

SETTLEMENT GAMES

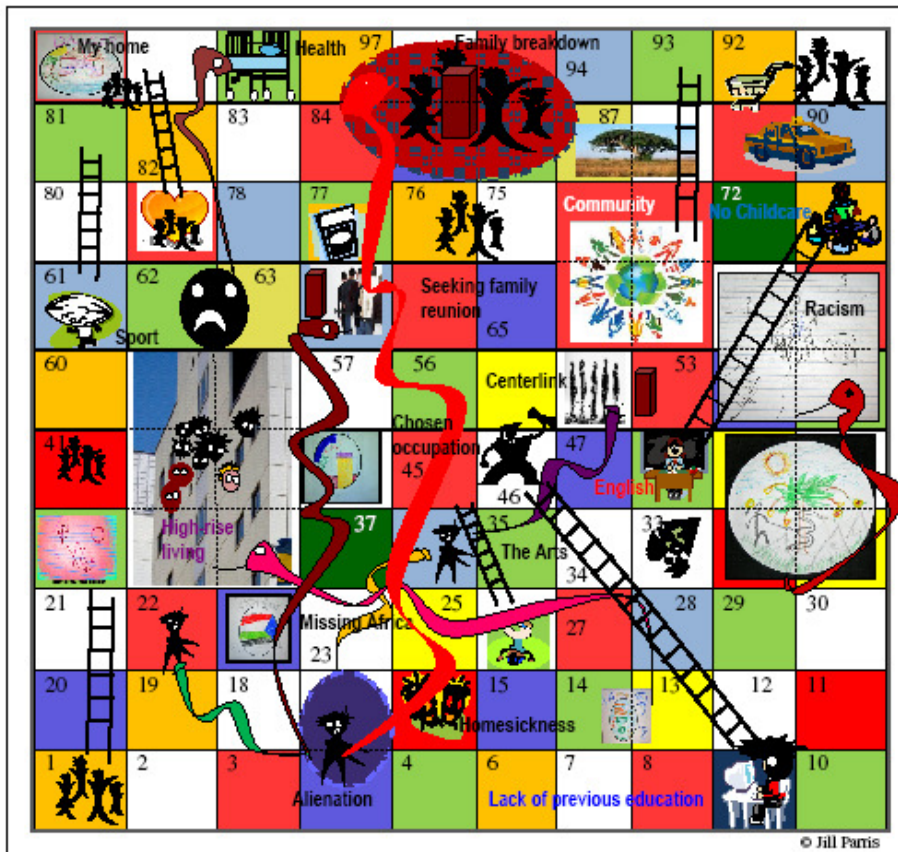
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I love working with groups and have learned to be confident in myself and the 'group' to do the work necessary to create trust and growth. With this belief in myself and the process I ventured off into the world of resettlement where I was to work particularly with people who had recently arrived from Africa.

In one group my brief was to work with mothers to build their capacity as parents in Australia and to address family and relationship issues in the Australian context. In another I was to help create a trusting environment in which young people could express themselves openly, learn new skills and build their resilience.

Sweet and Sour Settlement

The work with the young people, most of who had come from the Sudan within the past two to three years was wonderful, playful, engaging and energising. The program consisted of an introduction to a variety of arts activities and a time for reflection and sharing. The participants gave their all to whatever artistic activity they were introduced to. Dancing, drumming, acting, theatre games and diction all generated laughter and full participation and the reflection and sharing built in intensity as the weeks progressed. Over time the young people shared many experiences and as they did so I became aware of how trapped they felt. Over and over again they described situations where they felt like helpless victims of a system that did not support their settlement and integration into Australian life. I became so concerned about what I was hearing that I began to wonder what needed to change.



SWEET & SOUR SETTLEMENT- A GAME OF LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

As I wrestled with what I was seeing and hearing I began to conceive of a way to bring all the data I was getting together so that I could use this to inform both myself and others.

I hoped that by creating a space in which we could begin to experience what was being presented to us and wrestle with it we would deepen our understanding of the processes which lead to people's feelings of helpless. I believed that if we could gain some

understand of this process we might find a way forward that would foster growth and resilience rather than entrench dependence for people who would not have made it to Australia if they were not strong to begin with.

With this in mind I have created a board game that includes a fictitious scenario for each issue I have named on the board. It is my hope that as people play 'Sweet and Sour Settlement' and imagine themselves in the position of new settlers they will see these lives from a new perspective. It is my dream that this may lead to new ways of supporting new arrivals so that they can retain and build on the strength they have.

I have shown the board to several young people and they say that it encapsulates the important factors dominating their lives. They are excited that some people may attempt to see Australia through their eyes and shape their interactions with new migrants differently. What one young man said to me was that while he understands that what many are experiencing is similar to that of settlers who have come before he believes that migrants would integrate more quickly 'if they were taught to fish rather than having *'it'* presented to them on a platter.'

I invite you to play Sweet and Sour Settlement and join those who use this experience to talk about and rethink how, when and where we welcome our new arrivals to join us in our new lives together.

High-rise

Now back to my work with women who have been in Australia for a longer time than the young people who inspired my first game.

I began work with a group of Somali women with the brief of teaching them parenting skills in Australia. The first week was OK. The second week was slightly better. By week three I felt like a complete fraud as I wrestled with what to teach mothers who seemed to have endless patience with their children and a tolerance for this white woman who had less experience with parenting than they did. After all, many of them had supported their children in the very difficult circumstances of war and famine before coming to Australia.

By week five numbers had dwindled and I decided that what I was doing was not working. I asked the women what they would like to do. They said that they were interested in sewing. They would like to make a quilt. As it happened I had the makings of quilt at home. I had begun it a couple of years previously and not got much further than cutting the material to size. I brought in my material, scissors and needles and we began to sew.

As we sat together on the floor we talked about the children's health, the latest courses at the neighbourhood house and the ups and downs of family life. We needed to ensure the safety of the youngsters who played around us as we stitched together. As people needed they would move on or take a week off to attend to other things. The nature of the group became informal. As people got to know me better they would approach me before or after the group to seek individual advice or support. The work of parenting training was happening while we distracted ourselves with what colours went together best and how to stitch our quilt together. Once this was complete we began to think about what we would do next.

The women wanted to talk about their lives on the High-rise estate and we decided we would combine this with some artwork and put it together in a booklet which could be used to inform local agencies of issues of concern to participants. Once we had done this people were keen to try other

crafts. We tried making potato cuts but this ended with everyone covered in paint and little to show for our efforts. We decided to move on.

As the group proceeded more and more time was focused on the difficulties people faced in High-rise living. They asked for advice on moving out of the flats and we approached the Department of Housing to come and talk to us about a house building scheme. While this grabbed peoples' initial interest we later found that unless at least one person in a household was working there would be no way to guarantee ongoing payments if you were a single mother on benefits. While most women were preparing to move towards part time work they had no prospect of earning enough to support them on this scheme. At present waiting lists are not moving because of a severe housing shortage and people were becoming angry. I suggested we might harness this anger to find a way of letting others know just how unbearable high-rise living is. We would develop a game which people could play that demonstrates what it is like to be a Somali living on the estate.



We began by making up five fictitious characters. As we talked about each character I continually pointed out that these were not to be based on any specific person. As we worked on the characters the group sprang to life in a way that had not occurred before. The women who had never wanted to talk about their own past lives began to talk vociferously about what had happened in Somalia prior to their leaving. People who worked close by to the room in which we met began to come in for a few minutes at a time as they ducked out of work and added their bit. The group took on the feeling of a market place as people came and went and spoke very

excitably about their past lives. The work of uncovering their history and past trauma was happening before my eyes and the women were loving the sessions.

We spent a full three months developing all the aspects of 'High-rise' with a comprehensive set of cards covering:

How people conducted their daily lives on the estate including some of the food they prepare and eat, their religion and their day to day activities

The problems of living on the estate

Their dreams for change.

We talked about what influenced their lives the most and decided that the biggest issue was how long people had to wait to get off the estate. We decided that time on the housing waiting list would become the currency for 'High-rise.' Day to day expenses was also a big issue, these were documented on the board.

The Women involved in developing this game are very proud of their work and are hoping that it will challenge people to understand their issues and support their striving for change.

Again I invite you to play 'High-rise' and join those who use this experience to talk and think about what it is like to live on one of Australia's high-rise estates. It is my hope that people will take time to put themselves in the shoes of the people who have inspired this game and that this will lead to new ideas about how to tackle the immense difficulties faced by those who live the lives depicted in High-rise.

The third space

In both the games described above I have drawn on my understanding of the *'third space.'* This *'third space allows for belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image.'* (Boal, 2002) If this process is successfully negotiated a Kind of *'container'* is formed where contradictory material can be held without an insistence *'upon its resolution.'* This space

- Allows people to explore their own issues at a distance
- Allows for open discussion of what that other person did 'wrong'
- Opens up discussions of how that third person can tackle his or her issues

(Lumsden, 1999)says that this *'third space'*, or *'transitional zone'* allows for healing, learning and creativity, where new ideas can emerge, emotions can be expressed, and new relationships tried out.

The development of both games grew out of creating such a *'transitional zone'* in both groups described above and I am hoping that those who play the games will enter a *'third space'* where they will be able to suspend judgement and explore the possibilities of new solutions.

If you wish to find out more about either of these games please contact me at the Ecumenical Migration Centre.

References.

Boal, A. (2002). Games for Actors and Non--Actors: Routledge.

Lumsden, M. (1999). Breaking the Cycle of Violence: Three Zones of Social Reconstruction. Conflict Resolution: Dynamics, Process and Structure, 131–151.
