities, often help a more diverse range of students complete our programs. Nevertheless, to engage bigger cohorts of under-represented groups, especially those facing multiple levels of social disadvantage, more systematic material not just psychological supports are needed. Having a diverse range of staff can also help. While there is some diversity among our staff, most are also white, able-bodied, heterosexual middle-class women from Christian backgrounds. Politically, there is a mix of perspectives used to understand and teach social work.

Adult Learning Principles and Critical Reflexivity in Action

To varying degrees, our staff appreciate that our students are adults, with real life experiences and pre-existing skills from employment and caring responsibilities that may be imported into social work. Adult learning principles are infused through the content, structure and assessment of our topics. Thus, students are asked to reflect on themselves and their assumptions and to set learning goals reflective of their own interests and needs as well as those of the university and the profession.

Critical reflexivity is not just a topic of discussion in our teaching, but a way of being that we try to emulate in and outside the classroom (Pease, 2009). This means that we (educators) do not just seek praise or affirmation, or look for ways to screen out criticisms. If students speak out or complain we do not simply recoil in discomfort but try to consider the strength, merit and accuracy of the complaint. We reflect on insights that may be unsettling and may require adjustments, if not transformations, to work practices.

SOAD3103 Social Work with Diverse Populations

In their third year of study, BSWSP students study power, oppression and privilege in SOAD3103 *Social Work with Diverse Populations*. 80 students were enrolled in the topic in 2012. The topic is, “Guided by an egalitarian social justice agenda, and will explore how unearned entitlements and undeserved penalties are distributed across diverse populations. Insights drawn from these analyses will form the basis of the practice interventions promoted, and then assessed” (Fraser, 2012, p. 2).

The Topic Aims are to: (a) critically analyze the notion of diversity and diverse populations, especially as they are applied in education, health and welfare; (b) conceptualize



power, privilege and oppression in relation to social workers and the practices they employ with diverse populations; and (c) examine how specific groups identified as diverse, can see the world differently from others. The Learning Outcomes are to: (a) explain how power, privilege and oppression pattern the lives of diverse populations; (b) articulate why, and how, critical social work practices may be undertaken with diverse populations, and (c) explicate how 'different ways of knowing, doing and being' relate to oppressed groups, especially those most likely to use social work services.

The topic is taught from a *critical social work perspective*. This means taking a very different approach to the content, structure and processes of the course. For instance, students do not 'visit' different groups each week and try to become familiar with 'their customs' so as to develop 'cultural competency'. Criticisms are made about such an approach that can feel random, Othering and depoliticized (Hollinsworth, 2012). Crucially, students need to consider who gets constituted as 'different' and with what effects. By examining different groups and 'their' customs—and not inspecting how difference and diversity is deployed in the current social order—white, heterosexual, middle class male identities are re-centered (Pease, 2009).

The topic is using the prescribed text, *Critical Social Work, An introduction to theories and practices* by Allan, Pease and Briskman (2009). Prescribed readings from this text and additional journal articles and book chapters are identified each week. In a flat, open classroom equipped with good educational technology, smart furniture and air-conditioning, six interactive workshops are held every two weeks, for three hours per session, totalling 18 hours of tuition time. Assessment is conducted in three parts: (1) an 1800 word paper called 'Privilege and Oppression in My Own Life' (40% weighting); (2) a 2000 word 'Critical Social Work Intervention Paper' (50% weighting); and (3) 10% active participation.

Guiding questions lead all six 3 hour sessions. In Session 1, 'Privilege & Oppression' they are: (a) why study diversity and diverse populations in social work? (b) What has privilege and oppression got to do with social work? And (c) What is critical social work and how does it relate to diverse populations, and the concepts of privilege and oppression? In Session 2, 'Class & Race/Ethnicity', the guiding questions are: (a) what is classism and what effects does it produce in contemporary Australia, and current social work practices? (b) What relationship does racism have to classism? (c) how is racial privilege enacted in everyday ways? (d) What can social workers do to be anti-racist? For Session 3, 'Gender & Sexuality', the questions are: (a) how does gender privilege emerge in social work practice and why is it so pernicious?; (b) how is heterosexism expressed in health, welfare and education?; and (c) how might we work against unfair sexual privileges in specific fields of practice?



After the semester recess, Session 4, 'Age & Ability', asks students to reflect on the questions: (a) what are the conventional privileges associated with age?; (b) with respect to individuals, groups and communities, what are the risks of failing to stem ageism?; (c) how might we better recognize the unearned privileges associated with ableism?; and (d) how have social policies been used to better recognize disabled people's human rights? In Session 5, 'Religion & Spirituality' the questions are: (a) why is religion and/or spirituality important to lots of social workers and their clients? (b) Why does religious privilege matter? and (c) what is Islam phobia and how might we respond to it? In the final Session, 'Doing Egalitarian Social Work' the questions are: (a) why might it be said that much of social work involves dealing with the effects of oppression? (b) How do critical social work ideas help us to promote egalitarianism and resist the reproduction of oppressive practices? and (c) what steps might we take to embed new, preferred social work practices? And what might get in the way?

The highly sensitive and contested nature of the issues in *Social Work with Diverse Populations* covered necessitates debate and raises ethical dilemmas. It also calls for the creation of safe but challenging learning environments where robust debate is expected, valued, prepared for and responded to in respectful ways (Abrams & Gibson, 2007). Thus, the uni-directional, didactic delivery of topic content is largely avoided to facilitate a discussion-based exploration of the issues. Instead, varied, innovative and inclusive teaching materials and strategies are used and work to support different styles of learning. Limited lecture style content delivery provides scaffolding for the workshop-style classes and is enhanced by striking and relevant graphic images, music and video clips. Music and videos are used to 'warm up' a class and introduce its focus along with guiding questions to structure discussion. Small group discussions precede large group discussions to increase students' participation. Space is made for less vocal members of the class to speak. This is done through a mix of activities including group rounds, reading stories, the use of pairs or triads, larger forums where the facilitator asks individuals for their responses directly but allows them to pass if they do not wish to respond.

Color Wars: An Experiential Activity

The experiential activity took place in the second workshop held in Semester 1, 2012. The workshop was dedicated to a class-wide role-play involving 80 (third year) students and five (very experienced) social work educators: Heather Fraser, Joanne Baker, Mario Trinidad, Sue Maywald and Susan Strega, who was visiting from the University of Victoria, Canada.

The origins of our 'innovative' activity lie in Kristen Myers' (1998) well-used article 'Allegiances, coups and color wars', which details her development of a class exercise to engage students with issues of racism (see scenario and instructions to students below). A



particular attraction of the activity was its potential to extend the experience of racism; meaning that racialised students would not be required to be the representatives and spokespeople for the experience of racism (Hooks, 1994).

While we shared Myers' concerns with some students' reluctance to discuss issues of 'race', our own experience in contemporary Australia has also been silence about *class*. This has become a supposedly outmoded and discredited notion where neoliberalism has successfully 'sold' the idea that society has rid itself of obstacles to social and economic gains so that personal drive and meritocracy now determine the social order (Mullaly, 2007; Pease, 2009). We were therefore interested in the potential that 'Color Wars' had for the creation of a classroom experience that allowed for the embodied and collective experience of hierarchical social status (and the various axes of privilege and disadvantage on which this is determined) and the implications that stem from it. The hypothetical scenario includes details pertinent to the economic power and privilege associated with different racial positions (see activity instructions below).

In drawing explicitly on the published work of another educator, we challenge the notion that to be innovative is necessarily to make a claim for novelty, being 'first' or a 'pioneer'. Here, the innovation was to recognize the inherent potential of the Myers' approach and to adapt her exercise to make it meaningful and relevant to the contemporary Australian context. The resulting hypothetical, contemporary scenario of community consultation about an upcoming soccer World Cup was written to reflect the local Adelaide context and is presented below.

Role Play Scenario

Adelaide, South Australia has just been nominated as the place to host the World Cup (soccer) for 2013. Promoters boast that an additional 8 billion dollars will flow into the South Australian economy over the course of the event. The Advertiser keeps reporting on the sunny hospitality that Adelaidians are renowned for and has called for volunteers to help make the event 'the friendliest ever'.

Lots of road works and other public improvements are going on because of the forthcoming World Cup. Encouragement in the form of subsidies and public recognition is being given to the many local business in the city, inner North/West and Port Adelaide areas to refurbish and generally freshen up in readiness for the soccer star, their fans and the media entourages. Some talk back radio announcers have on air discussion with local businesses in the West and Port Adelaide neighborhoods who applaud the 'clean up'.

However, a trickle of reports question what will happen to the people in the inner West of the city (Thebarton, Ovingham etc.), especially those in cheaper rental houses now that there are such large incentives being given to owners to sell up their properties to make way for the Athletes' village. One journalist claimed that Housing SA has already stopped re-tenanting properties in the inner West and Port Adelaide. It seems they plan to sell their stock in these regions and use the proceeds to get out of



deficit. New offers are being made to others to relocate to the outer suburbs of Smithfield Plains and Hackam West where the stock is cheaper and more are being purchased.

In July 2011 members of the World Cup Organizing Committee (WCOC) were hand selected by the SA Premier. They include senior representatives from the following major sponsors: Coopers Ltd (beer etc.) Balfours (pies), Rio (coffee) and BHP (mining). There are a few community representatives too, inducted into the existing committee's formal process by the chair of the Public Works committee the Honorable Dr. Malcolm Braithwaite. He is helping to oversee a process that involves 'diverse cultural representation' but 'on time and in budget'. Other matters relating to security, public hygiene, transportation, crowd control, ticketing and media are part of the brief given to this committee.

The organizing committee needs to ensure that any social issues are handled with sensitivity; that no bad press emerges, particularly given 'the whole world has their eyes on us'. All seemed to be going well until the committee learned of the public forum about to take place in the Port Adelaide Town Hall, where all sorts of 'concerned community groups' were supposedly being represented.

After the students read the scenario we divided them into the following groups: Orange, Pink, Green, Blue and Purple and handed them their specific instructions. Again, these instructions were adapted and written to suit the present Australian and Adelaide context and its history of colonization and immigration.

Group Instructions: Orange

You are a member of the ORANGE group. After a long struggle to gain admittance, You have been granted the temporary right to reside in the country.

Although you understand it, you don't speak the BLUES' language very well.

You often perform the worst jobs for the least pay. Mostly you do so without recognition or complaint.

You have few legal, educational and healthcare rights. You are hesitant about using the legal system, as you fear being asked to leave the country. You fear returning to your country of origin because of the economic and/or political situation there.

You are often considered mysterious, if not scary by other groups in society. Many of your members have few material resources. However, sometimes your women are considered exotic and interesting, teaching other groups how to do things like belly dancing and cooking. Your restaurants are also much favored. And you have a history of producing very good soccer players, including some who have made it into the Australian soccer team.

In your community, however, the BLUES have a great deal of wealth, power and influence. They have had a long history of being the decision makers and leaders. Their way of doing things usually prevails, although many people across the different colored groups may just assume their ways and customs are 'usual', 'ordinary' and even 'obvious'.

Your task is to devise a group strategy to put to the Town Hall meeting representing the interests of people classified ORANGE. You want to ensure you are able to participate in any decisions made. Token representations and ornamental cultural practices used for opening ceremonies and the like are not your way forward. You want more power than this even though the ORANGE people have not played such a role in the past. You might want to think about the ways in which the BLUES rely on you.

BE CREATIVE!



Group instructions: Pink

You are a member of the PINK group. PINK people are well known for their 'primitive' art work and dancing, and strong links to the land.

Although many of you no longer live in these designated areas, you are still largely restricted to low-income, high crime areas. Very few PINKS are known for having big, or small, businesses. Some of the PINKS live in very remote places with little or no proper infrastructure. In these areas, access to education is a big issue along with violence and poor nutrition. Strangely enough though, the BLUES usually assume that only the remote PINKS are 'authentic'.

While legal protection exists for members of your group, it is often poorly enforced. At the same time, when members of your group are accused of a crime, they face higher conviction rates and longer jail sentences. Your group's high incidence of substance use is part of this.

Historically you were forced to live together in designated areas by the BLUES, needing pass outs given by the BLUES if you ever wanted to leave. People from other coloured groups (GREENS, PURPLES AND ORANGE) have not necessarily been kinder to you than the BLUES. When you try to tie your present situation to past experiences, you are often accused of being 'whingers' or 'victims'. Non-PINKS have often portrayed you as 'needy' and even pathetic.

In your community, however, the BLUES have a great deal of wealth, power and influence. They have had a long history of being the decision makers and leaders. Their way of doing things usually prevails, although many people across the different coloured groups may just assume their ways and customs are 'usual', 'ordinary' and even 'obvious'.

Although some PINK men are very good at football, soccer is not really your game. Your task is to devise a group strategy to put to the Town Hall meeting representing the interests of people classified PINK. You want to ensure you are able to participate in any decisions made. You may question everything, something or nothing. It will depend on your aims. However, token representations and ornamental cultural practices (used for opening ceremonies and the like) are not your way forward. You want more power than this even though the PINK people have not played such a role in the past. You might want to think about the ways in which the BLUES rely on you. BE CREATIVE!

Group Instructions: Green

You are a member of the GREEN group. Your group is known to be quite religious and have come from a country that's had a history of civil war. You were once forced through law to defer to the BLUES but over time you have gained power and respect. You even have a special day that many other coloured people celebrate with you.

You are known for your poetry, storytelling, jokes and for drinking. You are thought of as fun but not always taken seriously. You are often the object of jokes by other colours.

Mostly you live alongside the BLUES and PURPLES but in the past you have had some good relationships with some PINKS. You enjoy soccer a lot and have produced some excellent players.



In your community, however, the BLUES have a great deal of wealth, power and influence. They have had a long history of being the decision makers and leaders. Their way of doing things usually prevails, although many people across the different coloured groups may just assume their ways and customs are 'usual', 'ordinary' and even 'obvious'.

Your task is to devise a group strategy to put to the Town Hall meeting representing the interests of people classified GREEN. You want to ensure you are able to participate in any decisions made. You may question everything, something or nothing. It will depend on your aims. However, token representations and ornamental cultural practices (used for opening ceremonies and the like) are not your way forward. You want more power than this even though the GREENS have often not played such a role in the past. You might want to think about the ways in which the BLUES rely on you.

BE CREATIVE

Group Instructions: Blue

You are a member of the BLUES. You have historically made the rules, and the rules you make allow you to continue to make the rules.

BLUE people have often been presented as the most talented people. Young BLUE women are the ones most often chosen to represent the finest forms of beauty.

Although the BLUES are not all that well known for their cooking, you have the means to buy the delicious offerings provided quite cheaply by the other colours.

You can afford to buy in help of all kinds because members of your group own the major sources of capital/wealth in the society and occupy most government positions at all levels (elected and non-elected) and you are the most fully protected of all the colours. Remember the BLUES have the most wealth, power and influence out of all the colours. The BLUES have had a long history of being the decision makers and leaders in Australia and Adelaide in particular. Your way of doing things usually prevails. Often you enjoy the privilege of other colors accepting that your ways and customs are 'usual', 'ordinary' and even 'obvious' for everyone to follow. Others often envy your lifestyles or try to copy it. You like it like this and you want to keep it this way.

You absolutely love soccer! You pride yourselves on your players' abilities on the field. There are quite a few excellent BLUE women soccer players too.

Your task is to strategise around how you might keep your power. For example, might you find a way to work directly with the caterers to sponsor free catering of the Town Hall meeting, so as to gain access to the meeting with the hope of regaining control? Or do you have another strategy? How might you show the other colours that you are 'reasonable people' that they should respect, and continue to follow? If you are going to allow other colours to be part of the process, how can you do so without losing overall control?

BE CREATIVE!

Group Instructions: Purple

You are a member of the PURPLE group. Many PURPLE people came to Adelaide a few generations ago and were first known through small businesses, coffee making and fruit growing. Nowadays, there are lots of PURPLE builders, shop owners, restaurants and fashion houses.



PURPLE people are known to be good cooks and generous hosts. Many PURPLES are religious but not always practicing. Many live alongside the BLUES in the 'good areas'. Private schooling is a priority for all that can afford it. Grandmothers often live with families. PURPLES often speak their original languages at home. Of all the ball sports in Australia, male PURPLES are good at soccer and have produced many excellent players and coaches. In your community, however, the BLUES have a great deal of wealth, power and influence. They have had a long history of being the decision makers and leaders. Their way of doing things usually prevails, although many people across the different coloured groups may just assume their ways and customs are 'usual', 'ordinary' and even 'obvious'. Your task is to devise a group strategy to put to the Town Hall meeting representing the interests of people classified PURPLE. You want to ensure you are able to participate in any and all decisions made. You may question everything, something or nothing. It will depend on your aims. However, token representations and ornamental cultural practices (used for opening ceremonies and the like) are not your way forward. You want more power so you are equal to the BLUES. You might want to think about the ways in which the BLUES rely on you. BE CREATIVE!

All students had access to the descriptions of the other groups. In their individual groups, they discussed their interpretations of the scenario. If speaking to other colors, they did so in character, representing their group's interests. Their task was to discuss how they wanted to proceed with the Town Hall meeting, to develop a group strategy, including whether or not the group will have 'leaders' to speak on their behalf. This took over an hour. Following this, the groups came together to role-play the rather explosive town hall meeting. This took about half an hour. After this we spent another hour leading a class-wide debriefing of the experience and discussing its implications.

Such use of experiential activities is congruent with the teaching philosophy described in this article, which eschews the unidirectional delivery of information and is concerned with students meaningfully engaging with ideas about what makes for a just society. However, we knew that such an activity had the potential to induce hostility and alienation. If the activity backfired, the work of undoing the 'damage' could have been considerable. We recognized the risks associated with being experimental and not sticking to what is safe, known or popular. These risks are perhaps felt more keenly in the audit culture described earlier in this article, particularly its reliance on student evaluations of teaching to determine teaching quality.

Judging from the students' body language (strong eye contact, bodies leaning forward to hear each other) and overall excitement during the activity, through the subsequent



discussions and after class, the exercise seemed to be well received. We heard how the level of detail and direction provided to them through the group descriptions and scenario encouraged a high degree of engagement with the activity. However, at the beginning of the activity we also noticed a mix of wariness and excitement as information was distributed and directions given. This was similar to some of Myers' recollections of her classes at the start. The generally observed pattern was that each group began tentatively and then 'warmed up' as they got used to being 'in character' and communicating with others in their group.

For us the most memorable aspects of the day were witnessing the frustration grow for those situated in less powerful groups while the more powerful group members' confidence and willingness to speak out, rose. The most powerful Blue group members were very comfortable with the 'community consultation' process and the tokenism it offered other groups. After a prolonged period of passive behavior, the Pink (Indigenous) group responded to the arrogance of the Blue group members by attempting to enact a 'coup'. This involved moving to the front of the meeting and first turning their backs on those gathered before exhorting other (colored) groups to also shun the 'sham' consultation by walking out of the (class) room. The Pinks were not able to achieve this however, because the other colors were not prepared to take their side and leave the process, leaving them embarrassed and demoralized.

Overall, the activity seemed to provide students with the opportunity to simulate the experience of power and privilege associated with differently valued social groups. Their comments made through the debriefing process indicated that they had been able to feel the inducements and seductions of power and privilege, as well as the obstacles to challenging marginalizing and oppressive practices by other groups. Unlike more abstracted, less embodied activities, some strong emotions were felt, including positive feelings associated with collective strategizing. There were, however, also painful feelings of being dismissed, trivialized and in some instances, humiliated by the lower ranked groups. Some students, who enjoy white, middle class privileges in their own lives, recounted how surprised they were to feel such resentment at the poor treatment they received in the role-play. This provided 'traction' for some very dynamic discussions about privilege and oppression and encouraged some of the students not enjoying such privileges, to discuss their own experiences and observations of maltreatment in Australia. When the class ended, many students hung back



talking about what had just happened. And in subsequent class references were made, sometimes with humor, to the insights derived from that activity.

Conclusions

In this article we detailed a teaching innovation in the course SOAD3103 *Social Work with Diverse Populations*. By providing a rationale for the experiential activity held in the second session of the program, including background information on the Flinders University BSWSP and the broader contexts of higher education in Australia, we have indicated our interest in and commitment to teaching in enlivening ways that promote social egalitarianism. In so doing, our critical, reflective practice has led us to be wary of any uninspected endorsement of the notion of innovation.

As we have suggested, innovation per se is not necessarily problematic, and can be used to denote admirable creativity and fresh approaches to 'old' problems and practices. However, it is a term that has been drawn on heavily in the neoliberal context and now has associations with its sensibility. Under the guise of 'innovation' comes the imperative to be resourceful (make do with limited resources) and entrepreneurial (self-driven and self-reliant; oriented to commercial opportunity and personal gain). These are seductive ideas that can easily cut across collective approaches to social problems and concern for those who do not seem to fit the model of the neo-liberal citizen.

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