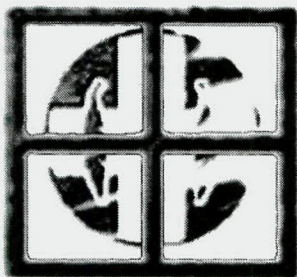


Radical, Skewed, Benign, and Calculated: Reflections on Teaching Diversity

This narrative shares my experiences teaching diversity in an undergraduate social work program. First, I begin by sharing my experience teaching diversity as a Ph.D. student. Second, I discuss my experience teaching social work with First Nations in Canada and tell how this experience influenced how I later taught diversity. Third, I attempt to define diversity and discuss how broad and elusive I have found this topic to be. Fourth, I share different instructor roles I assumed in order to get students to appreciate the importance of this course. In this narrative, "Indigenous" and "First Nations" Peoples are used interchangeably to refer to the aboriginal Nations of the United States. I avoid, as much as possible, the terms "Indian, American Indian, and Native American" because I consider them to be colonized identities. When they are used, it is only in the context of a direct quote.

by
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When I was a Ph.D. student in the School of Social Welfare at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1986-1992), I wanted the chance to experience teaching before I actually entered the classroom as a full-time faculty member. My preference was to teach a course that would help social workers critically examine the social, economic, and political issues affecting the past and present well-being of First Nations. My desire to teach this course was influenced by the interactions I had with many non-First Nations Peoples, including social workers, who often displayed a lack of knowledge about the most fundamental conditions and concerns of Indigenous Peoples. Many told me they had received little information about First Nations in their educational experiences. Several said they never met an Indigenous person. Some said they had grown up believing we all had problems with alcoholism, or were predominantly warrior-like peoples, or exceptionally gifted spiritual beings with mystical

powers. Their lack of knowledge and distorted images were not surprising to me because American society has rarely, if ever, understood or celebrated the cultures of Indigenous Peoples in the United States.

I did not get an opportunity to teach a First Nations social work course while I was a Ph.D. student. Instead, I was encouraged to be a Teaching Assistant (TA) for the undergraduate diversity course in the school. This course focused mainly on practice issues related to race and ethnicity. Gender, class, and sexual orientation were examined within the context of these two topics. I was not clear what teaching diversity was all about, so I asked some of the other Ph.D. students. Several said it was one of the more difficult to teach due to the tensions that arose from critically examining the issue of race with a predominantly white student class. At least a few said to be asked, or designated, to teach the course was more of a punishment than an honor since instructor evaluations were gener-

ally low and student resistance high. These comments concerned me, but I remained excited about the chance to teach. The fact that some course content was devoted to First Nations also made this opportunity appealing.

As the TA, my charge was to facilitate discussion sections to evaluate students' understanding of the course readings; revisit some of the more controversial topics such as racism, white privilege, and hate crimes; and, when possible, help students apply what they were learning to direct practice situations. I enjoyed the discussions and learned a lot about how a predominately white class responded to topics of diversity. Some students remained silent on issues of race, racism, discrimination, and prejudice, preferring "feel good" multiculturalism, which focused on less volatile aspects such as ethnic dances, clothing, foods, and beliefs. Others openly acknowledged the oppression that existed in society. Still others spent a great deal of time trying to convince me that they were not prejudiced or racist and that, in their eyes, they didn't see color because everyone is equal.

When I received my teaching evaluations at the end of this course, I was disappointed that students had rated some of my facilitation skills lower than the overall average TA scores. I had really enjoyed the course and thought that the discussion sections had been lively and that a great deal of learning had taken place. I had also believed students had appreci-

ated my personal experiences and the way that I tried to weave them into discussion. I thought that my efforts to approach diversity in an "honest" and "progressive" manner was also appreciated. To me, this meant that I should not sugarcoat the experiences of people of color, but rather give students true life accounts of the pain, trauma, and struggles that were an everyday occurrence for many. I believed that students would appreciate my honest line of inquiry and, like me, when they were exposed to the censored and ignored truths of the oppressed, they would become angry at the system that had perpetuated a prevarication of equality, colorblind society, and fairness. After all, I reasoned, isn't social work about social justice?

The written feedback from the students in this diversity course was limited and gave me only a slight clue of what their experience was like. While some agreed that the course and discussion sections were helpful and that they had learned something, others were clearly dissatisfied with the course. One student said that the class sections actually promoted racism because the subject was brought up. This student felt that if we didn't talk about it, it wouldn't be a problem. Our discussions made her/him feel uncomfortable and diminished her/his desire to hang out with students of color, for fear they might see her/him as a racist. Another student said I was not a good TA and that s/he had a hard time taking the class seriously because I had

shared, with the class, that I had grown up with prejudices that I still needed to be aware of. This student believed that I should be free of all prejudices if I was to teach this class. I was disappointed with my evaluations but hoped that this experience would help me be a better instructor. And, in the event that I should ever teach diversity again, I would have this experience to fall back on.

In 1992, I left the University of Wisconsin and accepted a faculty position in the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. Here I did not teach a class on diversity but taught a special course on social work with First Nations. I was very excited about this opportunity, but I soon found that this course was a very personal and difficult endeavor. Many of the readings, videos, and guest speakers I used often recounted story after story of the struggles, pain, trauma, and racism experienced by Indigenous Peoples. Much of it was very familiar to me. For example, when we watched videos of how "Indian" residential schools destroyed the cultures of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, I recalled, in very painful ways, how "Indian" boarding schools in the United States had done the same to our people. When a guest speaker came to our class and talked of her tribe's struggle to protect their lands from the provincial government and their children from social workers, my mind immediately flashed to all those Indigenous Peoples in the U.S. who were



struggling to do the same. When we read articles that chronicled the high rate of death among First Nations due to alcoholism, suicide, chronic poverty and disease, I immediately reflected on how Indigenous People in my own community died from identical causes.

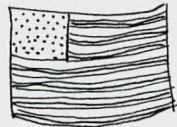
Repeated exposures to this heartbreaking information was very traumatic. After class, I often had to retreat from this emotional overload of information because it created a deep sense of loss, anger, grief, and resentment in me. To deal with it, I would sometimes talk to other First Nations Peoples to help me process what I had heard or read. Other times I would sit by myself in my office and burn sage or sweetgrass and smudge myself to get rid of the emotional heaviness I felt. When I felt really bad, I would go into a sweatlodge where I could grieve, pray, and find courage to continue helping my students to understand the struggles of First Nations. In the end, teaching this course renewed my commitment to continue to try to introduce material about First Nations into the classroom.

I left the University of British Columbia in 1994 and joined the faculty of the School of Social Welfare at the University of Kansas that same year. I started my new position teaching practice in the undergraduate Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program and shortly after was asked if I was interested in teaching the school's diversity course. I quickly accepted because I believed I understood the subject and could offer a

unique perspective on diversity since I was the only First Nations professor in the school. I also thought that this course would offer me an excellent opportunity to introduce social work students to some content on First Nations.

Diversity Defined

In the past, social workers defined diversity in terms of race and ethnicity. However, the concept of diversity has broadened (Miley, O'Melia, & DuBois, 1998). Lum (1996) states that "human diversity is an inclusive term that encompasses groups distinguished by race, ethnicity,



culture, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical or mental ability, age, and national origin" (p. 3). Rounds, Weil, and Bishop (1994) add that "variations within groups are often great, depending upon the effects of socioeconomic status, education, family history, identification with ethnic group, and time since and cause of immigration" (p. 7). The 1992 Curriculum Policy Statement of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) says social work practitioners must use culturally appropriate assessment and intervention skills when working with diverse populations (Lum, 1996). Finally, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics states that "social workers should un-

derstand culture and its function in society, have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services, and obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression" (NASW, 1996, p. 9).

The above definitions show that diversity is a complicated and extensive area of study and, consequently, is difficult content to teach. One of the most challenging aspects of teaching diversity is trying to cover the immense number of topics in one semester. As I have taught this course I have wondered, as I still do now, how it is possible to give sufficient attention and detail to the numerous dimensions of diversity and what is sufficient attention. I have wondered how to adequately cover racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, classism, and disableism in the 15 weeks that I am allotted. When I factor in 15-minute breaks I allow students in each three-hour class period, the total time students spend in this course is equivalent to about 40 actual in-class hours, or a two-week work period. To me this seems like a ridiculously brief time that students spend learning about diversity, especially if any meaningful learning and personal growth is to take place.

I have also wondered whether some dimensions of diversity should deserve more attention than others. For instance, is racism more important to study than heterosexism, and is sexism more important than ageism? Also, what constitutes

an effective course and instructor, and should a lot of time be devoted to helping students unlearn false myths and stereotypes or should we expect these will vanish by the end of the course? How much of a personal and political agenda should an instructor bring to the course and how does one compose a successful or acceptable resolution to in-class student conflicts based upon ideological foundations? For example, there have been times in class when students with certain Christian beliefs declare that gay and lesbian lifestyles are immoral and accuse me of violating their beliefs when I invite gay and lesbian speakers into class.



My Approaches to Teaching Diversity

Teaching diversity has been a rewarding and very challenging experience for me, and I have found myself trying on different instructor roles in order to get students to appreciate the importance of this course. Below are four of the roles I have assumed. None is mutually exclusive of the others, and I am not suggesting one is better or more effective.



The *Radical*: My Private Revolution

The instructor role I used most frequently when I taught diversity was The *Radical*. In this role, I found myself

continually pushing students to move away from the "comfortable fictions" (Deloria, 1992) that all peoples in the United States enjoy equal opportunities and are treated fairly, regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, or disability. To this end, I told students they must practice "fierce critical interrogation" (Hooks, 1992) of what they had previously learned or not learned about fairness, democracy, and freedom in the United States. Like Professor Hooks, I believed that fierce critical interrogation "is sometimes the only practice that can pierce the wall of denial" (p. 5).

I was on a mission to ensure that my students did not become passive receptacles of the mass societal amnesia and denial that exists among the American public with respect to its unfair treatment of diverse peoples. I continually shared examples of how majority America had exploited, deceived, and pillaged diverse peoples. I told how hate crimes, colonialism, racism, and oppression continue to exist and to threaten diversity. I told my students the political platitudes, "the land of the free, home of the brave," and "America is the greatest democracy in the world," spoken by so many U.S. presidents, had come at great cost to many of us. I told students economic, social, and cultural privilege for select groups existed at the expense of others and that social workers had to reverse this.

I did not purposely set

out to be The *Radical* diversity instructor. My personal experiences with racism, oppression, and colonialism, along with the hate crimes I saw directed at people of color, women, gays and lesbians, and poor helped me justify this approach. As a survivor of European American colonialism and racism, I took a strong and vigorous anticolonial stance when talking to students as if they were 100% behind my private revolution to disrupt and reconstruct the racist, homophobic, sexist, and classist colonial society called America. I tried to incite, within them, a zeal for justice and the courage to fight oppression by speaking passionately, willingly, and honestly about the everyday pain and trauma of oppressed peoples. I convinced myself that they would become angry at the system that had lied to them and become highly motivated to confront the widespread racism and oppression that existed in American society.

The *Radical* instructor role was important for many reasons. First, many students in my classes did not experience the extreme oppression of the people they might someday work with. Most were not students of color or gay or lesbian or did not grow up in extreme poverty. Thus, I believed they did not fully comprehend the personal pain of these oppressive circumstances. Thinking this, I wanted to make them exceedingly aware of the reality and pain of these diverse forms of oppression. I also wanted them to understand that the so-called "pathologies" of diverse

clients were perhaps related to individual problems, but many were often clearly caused and maintained by the political imperialism of a few.

Second, the educational experiences most had before entering my class rarely included the study of hate crimes, oppression, racism, or colonialism. In most of their experiences, diversity and its unique issues and dimensions either were not addressed or were done so in a very narrow and superficial manner. Indeed, Freire (1993) asserts that education uses a "banking approach" where students are passive receptacles (listening objects) and the teacher or school (narrating subjects) deposits selective knowledge which is often detached from reality. Using his ideas, I believed that the domination of student thinking and lack of critical discourse in education kept students submerged in a situation where awareness and response to the oppression of diverse peoples is practically impossible. My charge was to help students confront and disrupt this reality.

Third, I believed that unless students were given a radical social work perspective, they would be domesticated by the social service agencies that they would work for in the future, especially agencies that did not practice progressive services and policies protecting and honoring diverse peoples. Indeed, over the past four years some students who have graduated have called me and remarked how difficult it is to employ a radical approach in their current

positions. In their frustration, some have changed employment to find a job where they felt they could use a more progressive approach and where the diversity of the client was a priority.

The radical style of teaching was exciting and liberating to me and created an intense climate in the classroom. Students either loved it or hated it. While several enjoyed the intense debates that arose from discussing such volatile issues as hate crimes, racism, and white privilege, others broke rank by shutting down and not talking or participating. In one particular class, several verbal disagreements broke out between some of the white students and some of the students of color because a small and very vocal group of white students refused to believe that the personal racism experienced by students of color in our very liberal town was true. The more that the students of color argued their point, the more the white students contradicted them. This went on for a good part of the semester. With such intensity in class, students often left angry and distressed. As I entered each class, I regularly found myself trying to help students process strong feelings, reactions, and disagreements from the previous week.

At the end of the course, student course evaluations were mixed. One student stated, "this was a great course if you are interested in liberation and revolution. My interest is in working with disadvantaged populations." Another student wrote

that "at times, I felt discriminated against in this class because I was white. More validity was given to minority students statements." Another student said, "I have a very conservative viewpoint that seemed to be wrong. I was involved in another diversity class where the panels were open to *any* questions." Another student stated that "I basically didn't like the course...the course sparked animosity between students." Finally, one student who openly acknowledged the resistance by her/his classmates wrote, "keep it up despite the resistance. The resistance shows just how... important it is for you to continue!"



Skewed-Ethno Diversity Instructor

Being a First Nations person has made teaching diversity a challenge for me. As I have taught this course, I have had a tendency to "over-focus" on Indigenous Peoples and their circumstances. This tendency has generally brought more complaints than praise from students.

However, I did not purposely set out to be unbalanced in my presentation, nor did I realize that I was. One explanation I can offer for this tendency is that I feel most competent and comfortable when skewing content toward what I know best: First Nations. I imagine that in this respect I am not unlike other social work diversity instructors. There are some other justifications I have for this approach

as well.

First, First Nations are among the smallest and least visible groups of color and, thus, easy to ignore. I have felt that extra focus on our peoples helps keep us on a par with better known diverse groups. Second, First Nations have had a long history of being neglected or misrepresented in the literature, media, and society and my extra emphasis was one way of correcting this reality. Third, my previous teaching experiences remind me how little social workers know about First Nations and how threatening past and present social, economic, and political issues are to Indigenous Peoples. Fourth, in some circumstances many of my students' future clients will be Native. Finally, a general loyalty to my group has played a big role in my skewed approach. Since I feel a strong sense of pride being Indigenous, I have a desire to share unique aspects of our cultures. This sharing helps me feel as if our voices are being heard.

As the *Skewed-Ethno* Diversity instructor, my extra focus on First Nations was my attempt to get students to understand and feel the unique pain, trauma, anger, and resentment that exists within our cultures. I wanted students to walk around in our skin so they could realize why so many of our communities are affected by numerous social problems. I also wanted them to know about our strengths and resilience and that we take great pride in the survival of our peoples. I wanted students to know that European-American colonialism is

alive and well in our communities and is responsible for much of our distress and struggles. I wanted students to know that we are uniquely different from other diverse groups because we are sovereign nations, not racial classifications. I wanted students to know that our lands and ways of life are still under threat from American society. Most of all, I wanted students to know that I didn't think we needed social workers coming into our territories to save us through copious amounts of psychotherapy or by feeling sorry for us. But, what we need is social workers willing to stand with us and help us maintain our sovereignty and nationhood.

While I felt really good about being able to provide social work students with extra content on First Nations, this approach came at a cost. For instance, one student wrote on her/his course evaluation that the instructor "is a super person, but is rigid and fixated on the Native American culture. There was nothing diverse about this class. With the exception of four panels of non-native speakers and several readings of other groups, there was no diversity presented." Another student responding to my extra emphasis on First Nations wrote "instead of having good knowledge of different areas of diversity—I feel I'm an expert in one but know little if anything about others." Another student said this class had "way too much focus on Native population. Not what the class was intended to

be about."

One semester I focused my diversity course entirely on the diversity within Indigenous Peoples. The course was listed in the timetable of classes as a First Nations diversity course, so students who enrolled understood the direction of the class. My justification for this course was, "hey there are over 550 different Indigenous Nations, and not only is each different from the others, but there is also a lot of diversity within when one considers gender, sexual identity, class, and age." In this course, students were introduced to readings, videos, panels, and field trips that showed the diversity and oppression within First Nations and social work practice models that could be used when working with these groups.

The reaction of most white students to this course was one of enlightenment and uneasiness. Some felt enlightened because they had not ever had such in-depth coverage on one group. Others felt uneasy because they were not exposed to other diversity. One student citing her/his enlightenment remarked on her/his final evaluation, "you have opened my eyes to the oppression that First Nations Peoples have faced, I never knew such things happened. Thank you." Another student said "this course was very interesting and I now feel that I am able to work with Native American clients." Another student remarked "I learned so much in this class and was so



happy the diversity was in the culture of Native Peoples as they are my passion for my work." Another, noting my passion and radicalism in teaching this course, commented that the "instructor teaches this course like an act of revenge." Finally one student stated, "I learned more than I could ever imagine about the Native people, and their heritage and diversity."

On the uneasy side one student said "Although I enjoyed this class, for social work, I would like a more well rounded view of diversity looking at other minorities as well." Another student stated that the instructor "kept saying that we should ideally have a class to study each minority group and that is why he was only teaching Native issues, but we are not in an ideal world and we need to learn about ALL peoples!!!!!!" Finally, one student said, "I learned a great deal about native Americans but since this is a Diversity course I would have liked to learn more about other cultures as well."



Benign-Content Deliverer

I took on the role of *Benign-Content Deliverer* as a response to the criticism and backlash I received from students in a diversity class who disliked too much content on First Nations and the radical approach in the classroom. While both teaching roles were alternately supported or rejected by various students, in the end my teaching evaluation scores reflected

that I was below the teaching mean of other diversity instructors in the school. Being an untenured professor, I had a certain fear of poor teaching evaluations even though I felt I was being effective.

In one class (not the class where I focused solely on First Nations diversity) I employed both The *Radical* and *Skewed-Ethno* diversity teaching roles, which caused students to attempt a *coup d'état* of the class. Several, but not all, went to the Director of the BSW program to complain about the course. Their charge, although they never told me, was that the class was out of control because all students did was argue or complain, and I was not stopping it. They also said that there was too much content on First Nations and that I was not following the course syllabus. They were right on all counts. I did not stop the intense discussions (debates) because I wanted students to hear one another and understand where each was coming from. I especially wanted those students who had rarely faced discrimination to not devalue or doubt the experience of those students who felt it. However, I also wanted those who felt oppressed to hear the lack of understanding that was being expressed by those who infrequently felt oppressed. I thought if both could hear each other, then we could understand how the privileged and oppressed felt.

There was a considerable amount of content on First Nations in this particular class because there were several First

Nations students who shared a lot of personal experiences and asked many questions. Normally I do not have many First Nations students in my class, and when this class produced more First Nations students than usual, I was excited and did lean toward helping them validate their experiences and feelings. I didn't follow the syllabus as closely as I would have liked to because I thought the debates provided opportunities to help student see how volatile and messy diversity can be. I thought that digging our way through these messy issues was important to the process of understanding and appreciating diversity.

The BSW program director sent the students back to me to resolve the concerns they had. I asked to hear their concerns and tried to address them. However, we were at the midterm of the semester and for several students, remedying the class was not possible. One student's final evaluation of the class sums up what many felt: "I appreciated the instructors attempts to change the structure of the class and his forthright attempts to address our concerns. However, it was a little too late." Another student stated "the many arguments between students got us off track and behind and made the class seem very unstructured." Finally, one student said "I felt that class time needed to be more structured—too many 'off-the-subject' comments. I felt like this class was a time where students shared their personal experiences and that was it."

Overwhelmed by the student responses, I decided to

try out the *Benign-Content Deliverer* role. In this role, I made deliberate attempts to not feel emotional about hate crimes, racism, colonialism, broken treaties, or slavery for fear of upsetting students. I also made sure that I did not talk about First Nations. And, when students shared personal experiences, I limited their contribution and tried to avoid becoming too emotionally engaged in what they said. In other words, I attempted to strictly follow what was set out in the syllabus.

However, I maintained this role only for the final half of the semester in which students attempted the coup d'état. I felt that this role was untrue to my activist nature and demonstrated low commitment to diversity. I didn't like the detached, objective stance I felt I was forced to take. It felt emotionally and intellectually flat and could not instill enthusiasm and commitment to diversity within the students. Growing up experiencing the personal pain of discrimination, racism, and colonialism, and knowing that it continues to exist in the lives of many diverse peoples, I felt a responsibility to not back away from the messy and unglamorous aspects of diversity.



Calculating Activist

The most recent instructor role that I have assumed while teaching diversity is the *Calculating Activist*. It is a role reflecting the successes and failures of the *Radical, Skewed-Eth-*

no, and *Benign-Content Deliverer* instructor roles. In this role, I maintain an activist/radicalist stance when I teach diversity. Yet, I also try to calculate when and how this role is most effective and how it can help students radicalize their thinking and actions and nourish their critical thinking and reflection with respect to diversity. For example, I am still trying to get students to be passionate about diversity and I want them to understand that it often takes revolutionary thinking and actions to do this. In addition, I want students to develop excellent critical thinking and reflection capabilities that will help them demand more in-depth studies of diverse peoples and the critical issues affecting their well-being.

As the *Calculating Activist*, I am not about to give up my sense of activism in the classroom because I am still concerned about the well-being of many diverse peoples. I feel the need to continue to bring tough issues such as hate crimes, racism, and class privilege to the forefront of my teaching and classroom discussion because I believe that such issues pose grave threats to diversity. While I feel that understanding the social and material cultures of diverse peoples is warranted, I think it is secondary to the tough issues which threaten diversity. I continue to maintain this thinking because I am concerned about the different forms of violence and oppression that continue to be directed at diverse peoples. For instance, I am concerned about the continued

physical violence directed at African Americans, women, and gay and lesbian peoples, and I feel that social workers must undertake progressive, thoughtful, and swift actions against such violence. I am concerned about the bureaucratic and political violence the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), various State governments, and the U.S. Congress continue to direct at Indigenous Peoples in the United States. I believe that social workers must be fully educated about such violence and must rise up against it in an intelligent, yet forceful, manner. I am concerned about the disproportionately large amount of police brutality against immigrants and people of color in this country and the disproportionately large number of people of color who are falsely arrested and remain incarcerated. I am also concerned that 15 million children go hungry each day in this country and that this country continues to exploit the labor of Indigenous Peoples outside the U.S. through free trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Finally, I am concerned by this country's judicial attacks upon affirmative action and its movements toward English-only laws.

As the *Calculating Activist* diversity instructor, I am compelled to continue to try to radicalize students. However, I am now attempting to do so in a manner that is not so overwhelming, skewed, or didactic. For instance, I continue to move students away from the "comfortable fictions" that all peoples in the United States are treated

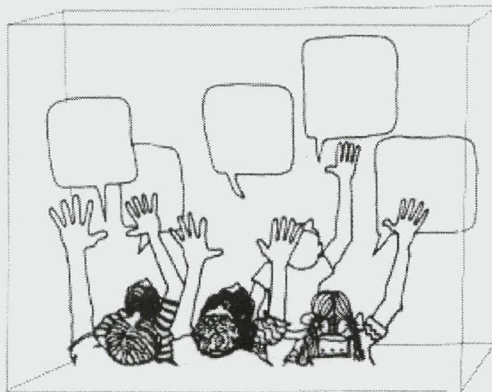
equally regardless of who they are. Instead of the more radical approach that pushes my message that "this is the way things are," I now often preface my statements with something a bit more palatable. One of the things I most often say is, "I'd like to do a little mind bending about fairness and equality in the United States with respect to diverse peoples and ask that you remain open to what I am saying." Or I might declare, "What I am going to say about fairness and equality with respect to diverse peoples in the United States is my opinion and the way I see the world." In contrast, as the *Radical* instructor I would have told my students, "this is how it is," and as the *Skewed-Ethno* diversity instructor I would have said, "this is how you should feel and what you should be experiencing."

As the *Calculating Activist*, I am also practicing more restraint when I am tempted to emphasize the experiences of First Nations. More often now, I will share only brief examples of First Nations cultures and/or experiences. Another thing I am doing is allowing more time for students to examine their own diversity and sense of culture. When I first started teaching diversity I had no idea that many white students felt they had no culture comparable to that of people of color. Only after reading their journals and papers did this become apparent to me.

Another thing I have found to be useful is doing exercises that help students ex-

press their opinions about controversial diversity topics without having to identify themselves or to participate in intense debates. I still think highly charged debates are necessary. However, it seems that many students in my classes cannot benefit from conflicts that arise from diversity. To help students engage in difficult diversity issues, I've created an exercise called "anonymous brilliance" which I use in the following manner:

I ask students to write a short micro statement (half a



page) of their thoughts on a difficult issue (what it means to them personally and what it means to social work). I ask them to make sure that they write with a pen on a paper that does not identify who they are. After giving them several minutes to complete their statements, I put them in a box and mix them up. Next, I ask students to select a paper and read it aloud to the rest of the class. As the students each read their statement, I find something very courageous, important, and "brilliant" about what was writ-

ten. Finally, the entire class gets a chance to re-discuss what was presented and how it now relates to comfortable fictions, honoring diversity, and social justice.

The *Calculating Activist* is a role that has, so far, worked better for me than the other roles when I review my instructor and course evaluations. My most recent course and instructor ratings for my diversity class (Spring 1998) put me well above the mean of the other combined diversity courses in the school. Perhaps, though, these higher ratings also reflect my time teaching this course and the extra organization I've put into it. Most comments from students are positive regarding this teaching style and course content. For instance, one student wrote, "I enjoyed the diversity panels, the anonymous brilliance and the professor's insight." Another student wrote, "the aspects of the course I enjoyed most was anonymous brilliance and

the instructor's thoughts and terminology." Another student stated the instructor "encouraged us to show our diversity. The course functioned in a manner that allowed, encouraged, and forced us to recognize the diversity in the human race. Every group and culture was shown in its true individual aspect, focusing on the total picture and not any one item. I learned more about people in this class than I knew before this class." Finally, one student remarked, "I truly appreciated the professor's sensitivity and

knowledge of diversity. He allowed me to not only look more critically at my actions and those of society, but he also allowed me to take charge of my own education. This class and the instructor have been invaluable to not only my personal education but my social work practice as well."

Endings: Skewed Reflections of Radical, Benign, and Calculating Activism

I think I've learned a lot about myself and students from teaching diversity. Perhaps the biggest learning is how my personal ideology (radical/activist) and cultural self (First Nations) works and does not work in the classroom. As the *Radical* instructor I learned few students appreciated this approach because it sparked intense discussion and forceful examinations of the comfortable fictions that students had grown up with. I learned I needed to get out my message of what I perceived the world looks like for oppressed peoples, and I also learned that I was in a much different ideological world than my students.

As the *Skewed-Ethno* diversity instructor, I learned I have a great need to share with future social workers the circumstances and concerns of First Nations peoples. I feel like if I don't, who will? I've learned that while students appreciate an in-depth course on social

work with First Nations, many will still feel uneasy if they don't get content on other diverse populations. I also learned that if I liberally sprinkle First Nations content in a "regular" diversity course, accusations of "too-much" content can be immense and the backlash fierce. As the *Benign-Content* Deliverer, I learned I could not fulfill this role for long. It felt too passive, detached, and uncommitted to diversity. Finally, as the *Calculating Activist*, I have learned it is possible to maintain a radical ideology in the classroom. However, I have also learned that I had to tone down what I said, felt, and expected of students. I found using different exercises to engage students in the troublesome aspects of diversity is important.

I am not sure how each of these roles have really helped students appreciate diversity. As it was when I was a TA teaching diversity, all I have to go on are the final comments students make about me and the course. I am not satisfied with how we teach diversity in the social work profession; it still seems as if we do a cultural drive-by and let it go at that, convinced we have corrected a great wrong or filled a great void. I strongly advocate for longer courses to help students achieve a greater understanding of diversity. Until we are able to devote more time to this critical subject, I will continue to be a calculating activist for diversity. □

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