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## **Informed Outrage: Tackling Shame and Stigma in Poverty Education in Social Work**

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### **Abstract**

The experience of poverty as shameful is felt by some people living in poverty due to the internalisation of stigmatising neoliberal discourses which construe poverty as the consequence of individual failings of effort, competence or morality. A critical response requires an analysis of poverty as primarily caused by structural factors, as without this critical perspective, social workers can become complicit with a responsabilisation agenda based on stigma. Many social work students were raised in the neoliberal era where the post-war consensus on welfare had diminished and thus may be blind to the assumptions embedded in current discourse about people in poverty. Increasing inequalities in many western countries may mean infrequent contact between people from different class backgrounds and exposure to the realities of poverty. To address the potential risk of social workers reinforcing poverty stigma we propose teaching which explicitly addresses the discrepancies between a structural analysis of poverty and current individualistic discourses that produce stigma. Suggested methods include using complex case studies, and bringing service user voices into the classroom, and the use of the arts, alongside exploring how moral panics are created by regimes of shame, surveillance and control which underpin welfare policy.

Keywords: social work education; poverty; stigma; shame; discourses; social justice

## **Social Work and Social Work Education in Neoliberal Welfare Contexts**

The political agenda in many western countries has shifted the public discourse of welfare from one grounded in the social contract and the ideals of the universal welfare state that emerged after the second world war. The doctrine of neoliberalism has intensified a new discourse of welfare which is individualised, surveillant and punitive and one where stigma and blame coalesce to internalise shame in those experiencing poverty (Jo 2013). Marston and McDonald (2012) argue that one outcome of this changing tide is the de-politicisation of social problems like unemployment and poverty, in both wider society as well as the employing agencies of social workers (1023). While there are various understandings of what neoliberalism is (Gray et al, 2015) a useful definition is provided by Harvey (2005) who argues that it ‘is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets, and free trade’ (2). As a framework for social policy neoliberal ideology is said to present “populist notions of individual life planning, the personalization of welfare, and a growing tendency to psychologize human problems or see them in psychological terms and negate their societal basis’ (Gray et al 2015, 370).

The impact on social work is that neoliberalism ‘commodifies relations and negates social connectivity’ placing responsibility onto the individuals, families, and communities’ (Houston, 2013, 65). A doctrine of individualism, for example, has encroached on welfare policies over time. Hanssen et al (2015) note that Nordic governments favour individual explanations of poverty and the other social problems social workers face every day. In this climate Hanssen et al. argue that “increasing individualisation primarily implies that clients must be prepared to go through a personal process in order to change their position from being clients to becoming full members of and contributors to society” (6). Social work education must respond in ever-nuanced ways to the challenge to structural explanations of poverty. We argue that it remains important to equip social work students with a strong critical framework to enable them to deconstruct social policy, understand the psychosocial impact of stigma on service users, and the effects of this on practice. In this article, we argue

that in order to do this policy deconstruction effectively, social work educators need to use pedagogical methods that guide students in a planned manner from the initial 'outrage' they may experience, towards a more 'informed outrage'. Such an approach requires framing both cognitive and emotional responses to poverty. It is our position that developing an understanding of poverty discourses is a first step towards countering the dominant stigmatising narrative.

The neoliberal approach to welfare challenges the very sociological foundations of social work in which the focus has traditionally coupled private troubles and public issues. The individualising of social problems impacts on the way social work itself is structured, with an emphasis on following prescribed paths to change. The "categorised client" is granted the opportunity to escape their category by participating in an individualised programme: one that renders invisible the structural and economic causes of problems (Hanssen et al 2015; Schiettecat et al., 2015). Often such approaches focus on reinforcing the responsibilities of service users to address their own difficulties in order to gain access to a 'good citizen' status (Rose 2000). More than encouraging the uncoupling of social work from a broad approach to social welfare, the current climate may actively disempower social work in its social justice mission. Garrett (2015, 2) quotes a UK politician (Michael Gove) as arguing that social workers laid insufficient emphasis on the agency of 'individuals and were constrained 'by far too great a focus on inequalities'. Garrett (2015, 4) argues that this attack on social work signals a Conservative aspiration to change social work to encompass 'dispositions, perceptions and affiliations which do not run ideologically counter to, or seek to destabilise, dominant neo-liberal orientations and the class interests' of political elites.

This assault on social work core values reported in the United Kingdom is not unique. In Aotearoa New Zealand (A/NZ) social work education is similarly a site of contestation and change (Beddoe 2014). In A/NZ as elsewhere the starting point for social work education is the Global Definition of Social Work (International Federation of Social Work 2015) alongside the Global Standards for Social Work Education (International Association of Schools of Social Work, 2005). These two documents form the lynchpin on which principles and practice are taught. Human rights and social justice are central to these widely accepted definitions of social work, and failure to provide students with a political analysis of poverty risks them becoming practitioners who contribute to the stigma and social exclusion experienced by many of the users of their services (Davis and Wainright 2005). An emphasis

in curriculum is the linking of the macro and micro, promoting the perspective that social workers must always hold in focus both the private troubles of the services users, families and communities with whom they work, and the structural aspects of oppression. Despite this commitment, it is important to acknowledge that social work's espoused commitment to social justice is not straightforward in its implementation. There have been regular arguments advanced about whether the profession's rhetorical stance is borne out (or even possible) in practice. Specht and Courtney's (1995) 'Unfaithful Angels' provided a strong challenge to a profession in the United States that had become increasingly focused on individualised accounts of disadvantage and distress. O'Brien's (2011) research found that social justice is actively drawn on in everyday social work practice, but much less actively utilized at a macro level aimed at broad social change. Reisch and Jani (2013) argue that some social workers can inadvertently conform to the politics of neoliberalism in practice despite a stated commitment to the rhetoric of social justice, by way of increasing acceptance of the norms embedded in the institutions they work for (2013,1135). Schiettecat et al (2015), writing in the European context, go so far as to ask the question: "Do families in poverty need child and family social work? (647), pointing out that the language of social investment common in neoliberal societies, tends to assign child and family social workers the role of educating and 'activating' parents in order to break the 'cycle of poverty'. In this formulation, the causes of poverty are construed as a problem of intergenerational transmission of values from parents to children, rather than due to macro policy settings and other structural drivers of poverty. Marston and McDonald (2012) in Australia, note that:

"Critics of the welfare state ... have dismissed what they call sociological and political-economy approaches to problems like poverty, and have instead opted for behavioural-economic understandings of human behaviour. The combined effect of these changes is to cast doubt on the knowledge and actions of social workers as political actors, particularly those social workers directly engaged in work that seeks to redress social injustice and to influence public policy. The validity and legitimacy of the radical tradition in social work knowledge and practice have been thoroughly challenged by these developments" (2012, 1023).

In this climate, there is evidence from a range of countries that, despite the purported alliance of social work with radical and critical traditions, increasingly embedded norms of neoliberalism are shaping conceptualisations of social work as it constantly re-negotiates its position vis a vis the state (Welbourne, 2011). This is not necessarily a recent phenomenon,

as social work has always had an ambivalent position in that it both relies on the state for legitimation while simultaneously resisting its premises in other areas (Welbourne, 2011). Lorenz notes that social work is ‘... everywhere dependent on the prevailing welfare regime, no matter how strong the professional aspirations to elevate their practitioners to a level of greater autonomy’ (Lorenz, 2001, 598). Students and the newly qualified find themselves in corporatised managerial workplaces with very targeted practice may struggle to find expression of commitment to social justice (for a recent firsthand experience see Nicolas (2015) “Why pretend social work is about social justice? It's not”).

Students raised in this environment may be affected by the norms embedded in the educational and social experiences they have been exposed to and in A/NZ many social work students come straight from school into four-year BSW programmes. In an A/NZ study, Nairn et al (2012) interviewed 93 young people transitioning into adulthood between 2003 and 2007. They were doing so in the wake of the period of privatisation and retrenchment of the welfare state in A/NZ colloquially known as ‘Rogernomics’ (after the main political proponent of the reforms: Hon Roger Douglas). They found that those who had not managed a smooth transition from school to tertiary education or adulthood had internalised neoliberal ideas conflating their failure with personal inadequacy, particularly those from working class, Maori and Pacific Island backgrounds. Social work students whose whole lives have been immersed in contexts where the structural explanations of social problems have been downplayed or invisible, are arriving in western tertiary institutions. They face an unsettled future of work, one in which the contestation around the value of a social work education in social justice is hotly contested by various state and employing agencies, particularly in the UK and A/NZ. There, the rise of new public management discourses and practices, the wider emphasis on economic rationalities, and the conflation of regulatory bodies and some fields of social work with the state itself are driving definitions of social work in practice contexts (see Welbourne, 2011, Rogowski, 2011).

### **Poverty in Social Work Education – developing informed outrage**

Given therefore, students’ arrival from, and likely exit to, contexts steeped in the assumptions of neoliberal views of poverty, how can social work education respond in ways that may inoculate them against future despondency (and leaving the profession) or conformity? In order to develop a critical framework that transcends the individualised accounts of poverty

described above, social work students require more than simply exposure to the facts of poverty (how many people are in poverty, demographics, health disparities statistics and so forth)– although these are an important starting point and almost certainly in existing curricula. Here we argue that the education process should combine cognitive understandings of the effects of poverty (discourse and stigma) with a sense of emotional outrage in order to develop ‘informed outrage’. The responses of social work educators must explicitly address the discrepancies between a structural analysis of poverty and the pervasive individualistic discourses of neo-liberalism that produce shame (Reisch 2013), especially when students may have internalised messages concerned with the need for self –responsibility, and limited exposure to the realities of life in poverty (Davis and Wainwright 2005; McArthur et al, 2013).

Below, we offer a theoretically informed analysis of the aims of this two-part process – cognitive content and emotional engagement - and the methods that may achieve it. While it is not known what of the following topics are addressed in A/NZ curriculum the lack of local literature (other than the authors’ work) suggests that little attention is paid to the discursive aspects of welfare and poverty stigma. Teaching practices that can help achieve the cognitive goal include direct instruction about the discursive tensions over poverty embodied in policy development, sociological teaching about abjection, and the role of news media and moral panics in producing stigma. In order to extend these cognitive aspects of poverty education to also evoke emotion, teaching practices such as the use of complex case studies, bringing service user voices into the classroom, and the arts are suggested. Together these practices – encompassing both the cognitive and emotional dimensions - are proposed as ways to emphasise the impact of stigma on people’s everyday lives in ways that produce informed outrage.

### **Cognitive – discourse, abjection and stigma**

Teaching methods in social work education have a long history of teaching social work students about structural disadvantage and critical reflection in the radical tradition (Fook and Askeland 2006, Fook 2003). However, an ability to understand their own class background and the privileges it confers on them does not necessarily equate to an understanding of the inadvertent permeation of their values by neoliberal discourses. Students require an ability to identify the ideological or discursive ideas that maintain structural arrangements, and how

those ideas have shaped national debates, government policies, media framing and the aims of social work in their specific locations (Reisch 2013). This section explores the connections between discourses and policies, media framing and abjection, as a first step of engaging with the cognitive elements of teaching about poverty in social work education.

An ability to deconstruct dominant discourses is a complex analytical skill that requires an ability to recognise both dominant and subordinate discourses that may be vying for prominence in any one terrain. Specific examples can be used to illustrate this contestation in the classroom. For example, in A/NZ, the battle over the presentation of discourses that explain poverty causes and solutions is intense. While a number of current politicians maintain that “work is the best solution to poverty”, implying individual effort and employment is key, a number of commentators and advocacy groups counter this, pointing out that 40% of children living in poverty have wage earning parents, arguing instead that better policies in the tax/benefit systems that redistribute income more fairly in an increasingly unequal society is the solution to poverty (Dale, O'Brien, and St John 2011).

Students can explore discourses that such as those of the policy think tank ‘The Welfare Working Group’ which informed the A/NZ welfare reforms of 2012. This group framed the problem as one of individual behaviour, lack of expectations, and a culture of out of control dependency (Welfare Working Group 2011). By way of contrast, the advocacy organisation Child Poverty Action Group’s response emphasised specific policy mechanisms within the tax-benefit system that were causing poverty, for example, that some tax credits are not paid to beneficiaries, the lack of indexing of benefits to the median wage, and the generally low wage economy as the causes. Their framing of the main source of poverty as state policy and economic factors rather than one of individual fault represents a different construction of the issue with quite different impacts in terms of the stigma generated by them (Dale, O'Brien, and St John 2011, Dale et al. 2010).

Such discursive battles are not new and Somers and Block (2005) use historical examples to explore policy change over time. Using the examples of the U.S. 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act and the English 1834 New Poor Law, they show how powerful the discourse of ‘perversity’ was as a tool for justifying the imposition of ‘market fundamentalism’ (260). They show how this discourse was used in a way that “reassigned blame for the poor’s condition from poverty to perversity... (the)



problem is attributed to the corrosive effects of welfare's perverse incentives on poor people themselves—they become sexually promiscuous, thrust aside personal responsibility, and develop long term dependency” (Somers and Block, 2005, 260). Such ideological claims were used in both instances to discredit structural causes of poverty, enabling the two legislative changes despite empirical evidence that refuted the individualistic claims of the ‘perversity’ thesis, claiming the perversity thesis changed the parameters of the debate from “social problems to the timeless forces of nature and biology” (260).

When students are able to recognise these ‘construction battles’ as grounded in real legislative and policy documents, they realise that dominant discourses are powerful in shaping policy, and that they can be “...resisted, simply by recognising the frameworks of meaning being put forward in any situation do not have to be accepted...the power of discourses lies in the extent to which they are unquestioned” (Fook 2012, 103 - 104). Applying an analysis that challenges individualised discourses as anathema to social justice assists with the development of critical thinking and aligning themselves with the values of the profession (Cabiati, 2015). This is increasingly important, as the jobs many social workers will take are becoming driven by a more overt discourse of control and sanction within increasingly neo-liberal saturation (Reisch and Jani 2012).

Another source of discursive contention is via media framing, and making this explicit is another way students can be taught to identify implicit discourses. Exploration of the interaction of political forces and news media assists in making visible the connections between poverty framing and dominant discourses about poor people. An understanding of how moral panics are created and sustained by the demonisation of certain groups can help students recognise and resist oppressive discourses about poverty. Using case studies students can explore how journalists and politicians can use framing to sustain a moral panic, by evolving and shifting the focus of the frame, expanding (and also narrowing) the possible range of claims and claims-makers about social problems and their causes (Fox 2013, 167). We suggest that students are encouraged to also look at the way popular culture is used to demonise groups, for example the UK reality TV programme ‘Benefits Street’ (Chanel 4, United Kingdom, 2014) is shown in A/NZ. Examination of popular culture provides a rich source of material for critique.

Tyler (2013) argues that the concept of social abjection is useful in developing a more nuanced analytical framework for considering the processes of discourse formation. Tyler (2008, 18) has written about the class disgust that has produced the framing of sole mothers: “‘chav mum’ is produced through disgust reactions as an intensely affective figure that embodies historically familiar and contemporary anxieties about sexuality, reproduction and fertility and “racial mixing”. These analyses are powerful and backed up by research which challenges the prevailing discourses and the social policies they underpin (see for example, MacDonald Shildrick and Furlong 2014 on intergenerational worklessness and Crossley, 2015 on targeting of poor families for ‘interventions’). Hodgetts and Stolte ( 2014, 1) explain abjection as ‘a process whereby particular individuals and groups are singled out, othered, and dehumanized as objects or tainted, dirty subjects to be avoided by other “normal” and “civilized” citizens’. Working-class neighbourhoods have historically been seen as dirty, disease ridden and their residents often tainted by framing that represents them as morally inferior (Tyler, 2008, 2013).

Throughout history there have been periods when the poor have been displaced from society through incarceration, asylums, work houses, forcible migration and transportation. These processes of displacement are also frequently associated with colonization and occupation, which is highly relevant to an exploration of inequalities in A/NZ. The histories of colonisation “highlight the processes of abjection by which colonial powers have justified the domination of indigenous peoples” (Hodgetts and Stolte 2014, 2). The aftermath of colonisation, war and civic conflict often includes migration for very low paid work, often in poor conditions, for the poor and marginalised. In the west groups of people may be categorised a by aspects of their lives- for example disabled, welfare claimants, teen mothers, sole parents, mental health service users. These groups may also be subject to social exclusion and stigma, all while experiencing unprecedented surveillance, often a price to be paid for public assistance. The prevailing message is that dignity and privacy must be sacrificed if welfare is to be claimed (Tyler 2013).

Blame and shame, heightened by discourses of social abjection, are powerful weapons with which to empower political disengagement with causes and focus on characteristics of victims. Stigma leads and intensifies the othering of people who are poor, side-stepping structural explanations of violence and neglect. Wacquant (2009, 100) argued that in both the criminal and welfare systems “public vilification racial accentuation and even inversion, and

moral individuation work in tandem to make punitive programs the policy tool of choice and censorious condemnation the central public rationale” for the implementation of more punitive justice and welfare programmes. Aotearoa New Zealand has its own examples of the negative moral framing of welfare claimants during a period of stringent welfare reforms, where commentators frequently associate criminality and violence with benefit claimant status (Beddoe 2015).

As students begin to see the discrepancies between clients’ lived experiences and how they are presented in everyday media they will likely experience powerful emotions about how welfare and even social work itself is presented in both news and political discourse. This ‘outrage’ can be channelled towards a more expansive engagement with deconstructing ‘the news’. Examples generated in our teaching have included a brilliant student exploration of the language used to represent asylum seekers in Australasia—the repeated use of powerful metaphors: floods, and so forth ‘connects the arrival of asylum seekers to natural disasters’ (Bogen and Marlowe, 2015, p.5). Another example is the repeated use of such words as ‘feral’ when referring to marginalised and socially excluded families (Beddoe 2015).

Teaching even a simple understanding of the differences between ‘episodic’ framing, that is reporting a particular incident in a specific time frame, and ‘thematic’ framing, where an incident is presented with reference to wider issues can encourage students to critically interrogate how ‘the news’ shapes the discourses about poverty and welfare (Iyengar 1990). Gamson (1992) has argued that the success of media framing is influenced by the strategies employed by the audience: those people who use a cultural strategy—received wisdom, “common sense”, stereotypes and so forth –may be more impacted by framing while those with “personal or vicarious experiential knowledge” are more likely to discount or ignore frames (Sotirovic 2000,274). Social work students may fall into both camps here, some with rich and varied life experience and strongly held views and others still forming their worldview.

Thus, teaching about the discourses that frame poverty in policy and the media helps students develop a critical approach to understanding poverty in a cognitive sense, and will likely begin an emotional response as well. Engaging with these emotions and extending them in a conscious manner helps progress towards an incorporation of cognitive and emotional elements in a considered and reflective practice approach (Cabiati, 2015).

## **Evoking outrage – understanding the psychosocial impacts of stigma**

As well as an understanding of the discursive – cognitive domain, students also require an understanding of the experience of poverty and the psycho-social impacts on individuals, as a pathway to an empathic and emotional response to poverty. Discussion of emotion in social work often focuses on students' management of their emotions in respect of their own wellbeing; see for example Grant (2014) who noted that students' reflective capacities increased their ability to manage empathic distress caused by exposure to the life experience of service users. Emotion is thus an essential dimension of social work education, requiring the development of both analysis and empathy, as both are needed in building effective practice relationships. Gair (2013, p.139) notes that "Over time social work skills texts have acknowledged that empathy is crucial for ethical, socially just practice in all areas of social work". In her research Gair found that for some students the gap between their own lives and the narratives of lived experience of indigenous people meant that they expressed 'partial empathy' (p.143).

The psycho-social impact of poverty on service users can be described as the internalisation of shame that results from living in poverty in a society that demonises the poor, whether through popular media, state policies or institutional processes. Demonisation can be overt or subtle, as even policies that use the language of 'community' or 'social inclusion' can, in reality, still implicitly expect the individual to overcome their structurally determined realities (Porter and Craig 2004). Such accounts will often challenge previously held notions, for example non-indigenous A/NZ students may be shocked and distressed by the harsh reality of health inequalities that are the legacy of colonisation for Māori (Anglem 2013). Jo (2012) highlights the role of cultural and social institutions in attaching specific levels of shame to poverty, and imparting these to the population at large. The social construction of shame is generated by implicit discourses in social policies, social work practices and wider social institutions such as the media, as described above. These sources must be understood in order to help people understand internalised stigma, but also resist the social and cultural generation of that stigma from social and political drivers in the macro context. An ability to link these wider contexts with people's felt experience of poverty and shame as an important aspect of understanding the psycho-social impacts of poverty, as internalised stigma can result in a "lack of voice, disrespect, humility, reduced dignity and self-esteem"(Jo 2012:

516). In A/NZ, for example, a recent report found that beneficiaries are increasingly scared of the staff in the benefit agency that administers state benefits (Morton et al. 2014). It was found that this is related to the power imbalances between worker and 'client', and the dehumanising processes they are exposed to in the agency. This participant, for example, noted that: "...you stand in the queue and there's three or four ahead of you, and as they're going down you can hear it, ... there's that whole process where you're not seen as a person...we're treated as non-human" (Morton et al., 2014, 33). The imbalance of power implicit in the accessing of benefits is particularly shameful, and can emphasise feelings of humiliation, distress and withdrawal. For example, this community advocate stated that: "...You can feel the punitive or the kind of authoritarian [approach], you know like, this is where the rubber meets the road, and I'm like the state, and I'm the one that oversees this money coming out and you've got to do this... almost like the parent. And the critical parent... you can see people just kind of cowering, just kind of going into themselves" (Morton et al., 2014, 33).

Disengagement with services, anger and defensive behaviour may all be explored as responses to felt stigma. Without understanding that these responses may be linked to shame generated by the meanings associated with their class position, inexperienced practitioners may reach for other explanations. The domination of psychological theories such as psychodynamic, attachment or cognitive theories might instead be used to explain behaviour in a manner that meshes conveniently with the individualised focus of neo-liberalism.

### **Teaching methods to highlight discourses and evoke emotion**

So, how can social work education students avoid these pitfalls? In addition to well supported fieldwork placements, classroom teaching can highlight the cognitive elements of poverty discourses, policies and media framing, while also evoking emotion (by foregrounding the impact of stigma) in several ways. Methods are varied, but those discussed here are: complex and realistic case studies, service user voices and the use of the arts. These will now be discussed in turn, and linked to the pedagogical project of conveying the context and experience of poverty stigma. Case studies have long been the bedrock of problem-based learning in social work, however it is important to ensure that these go beyond superficial and individualised accounts of service user experiences. Writing more complex case studies helps

students make the link between the structural impacts on families and the impact of shame or stigma. Thus, case studies that help to this end that include reference to service users' work experience, income, community characteristics, gender and ethnicity, service users' emotional reactions, reports of service users' own words (for example what they said when a home visit was undertaken). Such complex case studies provide opportunities for students to view clients in their whole ecological context, and thus consider the complex contributors to presenting behaviour, even if the class is about micro level theory. The inclusion of family class position, material wellbeing and gender/ethnicity encourages students to consider the complex interactions between macro factors, pervasive discourses, and micro presentations, ensuring an appreciation of the complexity of lived experience and psychosocial outcomes.

Bringing service user voices into the classroom directly can be another way that students are confronted in an experiential way by the realities of poverty stigma. This can be achieved in several ways. Gupta and Blewett (2008) developed a relationship between service users, academics and practitioners as a framework for focussing on developing practice that was "non-punitive and genuinely supportive" (459). They emphasise the importance of attention to the process of the inclusion of service user views, with a careful explication of the possibilities for exploitation or patronising service users in the process. They took students out to a non-government agency and carefully developed the curriculum aims and content in a collaborative project with services users first. Importantly for the aim of educating students about poverty stigma, they found that enabling frank and respectful expressions from services users provided a strong message that "poverty is not just about lack of money, but also the consequent impact on people's dignity and self-respect" and further the consequence of "low self-esteem—if you are struggling you feel worthless and think others have a low opinion of you and your children..." (455). Jack and Gill (2012) integrate an ability to work well with families in poverty with cultural competence concepts. An emphasis on the cultural elements of living in poverty emphasises the voices of service user's first-hand accounts as conveying the realities of lived experience and worldview in teaching materials. This is a powerful way of understanding the impact of poverty on lived experience, particularly how the impact of poverty stigma increases the stressors associated with parenting, for example:

"Having people think I was in care because I was a bad kid, or had a bad mother; seeing foster parents get so much money to buy my children the things I could never afford to buy them; saying no to my kids every day of their lives; dreading every Christmas and birthday because of the disappointment in the children's eyes; needing

help, but being too scared of being judged an unfit mother to ask for it; being treated like nothing, less than nothing, and accepting it” (224).

Drawing on first hand experiences, Jack and Gill argue will assist practitioners to develop positive, effective relationships with families and avoid simplistic interpretations of individual behaviour, and understand the interconnected nature of various kinds of oppressions.

Finally, the use of the arts is another way that students can be encouraged to understand the psychosocial impact of poverty on service users. The arts can be used to convey complexity in micro contexts, and how people use, resist, and are shaped by dominant discourses and stereotypes (Keddell 2011). The use of arts-based materials (including fiction, film, poetry) can provide exposure to complex narratives that encourage reflection, develop empathic understanding and evoke emotional, affective responses (Phillion and He 2004, Silenzio et al. 2005, Weaver 2005). Scourfield and Taylor (2014) have recently reports on the use of a book club to explore works of fiction with social work students arguing that creative literature can aid the “development of sensitivity, self-awareness and responsiveness...and is highly relevant to social work practice because it provides a holistic picture of people in their environment” (p.534). Zickler and Abbot claim such methods provide the ‘subjective necessity’, crucial to developing an appreciation of diversity and critical thinking skills, and understanding of people as existing within an ecological context (Zickler and Abbott 2000). Evoking this type of affective response is crucial to developing the informed outrage needed in these times, as emotional response, within a well-reasoned and evidenced cognitive framework, we argue can provide the ‘informed outrage’ required by students in order to avoid the ‘accommodation’ so persuasively proposed in many current social work roles.

## **Conclusion**

Challenges will continue to come from many directions to social work education, reflecting conservative ideological aspirations to change social work as part of the dismantling of a broad welfare society in A/NZ and elsewhere. Resisting the imposition of neo-liberal ideology as an increasingly normalised mode of existence requires continual rebuttal. By focussing on methods that incorporate a cognitive ability to deconstruct dominant discourses, as well as evoke emotion in social work students who may have little direct experience with

poverty, may help develop a deep appreciation for the causes and consequences of poverty in terms of the impact on real humans. It is hoped that this may help propel them through their futures with a continuing commitment to social justice despite their organisational and national contexts, with a well-considered ‘informed outrage’. As Reisch and Jani (2012) note, “Through its vocabulary, research and policy priorities, social work increasingly accepts as ‘normative’ existing institutional goals and their underlying assumptions. The profession’s rhetoric continues to be change-oriented while its practice largely focuses on accommodation” (2012, 1135). It remains the responsibility of the profession and its intellectual community to challenge the uncritical accommodation of institutional goals and practices and to support social work students to engage critically with the social policies against which they will inevitably be expected to deliver. At times developing this critical perspective will be painful for students. It may challenge their own values and perceptions and the class position these might reflect and it may engender anger and indeed outrage as their growing analytical skills peel off the layers of framing in the discourse of welfare. As educators we need to hold firm to the following ideas:

Experience is never innocent. A pedagogy that fails to interrogate experience ultimately delivers a conservative politics. Such pedagogy fails to examine the discursive production of experience. It refuses to explore the way we position ourselves in relation to experience or the investments that tie us to particular positions and identities (Avis 1995, 182).

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