CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES IN SCHOOL COMMUNITIES: AN EXPLORATION AND REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.

Obama, Barack, presidential candidate speech, June 4, 2005, Chicago.

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I would like to acknowledge that this research has been undertaken on the traditional lands of the Boonwurrung and Wurundjeri tribes of the Kulin Nation, and to pay my respect to elders both past and present.

Student Declaration

Doctor of Philosophy Declaration (by performance / exhibition)

"I, Sarah Tartakover, declare that the PhD exegesis entitled *Cultural Perspectives in the School Community: An Exploration and Representation of Cultural Identity in Pre-service Teachers* is at least 20,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This exegesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this exegesis is my own work".

Signature

Sarah Tartakover

Date

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Dedication

Dedicated to my beloved daughters Emilia, Lucinda and Tessa. May their world be enriched by cultural diversity.

Abstract

This arts based research consists of a creative product – the film *Classroom Conversations around Culture,* and an accompanying exegesis – *Cultural Perspectives in School Communities: An Exploration and Representation of Cultural Identity in Pre-Service Teachers.*

Both the film and the exegesis explore the experiences and insights of seven pre-service teachers in their final year of a teaching degree as they undertake their practicum in primary schools in Melbourne's western suburbs. The research uses portraiture and narrative inquiry methodology to examine a range of issues around pre-service teachers' knowledge and understanding of cultural identity, racism, diversity and the implications of these understandings on their teaching practice.

A re-emerging theme is the manner in which white hegemonic mainstream culture tacitly and overtly excludes people based on their cultural identity and skin colour, and the marginalising effect this has on them. While pre-service teachers are well placed to redress this systemic inequity within the communities they teach by integrating cultural diversity into their teaching and learning, the reflections of the research participants raise a number of associated dilemmas and challenges.

In a series of focus group sessions and optional follow-up interviews, I led the group of pre-service teachers to examine their own cultural lenses – their cultural beliefs, assumptions, prejudices and biases – and the way they are situated within this system. The narratives of these pre-service teacher participants offer important voices to consider when reflecting on ways to strengthen teacher education programmes which promote inclusion and social justice.

The thesis highlights the importance of understanding the history of oppression in White Australia to understand one's positionality. It suggests moving beyond traditional models of multicultural education and towards a critical pedagogy framework – one that scrutinises the unfair power and privilege that advantages some people over "Others" in a racialised society. Most importantly it stresses the need to have ongoing conversations around race, culture and identity despite the inherent challenges in these three intersecting domains.

The film is the main component of the creative PhD (60%), and is a stand-alone piece that will be shared with audiences beyond those examining this research. The intention of the film and the exegesis (40%) is to explore a range of issues around cultural identity, diversity and racism and to invite pre-service teachers and other educators to consider the ramifications of these on their own classroom practice. Because the film presents these issues in a spontaneous way, and the exegesis does this in a more measured and analytical way, it is my preference that the film be viewed before the exegesis is read. This will allow the reader to respond personally and create their own meanings rather than being influenced by the exegetical component.

The exegesis is informed by the many conversations with the seven pre-service teachers during our eight focus group sessions. The purpose of the exegesis is to highlight and unpack the multitude of issues and ideas that arise in the film and to place them in a broader research context. It is hoped that by placing them in this wider context, new understandings about approaches to teaching and learning in teacher education programmes will be shared and contributions will be made to making education in general more inclusive.

Prologue

I sit impatiently at the traffic lights, wiping off small vegemite hand prints from my un-ironed skirt. I wait for the heating to demist the rear window. The 8.30 news crackles through the car speakers, dulled by the light patter of rain and the distant wailing of a fire engine.

If I turned right I'd end up on Footscray Road; a straight, flat road that takes you past metal shipping containers stacked high behind a wire fence that extends towards Docklands. Caught at the base of the fence you'd see a collection of plastic bags, cardboard, paper and other debris flapping in the wind. If it was hot, the smell of decaying fish from the Melbourne Markets would catch your nostrils, along with the exhaust fumes from the trucks, which make their way relentlessly to and from the docks. Set against this backdrop of industry are pockets of beauty: Yarraville, with its historic village atmosphere is built around a thriving restaurant and café culture and the recently refurbished art deco cinema. Newport Lakes native wetlands, built on an old bluestone quarry, bursts with wildlife. The park at the end of our street is frequented by a variety of cockatoos and rosellas. The wattles have enjoyed their bloom, and are making way for the bright pink blossoms…this has been our home for seventeen years.

The lights change. Before turning I wait for a couple of veiled women to walk past, one sporting a leopard skin print around her cuffs and neckline. A tall African woman in black leggings and a watermelon coloured jumpsuit crosses the road with two equally slender and striking young girls – part of the growing community of Sudanese in Footscray. I wonder about their stories of arriving in Australia. It strikes me – I will never know what it's like to be a black woman living in Australia. How do I, privileged and white begin to make sense of their experience? What assumptions have I already made about these women based on their skin colour? Even from well-intentioned people, will these girls always be asked "Where are you from?" When will they feel like they belong? How do I explore these issues without essentialising difference and reinforcing stereotypes?

Dark storm clouds sweep across the sky as I park near Sunshine North Primary School, one of the four schools where I am filming a group of pre-service teachers undertaking their final teaching block before they graduate. I pull out the camera and start filming as I cross the school crossing. I've been thinking of an opening sequence to link the schools. The Government's education stimulus package could provide a nice metaphor, with each school at various stages of their building works. I film the construction site signs, the scaffolding, the backs of the workmen in their hard helmets.

I notice the principal bent over the water mains in consultation with a workman. I hear my name being called out from a distance. The assistant principal enthusiastically runs over to me, "Sarah, there's a

soccer match over on the oval between Maribyrnong and our school, maybe you could film it?" I head there and watch a group of boys kicking what was once a white ball through the mud. I wonder which group is from Maribyrnong and ask, "So where are you guys from?" One of the boy's looks up, falters for a moment, then says, "Vietnam".

Methodology: Painting a picture in words and on film

My arts-based enquiry has not fitted into a neat positivist paradigm of "researcher" and "researched", or even interviewer and interviewee. It necessitated the adoption of a bricolage (Kincheloe 2001; Kincheloe & Berry 2004) of overlapping roles rather than discrete research identities, which enabled me to "peer through a conceptual window to a new world of research and knowledge production" (Kincheloe nd, p.1). In organising the film shoot at the primary schools I was producer; coordinating filming with pre-service teachers*, their mentors and school principals. Within the classrooms I was film-maker; mindful of the aesthetics of composition and light whilst jostling with technical aspects of camera operation. In the focus group sessions I was facilitator and co-constructor of knowledge with pre-service teacher participants; sharing stories and building on our relationships to make sense of our experiences. At my computer desk I was writer, narrator and editor; piecing together over 100 hours of footage to tell these stories. These roles shaped who I was as a researcher, and were informed by my experiences as a teacher educator and reflective practitioner.

The intention of this research, drawing on portraiture methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis 1997), is to paint a picture in words as well as on film. It is hoped that these pictures will communicate important understandings for teacher educators about how to best prepare and support pre-service teachers to become culturally responsive practitioners. Through both the film and exegesis I wish to create resources that encourage pre-service teachers and others to reflect on issues around cultural identity and the ramifications these have for teaching practice. By pre-service teachers contributing to the production of knowledge through analysis of their particular experiences, it is hoped that there will be a move towards social transformation, and that their commentary will initiate dialogue amongst future pre-service teachers, and ultimately pave the way towards more equitable and just classrooms. The research draws from a variety of sources and research tools: film, media, current events, interviews, archival data, conversations, and autobiographical reflections. Given its interdisciplinary nature, it uses a qualitative mixed methods research design, shaped by portraiture, narrative inquiry, SooHoo's (2006) teacher inquiry, creative and visual research methodology as well as a/r/tography.

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* pre-service teachers are undergraduate teachers/ teacher candidates

Portraiture

At the centre of this research is the creative methodology of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis 1997). Portraiture was first used by Lawrence-Lightfoot in her book *The Good High School* (1983) in which she captures the essence of six high schools by "painting" a narrative portrait of them. This approach provides an effective framework within which to explore the multiple and complex meanings found in teaching and learning experiences and has consequently been a popular methodology for educational research.

Portraiture offers a balance between creative expression and empirical research, providing a suitable framework for the development of the exegesis and the film, as well as supporting my aim of creating a useful, accessible and stimulating resource for future teachers. The ongoing process of data collection and reflection, description and analysis from which dominant themes emerge is holistic. It has allowed me to approach the research questions with "anticipatory schema" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis 1997, p.188) yet with enough flexibility for themes to emerge organically from the focus group sessions and interviews. The exegesis explores and interprets the patterns and themes from the rich data collected, and where they converge draws them together into an aesthetic whole.

Portraiture positions the researcher explicitly within the research, "sketching herself into the context" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis 1997, p.50) and taking on the role of participant in the construction of the narrative. Embracing the idea that the researcher's viewpoint is an integral part of the study unshackles us from the "positivist, objectivist notion that knowledge is not socially constructed" (Anderson 2011, p.116). As the writer/researcher my voice "is tied intimately to what and who is studied and the interpretation drawn" (Lichtman 2006, p.181). My analysis of the pre-service teacher participants' "texts" *is* "situated and subjective" (Santoro 2005, p.4) in much the same way that "portraitists in visual art use technique to render their subjects' images while also including their own nuance and interpretation" (Anderson 2011, p.112). I do not claim to be objective. In fact, like Lichtman (2006), I believe that it is neither desirable nor expected for the researcher to remain objective (p.206). As McLaren (1998) opines, regardless of whether research takes place in the classroom or in the laboratory "every description is ideologically loaded, codified, and intertextually related to larger interpretive contexts" (p.xiv). Detached and objective narratives are neither evocative nor conducive to engaging readers in self-reflection. It is precisely *because* of the situatedness of the researcher that audiences are drawn in to examine their own experiences, in much the same way as a novelist's "well-crafted story allows the reader to see aspects of him or herself in unknown worlds and people" (Russell

2004). Because portraiture makes explicit the researcher's voice by deliberately weaving it into the written document, and "co-mingling" (Anderson 2011) it with the voices of the subjects, it engages readers in considering and understanding their own perspectives more deeply (Hackmann 2002). Additionally the researcher is involved in examining her own experiences; of interpreting and reinterpreting them, and of critically reflecting on her own judgements, perspectives and pedagogical choices.

Yet while the portraiture approach situates the researcher very much at the core of the research, the portraitist's work is also "…deeply empirical, grounded in systematically collected data, skeptical questions (of self and actors), and rigorous examinations of biases" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis 1997, p.85):

> There is a certain truth about works of art that makes the representations they contain not just depiction but valid expression of human experience. There is also a validity in the interpretation that a research portrait represents that tells the reader not just about an individual or a site but about more general human experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis 1997, p.230).

It is important to note, as Hackmann does (2002, p.53), that portraiture offers a multiplicity of meanings and that a "skilled portraitist can easily weave competing truths into the final portrait"

A central feature of portraiture is the relationship between the artist/ researcher and the audience: "At the heart of the aesthetic experience – a primary condition – is a conversation between two active meaning-makers, the producer and the perceiver" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis 1997, p.29). At the core of my research the "portraits" sketched in both the film and the exegesis are intended as windows into a range of attitudes, beliefs and experiences. These windows serve to invite the perceiver/reader/viewer into a conversation. "This conversation results in a co-construction of meaning in which both parties play a pivotal role" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis 1997, p.29). This enables both the researcher and her audiences to become joint agents of social change and educational reform.

Narrative Inquiry

Given the inextricable connection I have with the pre-service teacher participants and the value I place on them to provide a context and narrative to the research (Conle 2007), this research draws on

narrative inquiry. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe the benefits of using narrative inquiry in educational research: "...education and educational research is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; learners, teachers and researchers are characters in their own and other's stories" (p.2). They outline the narrative inquiry process, which involves "mutual construction of the research relationship, a relationship in which both the practitioners and researchers feel cared for and have a voice with which to tell their stories" (p.4). As my own observations and experiences have shaped the research topic, questions and analysis, my approach has been to interlace my own reflections and anecdotes in the exegesis with pre-service teacher narratives gathered in focus group conversations. These serve to contextualise my participation and multiple positions in the research journey: as a member of the dominant culture, a researcher, a teacher educator and mother of school children. They are inserted to remind readers of my positionality, as well as sketching the parallel narrative journey that pre-service teachers and I shared. Using this form of "narrative self study" (Beattie 2009) enables researchers to "study the meaning of our own experience, collect the data through the processes of inquiry, reflection, dialogue, story, and conversation, and engage in the systematic interpretation, integration and representation of the meanings through the writing and rewriting of our narratives" (p.32). The narratives, reflections and insights in my exegesis are also intended as a way to invite the reader in to reflect on their own thoughts, feelings and experiences; to participate in the inquiry by enticing them to consider their own viewpoints (Conle 2007). The reflective and reflexive writing style used by Ellis (1993 & 2009) provides the inspiration for the tone of the exegesis. Ellis writes in an engaging, accessible and evocative way. Her personal introspections offer readers the opportunity to re-think and ultimately re-construct their own realities, particularly in relation to culture and identity. In this way readers are invited to join the inquiry to enact social change.

SooHoo's teacher inquiry

In shaping my research, I have drawn strongly on SooHoo's publication *Talking Leaves (2006),* which is a compendium of powerful narratives written by SooHoo and her students. As a way of understanding the experiences school children have of Otherness, SooHoo takes her group of pre-service teachers (or "teacher candidates") on a personal journey by exploring their experiences of being Othered. Students write about their varying experiences of social exclusion and marginalisation as a result of their culture, language, sexual orientation and class, amongst other things. "From Otherness, students discover a social consciousness and moral responsibility to confront dominance as they take their place as social justice educators" (SooHoo 2006, p xiv). While SooHoo uses Otherness as a starting point for her enquiry – foregrounding the person as teacher, my research focuses on teacher as person, and starts

with an exploration of how they position themselves within the broad framework of "cultural identity". Another distinction between our work is that SooHoo's enquiry is firmly located in a North American socio-cultural and socio-political context, while mine is situated in an Australian context. They are both embedded in very different discourses. This difference is highlighted in the discursive language around hybrid racial and ethnic identity. For example, in North America the terms "Native-American", "African-American", "Asian-American", "Chicano" and "Mexican-American" are frequently used to describe one's ethnic identity, whereas in Australia, our language is often limited to "Aussies" and a range of often derogatory terms such as "wog" and "chink" to describe people who are not perceived to fit neatly within this identity. I explore this further in the section titled *"The tall black guy...": The language of difference, diversity and exclusion.*

Like SoHoo (2006), I use a collaborative critical inquiry model to create shared meanings with pre-service teachers rather than "privileging the researcher's interpretations as the 'authoritative voice'" (Awan 2007, p.52). SooHoo (2006) describes the "educational implications and acts of social justice" (p.177) which were inspired by hearing the narratives of her pre-service teachers and the impetus that the narratives provided to enact change in their classrooms. This kind of teacher inquiry is about "educational change, bottom-up or grass-roots framework for rethinking and redoing our work with children, families, and colleagues" (Meier 2007, p.2). The pre-service teachers were the experts of their own lived experiences, and together we co-constructed knowledge. Their participation in the project was critical to my understanding of the research questions. Their narratives challenged me to re-consider my viewpoint and prompted me to shift my thinking.

While my role in the focus group sessions was of facilitator rather than teacher, the structure of the sessions was strongly influenced by my pedagogical approach. A major aim of my research was to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to reflect and act on their practice. This has been influenced by the praxis inquiry model of teacher education which characterises the programs at Victoria University (Cherednichenko & Kruger 2005). As the pre-service teacher participants entered the final year of their teaching degree they seized many opportunities to initiate change as a result of their insights made in the focus group sessions and in their school practicum.

Creative and visual research methodology

Drawing on creative and visual research methodology for the focus group sessions, I prepared a number of creative activities to encourage participants' active involvement in the process of identifying

and analysing common themes. This involved participants in producing creative pieces as a way of exploring their own cultural identity and interrogating research questions (Gauntlett 2007; Awan 2007). The most significant of these was working with local artist Mira Vuk-Nikic to make a housebox. Houseboxes, as conceived by Vuk-Nikic, are three dimensional art works visually representing personal stories of family, culture and community. This activity was completed over several weeks and was an excellent reflexive vehicle through which the pre-service teachers shared their narratives about cultural identity. While most of our discussions during the focus group sessions were spontaneous and immediate, this task allowed time for pre-service teachers to reflect on and analyse their experiences more deeply. The value of this art based activity was that it provided each person with an aesthetic alternative to expressing themselves verbally.

This kind of artful practice is at the core of Arnold's (2012) research into pre-service teacher epiphanies into their professional learning, and assists in uncovering the layers of their "often elusive and resonating stories" (p.176). Arnold observes the effectiveness of art making, particularly for visual learners, and recognises its role in facilitating reflective processes for her cohort of pre-service teacher participants – an integral element of becoming a reflective practitioner. Polanyi's (1967) philosophical work about knowledge and its place in the world helps to explain the success of this approach, particularly his tenet that "we can know more than we can tell" (p.4). This pre-logical phase of knowing is difficult to articulate accurately through words, yet the creative arts can provide a vehicle to make sense of and express this "tacit knowledge" (Polanyi, 1967).

The success of the housebox activity was reflected in the fact that two pre-service teachers implemented the activity across the entire year 3/4 cohort at their placement school and participated in a final community exhibition of 1000 of the boxes. In addition to the houseboxes, several of the pre-service teachers engaged their students in the production of creative visual materials including culture pizzas, Y charts and poems around the themes of diversity. These pieces, as well as the class discussion that was generated around them, provided another layer of rich data for this research. I return to the possibilities of art creation in educational contexts in the section: *Using Artful practice as a discursive device to explore cultural identity.*

A/r/tography and the film

This research is also influenced by the work of a/r/tographers (Springgay et al. 2007) in so far as it is a process of living inquiry which seeks to use art and teaching practices to shift perceptions and make

meaning of the world. "A/r/tography is a pedagogy for artistry – the art of researching, teaching, and learning in the creative, relational, generative spaces of intra/inter-personal multiplicity" (p.49). A/r/tography sometimes requires researchers to "strengthen aspects of themselves that are not areas of strength: for instance, artists expand their educational interests, skills and abilities while educators enrich their artistic endeavours" (p.75).

The film is the creative product – the art work – of this thesis, and as such exists in its own right. Creating it provided me with the opportunity to hone my "artistic endeavours". The exegesis provides a written supplement to the film and provides a platform to extrapolate a range of central ideas that arise in the film.

Film is a medium that lends itself to educational research, as it is accessible and absorbing. Hollingsworth (2005) details the virtues of using classroom video as data for educational research which supports and improves teaching and learning in Australia. In particular, she points to the fact that it can be examined from the perspectives of both the teacher and the learner. Above all, "film has the possibility of reaching a far vaster audience than most academic writers could ever imagine…Your films can be seen and evaluated by all sorts of communities to which you'd otherwise have no access" (Barbash & Taylor 1997, p.2). The primary film data collected and analysed was of the focus group sessions, interviews with pre-service teachers and their mentor teachers, and classroom footage of the pre-service teachers completing their final six week block in a primary school. The footage of the focus group sessions has predominantly been used as data for the exegesis while the footage of the classrooms and the interviews has been included in the final film. As with the written material, there is scope to use the footage in a variety of ways in the future.

Filming served multiple purposes. It generated data in its own right as an art form and provided source material to be edited into the final film which is explored in the exegesis. It was also useful as a reflexive device to chart the progress of discussions and to identify shifts in personal theorising and teaching practice. Re-visiting the footage during the editing stage and write up of the exegesis was useful and insightful. Much of the time I spent filming in classrooms was focussed on the technical aspects of operating two cameras: setting up shots, checking that the audio was working, replacing tapes, and making sure there was enough light. It was therefore difficult to give my full attention to the classroom dynamics and conversational nuances. Similarly, when I was facilitating the focus group sessions I was focussed on eliciting responses from all pre-service teachers and making sure they were all engaged in the activities and discussion. Coming back to the raw footage at different stages of the research gave me much needed space for more detailed observation.

Barbash and Taylor (1997, p.9) draw attention to the representational quality of film by highlighting the difference between a film's "diegesis" ("the story you construct in shooting and editing") and the "pro-filmic" ("what was really going on when you were shooting"). The term diegesis can be traced back to Plato's *Republic* in which it referred to "a story or a narration" (Gabbard, cited in Holbrook 2003, p. 207). In many ways it is similar to the narrative which unfolds in the exegesis. It draws on portraiture by integrating different aesthetic elements to illuminate some contextual details and themes over others. "The negotiation of balance in works of art and research portraits relies on the artist's or researcher's judgement – the manipulating of elements to find what is right, what works, and the equally important experience of deciding what does not fit and what needs to be reconsidered or excluded (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis 1997, p.33).

As a writer and a film-maker I was constantly making decisions as to what I would include and what I would edit out in constructing the narrative. Factors which influenced the editing of the film and the selection of some clips over others have included ethical considerations, aesthetics, integrity to original research questions, creativity, representation of the main themes, and many practical considerations such as the technical quality of the audio and visuals. As in the exegesis, of greatest importance was the desire to create something to engage audiences in a conversation. Again, drawing on the work of Polanyi (1967), the film enabled me to express tacit knowledge in an alternative manner to a written format. Film clips were juxtaposed to highlight multiple meanings of the same question or issue, visual images were sought to create metaphors, and music was added to evoke certain emotions as well as to allow audiences time to sit with their own thoughts and feelings.

The clips were sequenced to create a narrative arc based on Aristotle's three-act structure (Everett 2006), which is essentially a dramatic device with a beginning, middle and end. While Everett (2006) points out that documentaries do not fit neatly into three acts, I believe the film I have created does align itself with her key ideas of "launching the story", "portraying the incident" and "posing the central question". There is also the sub-narrative plot of a migrant story told through Shaun Tan's book *The Arrival* (2006). The reader is reminded in the viewing of the film, that the pages I chose synchronistically to include in the film were quite literally from the first, middle and last pages of Tan's book.

Film clips were arranged to reveal information at certain key points in the film. For example, in an early draft of the film I had omitted the clip in which Mat's mentor teacher Tammi discusses her daughters' Indonesian heritage - not seeing its relation to the film as important. When I showed this early draft to a colleague I was intrigued by the assumptions that she made about Tammi. These were largely based

on Tammi's comment of "teaching to the dominant culture" and led my colleague to presume Tammi's perspectives were quite narrowly situated within a dominant culture paradigm. When I revealed to her the Indonesian background of Tammi's daughters, I was interested in how quickly she re-evaluated her initial assumptions. This prompted me to include the clip, but withhold it until the end, with the intention that some audiences may similarly be challenged to re-consider and re-interpret their initial assumptions.

This demonstrates how film as artwork "creates a discourse and interaction with their viewing audience" (Jarvis 2007, p.202). In *Articulating the tacit dimension in artmaking* Jarvis (2007) discusses the analogy of the artist as puppeteer "able to transform the art of viewing (the viewing experience) by means of technical trickery. This is important to emphasize because it reveals that the artist is in command of what is being shown and, in the completion of a work which appears 'effortless', there is a deliberate attempt to conceal previous procedures in the searching for a particular stylistic effect or appearance" (p.202).

Background to the research

My daughter Emilia (aged 4) asked my husband why people had different colour skin.

He attempted an explanation about different cultures.

She then asked if there was a "best" colour you could be.

"All people are equal" he explained "but some people judge other people by the colour

of their skin"

"That doesn't make sense" she said "Aren't we all the same because everyone has a heart...don't

they??..."

Then she asked with further insight...

"Why aren't there any striped people Dad?"

Perhaps in a world of striped people an inquiry such as this wouldn't be necessary! However the reality is that in Australia some cultures, skin colours and ancestries are valued more than others, despite our policy of multiculturalism, which endeavours to promote inclusion and equality. This introduction sets the scene for this research by giving an overview of Australia's culturally diverse fabric, contextualising the policy of multiculturalism, drawing attention to the gaps between policy and practice and emphasising the potential that schools have in facilitating social change. It also locates the study and gives an overview of the methods used. I begin with my motivation for undertaking this research.

The impetus for this research

My decision to explore culturally responsive education has come about through a range of experiences as a teacher of English as an Additional Language (EAL) working in the community sector, a teacher educator (2000-ongoing) in the College of Education at Victoria University and a mother of three living and working in Melbourne's culturally diverse western suburbs. Culturally responsive teaching, for me, is about more than having a culturally inclusive curriculum and pedagogy in place. It is about actively engaging teachers at all levels of education in a life long journey to bring to consciousness "tacit knowledge" (Polanyi 1967) of the inequalities and oppression caused by socially constructed categories of cultural difference. As a teacher educator, I am particularly interested in the opportunities pre-service teachers have to effect social change – to challenge these inequities and encourage their students to follow socially just pathways.

Culturally responsive teaching has been characterised by theorists and scholars as pedagogy that empowers students from diverse ethnic groups by teaching "*to and through* their personal and cultural strengths" (Gay 2010, p.26). It seeks to redress many of the societal and academic inequities that students from cultural minorities have experienced in our education systems by drawing on their cultural knowledge, language, literacies and life experiences to make learning more relevant, effective and authentic (Gay 2010; Nieto 2010).

There are a range of terms that have been used interchangeably in discourse around culturally responsive teaching. It has also been referred to as "culturally relevant", "culturally inclusive" and "culturally sensitive". Paris (2012) believes that the terminology "responsive" and "relevant" pedagogy does not go far enough in fostering cultural pluralism and suggests we adopt an alternative term - "culturally *sustaining* pedagogy" [my italics]. He convincingly argues that this term embodies the best practices and principles of culturally responsive pedagogy in that it sustains cultural and linguistic competence, but it extends beyond that by enabling students to attain "dominant cultural competence" necessary for success in a globalised world (p. 95). It is therefore inclusive of students from both marginalised and dominant cultures.

In this exegesis a number of terms such as 'Anglo-Celtic', 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'Anglo-Australian' are used interchangeably. This fluid use of language is not intended to include or exclude certain groups, but rather is reflective of the language used in the literature and by the pre-service teacher participants. More important than settling on one particular fixed term, is conveying meaning by observing the overlapping characteristics of these various terms, as I argue in *Part 2 Introduction.*

An experience early in my career as a teacher educator in 2002 prompted me to think about the role of teacher education programmes in preparing pre-service teachers to develop culturally responsive practices and the challenges teacher educators face as they work towards supporting their pre-service teachers to understand the issues around equity and social justice (Potts & Schlichting 2011, p.11). I was asked to organise a lecture for my new cohort of first year pre-service teachers enrolled in a Bachelor of Education degree. It was at the time when the Australian Government and media were responsible for much negative portrayal of asylum seekers through a language of fear and pejorative discourse (Klocker & Dunn 2003). As a way of dispelling some of the myths as well as building bridges, I invited three former English as an Additional Language (EAL) students of mine who were seeking asylum in Australia to speak to my class:

Nahal stands nervously at the front of the lecture theatre. In very broken English she retells her story of escaping Afghanistan – watching as members of her family are killed; painfully waiting to be reunited with her young daughter in Australia; not knowing the fate of other family members. My students sit in stunned silence as her story reverberates from the cold walls of the lecture theatre. When she has finished she shakily sits down. Yusuf and Zaid slowly edge towards the front of the stage and turn to face the group. They share with us their perilous journey to Australia – the loss, the hope, the continuing uncertainties. Zaid breaks down as he recounts his escape from persecution in Iraq.

After they have finished talking, some of my students move tentatively towards the stage. I notice two male students offer a consoling pat on the shoulder to the Iraqi men, others shake their hands. I hear some of the women thanking them for bravely sharing their personal stories. One young student, brushing a tear from her cheek, explains that she has never heard a personal story like this before. She is profoundly moved, and confesses, "I now realise I've been pretty racist all my life. I've just listened to the views of my Mum and Dad, and also the media."

The scene is now set for some sensitive class discussion around responding to the diverse cultural, linguistic and emotional needs of students who may arrive as refugees or migrants. I set the group the task of posting a reflection inspired by the lecture to our email list.

With great anticipation I go to my inbox the next day. To my dismay, the first response I open reads

"There are already too many migrants in Australia. We shouldn't let any more in. They take all our jobs".

The attitudes expressed by "Steve" in the email indicated a general disdain for and resentment of "migrants". The tone of the email was vitriolic. His general sentiment was that we had enough problems with youth unemployment and Indigenous issues to take on the problems of migrants. This experience was distressing and problematic for me. On a personal level, I was upset at what I saw as a lack of compassion for the plight of the guest speakers. On a professional level it appeared that the lecture had backfired in achieving what I had intended. I was also conflicted. Surely Steve was entitled to have his opinion about migration, yet how would this attitude manifest itself when he had his own class? What capacity did he have to teach children whose language, colour and cultural practices were different from his own? I felt it was my responsibility to challenge his thinking and to open up some kind of conversation with the class, but felt ill equipped. In the few other instances in which I had detected undercurrents of racial prejudice in teacher education classroom discussions I had floundered –

vacillating uncomfortably between standing on moral high ground and inadvertently shutting down conversations with quips such as, "Gee, that's racist". Clearly neither of these approaches is effective.

It occurred to me that pre-service teachers would face similar dilemmas in their future teaching careers and I was interested in how they would respond. How confident did *they* feel in addressing racism in their classroom? How did their understanding of their own cultural identity impact on their classroom practice? What are the best ways to build culturally responsive classrooms? As teacher educators, how can we foster cultural sensitivity in pre-service teachers and effectively prepare them to teach? These questions are at the core of this research. They have prompted me to reflect on ways to engage pre-service teachers in meaningful dialogue about culture, identity and race and to work towards creating classrooms where everybody is genuinely included and represented.

Multicultural Australia: Is everybody really included?

Australia has always been a culturally and linguistically diverse country. Before white settlement Australia consisted of up to 300 Aboriginal nation-states with intricate kinship systems. Amongst these Indigenous kinship groups there was an estimated 250 languages and many more dialects spoken (NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs 2001). Our current population has been shaped by decades of immigration. A Grade 3/4 excursion to Melbourne's Immigration Museum organised by two of the pre-service teacher participants in this study brought this point home:

> *"Was anyone born overseas?"*
> *A few hands tentatively go up.*
> *"What country were your born in?" The passion of the immigration museum guide works its way into his voice, his hand movements, and his expression. It is difficult not to feel enthused at the unravelling of the children's origins.*
> *"I was born in England", answers a small voice at the back. Then others follow;*
> *"Ireland",*
> *"Macedonia"*
> *"England"*
> *The class is settled comfortably on the floor.*
> *"What if we go further back into your family? Who has a Mum or Dad who has migrated to Australia?"*
> *Nearly all hands go up this time, and the students proudly respond:*

"Palestine", "Greece", "Serbia", "Egypt", "New Zealand", "Chile", "Germany", "Jamaica", "Scotland".

By the time we go as far back as grandparents, there are very few hands which remain lowered. The guide is excited and pleased by the rich origins offered by the group. He gets down on his haunches so he is at eye level with all the children. As if sharing a secret with us, he whispers, "I promise – it's the way Australian history works. Unless you're an Aboriginal Australian you have a story in your family about immigrating to this country".

We are a nation drawn from over 200 ethnic backgrounds. It is therefore not only good policy, but common sense that we should make every effort to live together harmoniously, with an intrinsic respect and appreciation for cultural differences. The Australian Government has responded to cultural diversity through its public policy of multiculturalism, underpinned by principles of equitable social inclusion and participation. Pledging its unwavering support of multiculturalism, it launched a new national multicultural policy titled *The People of Australia* (The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council 2010). This policy explicitly acknowledges the value and benefit of cultural diversity and a commitment to equality of opportunity as well as a shared sense of belonging. It is interesting to note that while Australia was lauding the success of multiculturalism, it was being denounced as a failure in Britain and other parts of Europe (World News Europe 2011). Yet despite the best intentions of multicultural policies and a common national experience of immigration, there is a fragility when navigating cultural diversity in multicultural Australia. Within the broadbrush strokes of difference there are still inequities experienced by those who fall outside the hegemonic white mainstream. While Australia is often upheld as a multicultural success story, it seems that not everybody *is* sharing equality of opportunity or outcomes, regardless of their origins or ethnicity. This is supported by data from a 12– year national study titled *Challenging Racism: The Anti-Racism Research Project* (2008), which reports that nearly 85% of Australians have seen evidence of racial prejudice, and a similar percentage agree that something should be done to minimise it (University of Western Sydney 2008). Wise and Ali (2008) ask the pertinent question:

If Australia is a multicultural society in which cultural diversity is celebrated then why is it that cultures are valued differently?...Why for example, does the Muslim presence, produced through immigration, often present a perceived threat to the Australian national mosaic? Or why are Muslim beliefs and practices too often considered discordant with the patterns of public life in Australian cities? (p.17).

It became a preoccupation of mine during this enquiry to observe inequities based on skin colour, ethnic background, and origin. Once I started noticing them, I found them everywhere; in conversations with

friends and family, interactions with strangers, in the classroom, in the media – even in my own assumptions and stereotyping. In my home city of Melbourne we have experienced a spectrum ranging from overt racism to a more "subtle social racism" demonstrated "subliminally through a cultural hierarchy of arrogance" (Moodley 1999 p.151). During the course of this research there have been disturbing racial attacks on Indian students, racism within the ranks of the Victorian police force and the Australian army (Moor, 2010), ongoing widespread negative media representations (Klocker & Dunn, 2003) and divisive government rhetoric towards refugees and asylum seekers (May 2011). A black face routine that aired on a popular Australian TV entertainment programme provides an apposite metaphor for the lack of cultural awareness that can sometimes surface; while the guest US judge looked on in horror and disbelief, the Australian host and other panel members were genuinely stunned and surprised at the offence it had caused him (and many viewers).

Melbourne's Australian Football League (AFL) is considered by many as an important part of the city's cultural landscape, and as such provides an interesting barometer of views. While the AFL is committed to stamping out racism, racial vilification both on and off the footy field persists. The well respected Indigenous footy player Lance "Buddy" Franklin was called a "black c _ _ _ by a spectator at a match (Robinson 2011). Several other players were racially vilified in separate incidents, including Sudanese player Majak Daw. At a packed charity function, footy great Mal Brown referred to Indigenous AFL players as "cannibals" and joked that they were hard to pick at night because they were so dark (Hawthorne & Lane 2010).

The public discourse and political debate sparked by these incidents is lively, and offers interesting insights into popular opinion on issues of race, culture and identity: Mal Brown was "just joking", "minority groups are too sensitive", "political correctness has gone crazy". In this way "the dominant group, aspiring to keep up a non-discriminatory self-image, often trivialises and denies racism" (Essed 1997, p.144). This can lead to a "denial of the systemic nature of racism in society" (Feagin & Feagin, cited in Essed 1997, p.132). "The link between microevents of racist slander and the macrostructural context of racial injustice is crucial to understanding that racism permeates all levels of the social order" (Essed 1997, p.132).

While this research is principally concerned with unravelling pre-service teachers' perceptions of cultural identity and the implications this then has for their teaching practice, it is framed and informed by these broader issues of race, culture and identity. Schools are microcosms of society. They are not isolated from the day to day socio-political realities that influence them. As McLaren argues: "Despite intentions

to the contrary, schools reproduce and perpetuate the inequalities and injustices of society-at-large" (1998, p.153). "As educators, it is not our role to ensure that we reproduce society as it is. Rather, one of our key responsibilities is to work consciously and creatively to provide spaces for individuals to embrace principles of justice, tolerance and inclusion" (Rowan 2001, pp. 10-11). It is therefore helpful to locate pre-service teacher experiences in the wider context of Australia's relationship with culture and race by observing relevant contemporary issues. Not only does it help to underscore the importance of creating a pedagogy that is responsive to cultural diversity, but it also highlights its challenges. It acts as a constant reminder of the continual work to be done, and the risk of becoming complacent. Additionally, many of these incidents provided much of the discussion stimuli for the focus group sessions, and have stirred much of my own thinking.

School communities as sites of cultural transformation

The importance of embracing multiculturalism in schools is reflected in the Australian Government's investment in a range of education programs and strategies, which focus on developing global perspectives and building social cohesion. At both state and federal level, the Government explicitly mandates that the school community must "identify and address overt, subtle and institutionalised racism, stereotyping and other forms of prejudice" (DEECD 2009, p.5). Principles of inclusion have underpinned key policy and curriculum documents such as the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) and Principles of Learning and Teaching – or PoLT (DEECD 2012). In the development of the new Australian curriculum, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) addresses the importance of students engaging with and respecting diverse cultures and has included "Intercultural Understanding" as one of the seven general capabilities explicitly addressed in the content of every learning area. Yet despite these Government mandates there are still disturbing levels of racial prejudice experienced in schools. A report by Mansouri et al. titled *The Impact of Racism upon the Health and Wellbeing of Young Australians* (2009b) reveals that schools are in fact the "primary setting" of experiences of racism amongst young people, with 70 per cent of secondary school students reporting that they had been subjected to racism. The report details a high level of racist incidents experienced by students at secondary school not only from their peers, but also from teachers and administration staff who are "complicit in this behaviour either through their tolerance of racist behaviour in the classroom, or via the perpetration of it themselves" (p.64).

In our pluralist democratic society, education must be for *all* children. "All children", as Sapon-Shevin (1998) asserts, are "not just those who are clean, or who have agreeable parents, or who come to school "ready" to learn. *All* means *all* (p.4)". Ben Jelloun (1999, p.54) believes that a fundamental

purpose of schooling is to teach children that "human diversity is a source of wealth, not weakness". Ayers describes the role of education as one that opens the minds of its students, concluding that anything that limits this is 'anti-education' (1999, p.165). Teachers and schools have a critical role to play not only in combating racism and actively promoting awareness and respect of cultural differences, but also in ensuring that all children experience equality of opportunity and outcomes. Theorists and scholars writing in the field of culturally responsive teaching agree on the importance of improving educational experiences and outcomes for children from culturally diverse backgrounds by making teaching and learning relevant to their diverse knowledges, histories and experiences (Nieto 2010; Gay 2010; Banks & McGee Banks 2010; McLaren 1998; Hyde 2010). Banks (2006) recognises the opportunities that teachers have to influence their students, arguing that teachers hold the key to reducing racial conflict in the classroom and school environment through exhibiting positive attitudes and behaviour to cultural diversity. Gay (2010) sees the potential culturally responsive teachers have to become advocates and agents of social change.

Pre-service teachers, by virtue of the fact they are beginning their teaching careers, are particularly well positioned to become agents of social change and to make a positive impact on their students' lives by developing principles and practices that promote cultural inclusion. The narratives of Otherness inspired by SooHoo and her group of teacher candidates strongly suggest that: "teacher educators and teachers have a responsibility to facilitate action as well as awareness" (2006, p.198). While a culturally inclusive curriculum goes a long way towards achieving this goal, there is also an understanding that teachers need to interrogate their own cultural identity to develop a pedagogy that is truly culturally inclusive and responsive.

Victoria University's College of Education has historically been particularly sensitive to the needs of the community in the western region – where it is located – focusing largely on those least socially, culturally and economically advantaged. It promotes teaching principles and practices that support an awareness and understanding of student diversity and social inclusion, inscribed in the College's philosophy of "working with and in communities for social justice and equity" (School of Education 2009). This western region of Melbourne is home to a very culturally diverse population – 40% of residents were born overseas, mostly in non-English speaking countries. Half speak little to no English (Maribyrnong City Council 2012). Many of our pre-service teachers not only undertake their school placements in the west, but ultimately go on to find employment here. As a way of valuing and respecting the rich cultural diversity of their students, it is important that they explore their understanding of their own cultural identity – of the unique ways in which we are each acculturated, and

with our individual set of beliefs, ideas and values.

The study

Over the years I have enjoyed watching hundreds of pre-service teachers tentatively anticipate their first classroom teaching experiences. As their teaching journey evolves I have been inspired by their intelligence, creativity and will to make a positive impact in their classrooms.

This research involves seven of these pre-service teachers. Their experiences and perspectives are at the centre of the inquiry and function as a lens through which to examine the factors that shape cultural identity, and the implications of this on their classroom practice. This exegesis examines the ways in which a student's cultural background impacts on how he/she is included or excluded, and the role of teachers in effectively bridging this gap. The complexity of responding to diversity is elucidated through our conversations. Sometimes these conversations lead to new lines of inquiry and at other times leave us struggling to find answers. This only serves to highlight the life-long quest of such an inquiry.

It is hoped that these discussions, anecdotes, insights and questions will stimulate further dialogue about teaching practices, which effectively promote cultural inclusion – not just amongst those working in education, but amongst anybody who has an interest in social transformation. This is at the heart of the film and this exegesis.

Method

In my final week of teaching a third year core Bachelor of Education subject I gave my class of pre-service teachers an overview of my planned PhD research and invited them to join my inquiry. This was an ideal group from which to draw together participants, as I had already formed good rapport and a sense of trust with many of them. Additionally, many of them had shown a keen interest in the themes that I intended to explore in the research, as these themes had arisen as points of discussion throughout the year. Importantly, there was no conflict of interest in inviting these pre-service teachers to participate in my research, as I had completed assessing all of their work, and I knew I was not going to be teaching any of them the following year. I was also hopeful that a culturally diverse group of between six and eight participants would volunteer, so that a range of perspectives and responses could be recorded and analysed. Krueger & Casey (2000) suggest this is the optimum number of people to have in a focus group.

Seven pre-service teachers ultimately agreed to be part of the research and I set to work finding several primary schools prepared to place them for their fourth and final placement. The College of Education has a well-established network of 'Partnership' schools, at which Victoria University's pre-service teachers undertake their practicum placements, so I drew on established connections I had with these schools located in Melbourne's western suburbs.

The principals of Yarraville West Primary School, Newport Primary School, Sunshine North Primary School and Coburg North Primary School agreed to participate in the research and discussed the project with prospective mentor teachers to gauge their interest and ensure they were comfortable with their classes being filmed. Permission was required from the pre-service teachers, schools, mentor teachers and parents/carers of the children who were filmed. In some cases consent was not given for children to be filmed, in which case care was taken not to include them in any shots. Over 100 hours of film was edited down to 36 minutes. I felt it was important that schools, mentors and pre-service teachers involved in the filming viewed the film at the final draft stage to ensure that they were comfortable with how they were represented and to ensure that students who did not have permission to be filmed were not inadvertently in the film.

In "signing up" to participate in the research, the seven pre-service teachers were aware they had the option to be filmed while they were teaching. It was not until the third school term of their final year, when their six week block was approaching, that I asked them and their mentors to decide whether they felt comfortable with this idea. I originally envisaged that only one or two pre-service teachers would agree to being filmed in their classrooms, but when the time came they all expressed an interest. Unfortunately the placement arrangements of two pre-service teachers (Jenna and Helen) did not readily permit them to be filmed in their classrooms. It is also worth noting that for various reasons not all pre-service teachers attended every focus group session. Thus, where excerpts of conversations are included in the exegesis it is because it reflects those in attendance rather than biasing some participant responses over others.

Focus group sessions

There were many methodological factors which influenced my decision to use focus group sessions as the primary method of collecting data from the pre-service teacher participants. Focus groups, as described by Barbour and Kitzinger (1999), are group discussions exploring a specific set of issues in which data are generated by the explicit use of group interaction. They are about "establishing and

facilitating a discussion and not interviewing a group by exchanging questions and answers between the interviewee and interviewer" (Gilflores & Alonso 1995, p.85). Engaging people in meaningful interaction through conversation is central to my research, as the title of the research film *Classroom Conversations Around Culture* and the narrative inquiry approach I take suggests. I wanted to create an environment that encouraged storytelling, question-asking and the development of ideas. Unravelling opinions and sharing insights in an interactive group situation leads to a richer and deeper understanding and awareness of issues.

This "synergetic approach" (Litosseliti 2007) in which participants build on the views expressed by other group members and respond to each other's experiences and perspectives (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999) encourages a multiplicity of views and results in "obtaining rich amounts of data and different perspectives on a topic" (Litosseliti 2007, pp.18–19). The inherent participatory nature of focus groups and the sense of partnership between researchers and participants that involves shared activities and understandings (Baker and Hinton 1999) complements my pedagogical approach.

A distinguishing elements of focus groups is that they encourage "participants to generate their own questions, frames and concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms, in their own vocabulary" (Barbour & Kitzinger 1999). This mirrors my pedagogical approach and correlates with my epistemological beliefs about knowledge and meaning-making as a socially constructed activity. Participants were actively encouraged to guide discussion, ask questions and respectfully challenge the views of others, resulting in authentic conversations between participants and myself. At the end of each focus group session I asked pre-service teacher participants to write down questions they would like to discuss at future sessions.

The focus group sessions were an important vehicle "for promoting an empowering, action-oriented form of research in education" (Williams & Katz 2001, p.1). Change occurred in a direct way as pre-service teachers evaluated their practice, re-assessed their viewpoints and asked each other for opinions on dilemmas they faced. The focus group had a direct effect on the pre-service teachers' classroom practice, particularly in terms of the activities and conversation starters they adapted for their students. I noticed a strong emphasis on cultural diversity and inclusion in the lessons they developed and delivered. In this way the focus group served as a "transformational act"; raising consciousness and empowering participants (Johnson 1997). Our sessions together offered me important insights into improving my own practice, as I was able to readily reflect on the approaches I used that were effective

in supporting pre-service teachers to reflect on and change their practice. I am mirroring these in my current practice.

A range of factors contributed to the preparation and organisation of the focus group session program. A subject at Victoria University is typically three hours a week for twelve weeks and a range of topics are taught to a class of approximately 20 students. Given the nature of the focus group, I believed eight focus group sessions of three hours each spread across two semesters would allow us enough time to cover the research questions in depth. I liked the symmetry of devoting half the time to exploring research question one and the other half to exploring research question two. Therefore focus groups were spread one month apart, with four sessions in semester one to explore question one and four sessions in semester two to explore question two. The exact timing and spacing of focus group sessions was influenced by practical considerations such as the university semesters, school terms, school practicum demands and pre-service teacher availability.

Originally I planned to use follow-up interviews as a way of collecting more in-depth data from conversations with individual pre-service teachers. Ultimately, however, I was very satisfied with the depth and breadth of the data collected from the focus group sessions. For the purpose of the film, however, there were two technical reasons why I chose to film individual pre-service teachers outside of the focus group setting. The first was because it was very difficult to edit audio segments from focus group conversations in which people were interjecting and the point being made by the speaker was sometimes indirect or peppered with asides. The second reason was because the conference room in which the majority of our sessions took place was not particularly aesthetically interesting. Therefore, I invited pre-service teachers to respond to questions we had covered in the focus group sessions in settings which helped locate the film in the western suburbs of Melbourne. For example, under the Westgate Bridge, along the shipping container-lined Footscray Road and on the railway line crossing the Maribyrnong River.

Similarly, the interviews with pre-service teachers and their mentor teachers were used predominantly to support the narrative of the film as well as to contextualise their relationship and to set the scene of the school. Some of the questions asked in these interviews were:

- What is the student demographic in your school?

- How does your cultural background influence the way you teach?

- What do you think a culturally responsive classroom looks like?

- In what ways does the school curriculum take into consideration a variety of cultural perspectives and values?

- What factors contribute to the success or failure of students from diverse cultural backgrounds?

- What role does the teacher and school have in promoting understanding between different cultural groups?

A combination of approaches was used to analyse the data. All eight focus group sessions were recorded on a video camera. At the end of each session I transcribed these and wrote summary notes which contextualised conversations. New themes and questions which arose in discussions informed the following sessions. When all sessions were complete I used the computer software program NVivo to categorise the dominant themes, by "drawing together and comparing discussion of similar themes" (Barbour & Kitzinger 1999, p.22).

Through preliminary research I was aware of the importance of dedicating time to exploring pre-service teachers' notions of their own cultural identity, thus in planning the eight focus group sessions I felt it was important for pre-service teachers to have time to consider who they were in terms of their cultural identity. Exploring our roots enables us to make connections with the past and gain a broader understanding of our cultural identity; the influences that shape us, and how it positions us in society. Without this introspection, discussion can lead to an Othering discourse: an objectifying and homogenising of "those" people different from "us". Our first four sessions were therefore framed around the core question:

What shapes pre-service teachers' knowledge and understanding of cultural identity?

This was a time to reflect on personal experiences of cultural identity; to unpack what it is, how it is shaped and to investigate how we perceive ourselves and others. Discussion, reflection and analysis around this question is organised into Part 1 of this exegesis. Equipped with a greater understanding of themselves and having a familiarity with a range of issues around culture, identity and race, the last four focus group sessions were devoted to moving the focus back to teaching and learning, and considering the second interrelated research question:

How does a pre-service teacher's knowledge and understanding of cultural identity impact on his/her teaching practice?

This question frames Part 2 of the exegesis and includes consideration of how teachers can best include cultural diversity in their classrooms. While these initial two research questions were the starting point for the research, our discussions were certainly not restricted to these. Given my desire to collaborate with pre-service teacher participants I thought it was important to encourage them to engage in the inquiry process by asking their own questions. At the end of each focus group session I asked them to write down any questions they had. I also made a note of questions which were raised during each session and topics which we grappled with and needed to explore in more depth. These assisted me in planning the subsequent focus group and their questions often guided our future discussions, as you can see from the focus group session outlines in Appendix 1. In this way many of the questions evolved from our discussions and were formative rather than summative. This reinforced the collaborative nature of the project.

In the focus group sessions I explored the research questions through inquiry activities and guided conversations. In these sessions and in the follow-up one-on-one interviews I used a "semi-structured questioning approach, which is a key feature of focus group methodology and which relies on participants' responses" (Litosseliti, 2007, p.3) to allow for multiple responses. During their six week school practicum, some pre-service teachers had the flexibility to develop and deliver dynamic lessons around the themes of cultural identity. Our discussions involved critical self-reflection and attempted to de-construct individual and group experiences.

Barbour and Kitzinger (1999) highlight the usefulness of using stimulus materials and a range of exercises in focus groups. This was certainly a key feature of the focus group sessions I facilitated and, I believe, contributed to the enjoyable and relaxed atmosphere of the sessions. In planning the eight focus group sessions I gave much thought about how best to develop exercises to critically engage group members by designing a range of individual and collective tasks. Some of the activities which I integrated included creating a cultural mind map, stream of consciousness writing activities, sharing of cultural artifacts, questionnaires, vignettes, a group poetry writing activity, role play, creating family trees, responses to theoretical readings and newspaper articles. Community engagement is an important aspect of teacher education therefore to further engage participants and stimulate discussion I organised two relevant guest speakers for two of the focus group sessions.

The first guest was local artist Mira Vuk-Nikic. As noted earlier, Vuk-Nikic was working on the community housebox project; an idea she conceived to encourage school students and their families to explore their unique cultural stories. This involved students representing their stories through collecting a range of artifacts and then creatively displaying these on the inside and outside of the boxes. I invited Vuk-Nikic to create houseboxes with the pre-service teacher participants, and used their engagement in this art project as a vehicle for generating discussion about their cultural identities. Our second guest was author and illustrator Shaun Tan. I have long admired the work of Shaun Tan, and have shared his books with many pre-service teachers over the years. His sophisticated picture books explore migrant experiences, colonisation, identity and belonging. His visit provided an opportunity for pre-service teachers to discuss the aforementioned themes and explore his work in the context of his own cultural identity. It also inspired some pre-service teachers to use his books *The Arrival* (2006) and *Eric* (2010) in their classrooms to invite their young readers to reflect on issues of culture and identity.

The visits by Vuk-Nikic and Tan enriched group conversations by providing opportunities for participants to discuss the themes of the research with people outside the focus group and to consider multiple viewpoints. My research journey has been enriched by pre-service teachers' narratives and insights, which have illuminated different ways of seeing things and prompted new questions. Parallel to the investigation of pre-service teachers' responses to research questions was my own reflexive journey of my cultural identity – what this signifies for me, and how it positions me in society.

Insider/outsider research

Qualitative researchers are sometimes situated either squarely inside *or* outside the membership group they are studying. My relationship with the seven pre-service teacher participants was much more complex than this. Clearly I was an outsider in terms of being a teacher educator doing post-graduate studies rather than a pre-service teacher completing a degree; however, there was the common membership of all belonging to the teaching profession, which extended to sharing similar teacher identities, language and experiential bases (Asselin 2003). Because I was working with a heterogeneous group of people with "multidimensional identities" (Kerstetter 2012) in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, geographic location and experience, my insider/outsider status constantly shifted depending on the topic we were discussing and the group member sharing at the time. There were no absolutes in terms of similarities and differences with group members. At times I shared identities, experiences, perspectives and opinions with participants and at other times I did not. Recent research has emphasised the permeable boundaries of this insider/outsider dichotomy (McNess, Arthur & Crossley 2013; Corbin Dwyer & Buckle 2009; Kerstetter 2012). Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) term

this "the space between." The personal narratives I provide in the exegesis and film are intended to assist the reader to identify where I am positioned within this space.

Insider/outsider status is historically about the power relationship a researcher has with the group he/she is studying: "The researcher is the one with power; the researched is the one without power" (Rabe 2003, p.150). While I deliberately chose pre-service teachers who I was not teaching to lessen any power differential, I acknowledge that I played a leadership role in shaping our conversations and was ultimately the one publishing the research. I worked to actively diminish this power differential by encouraging the group to see my role as a facilitator rather than lecturer, and emphasised that they were the experts of their own lived experiences and that there were no right or wrong responses. During the inquiry I also encouraged pre-service teachers to raise their own questions, which I used to frame future conversations (see Appendix 1). This helped to establish an environment that enabled us to work cooperatively and collaboratively, with mutually beneficial outcomes (SooHoo 2006).

I believe the rapport I had developed with the pre-service teachers when they were my students influenced the level of trust, honesty and openness they exhibited during our focus group sessions. This sense of trust was exemplified by the fact that pre-service teachers were comfortable with me using their real names in the film and the exegesis despite my offer to use pseudonyms. Additionally they never seemed concerned about how they would be represented in the film. I had assured them that if there was ever anything they said in the focus group sessions that they would like deleted from the video tapes that I would happily comply. I believe that there *were* in fact things said in the focus group sessions which they would have preferred not to make the final edit, yet rather than notify me of these, there seemed to be an implicit trust that I would not include these in the final film.

Because my insider/outsider status was fluid it is difficult to say how it affected the collection and analysis of data. Certainly I believe the quality and depth of the data collected were richer as a result of having taught the pre-service teachers during their Bachelor of Education degree and belonging to the teaching profession. In terms of the data analysis, like Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) I find that depending on the research context I am writing about I move between writing "I", "we" and "them". Like them, my temptation is also to leave it to the reader to decide whether my shifting status has enhanced or hindered the analysis. Perhaps as Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) suggest, more important than a researcher being an insider or outsider is their "ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one's research participants and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience" (p.59). This, I believe, I was.

Part 1: Setting the scene on culture, identity and language

Exploring our cultural identity

My surname is Tartakover. It amuses me that it is so often misspelled, as it is written exactly as it sounds. I was once told it was Polish for windmill, and for many years believed my roots were Polish. In my early 20s I went to stay with a Polish friend in her home town of Lublin. I quickly discovered that Tartakover wasn't a Polish name for windmill – in fact it wasn't Polish for anything! I scoured the telephone directory in the hope of finding some distant relatives, but to no avail. I met some travellers from Russia who told me Tartakover was as common as "Smith" in Northern Russia.

My mother's maiden name was Blackstock. This side of the family can be traced back to Glasgow, Belfast and Wales.

My paternal grandfather had a Jewish heritage. A family tree depicts the first Tartakovers arriving in Australia from France in the mid-1800s. There is even a Sarah Tartakover who was married in a Parisian synagogue before embarking on her journey to Australia. On more than one occasion my aunt has highlighted the fact that had I been in Europe during the Holocaust, my Jewish ancestry would have marked me for the gas chambers.

At university I had a philosophy lecturer who was a chess aficionado. I remember him running down the hall once to catch up with me. He had just photocopied some pages from a chess book about the great chess grandmaster, Savielly Grigorievitch Tartakover. He pointed out how an opening gambit was named after him – "the Tartakover move". He asked excitedly: 'Are you related to him?' I didn't want to disappoint him. "Maybe" – I tried to sound convincing and hoped that perhaps a connection could be traced.

I have a well-worn narrative that I have used since a young adult – one that is prompted by the casual conversation starter: "Tartakover, that's an unusual surname, where's that from?"
"I'm not sure, I think it's northern Russian, but my ancestors are from Ireland and Wales. I'm fifth generation Australian". I now ponder on this response – this claiming of status as fifth generation Australian and a lineage that can be traced back to the imperial homeland as if it somehow legitimises my right to be in Australia – to be an Australian. I've never been asked "Where are you from?" As a white skinned, blue eyed woman whose mother tongue is English I fit seamlessly into the dominant

culture.

Our cultural identity is intrinsically tied to our notion of self. Who we are and how others perceive us profoundly affects the way we position ourselves within society as well as the way we are positioned. The idea of teachers and pre-service teachers developing their cultural awareness by exploring their own cultural identity, attitudes and biases, is one that has been well documented (Trumbull & Pacheco 2005; Zeichner et al.1998; Klein 2006, Soo Hoo 2006; Banks 2006). Zeichner et al. (1998, p.168) suggest: "In order for prospective teachers to become effective teachers in our multicultural society, they must first understand their own identities as complex multidimensional people in a multicultural society". He goes on to point out the "multiple identities" that we each possess are "formed through a unique and complex intersection of race, ethnicity, social class, gender, language, religion, sexual orientation and ability" (p.168). Identity is not a unified concept, which can be easily deconstructed (Hall & du Gay 1996). Therefore, while my research focuses on cultural identity, it is clearly difficult, if not impossible, to explore it in isolation from these other aspects of our identity. The other challenge of investigating cultural identity is that while it is often associated with ethnicity and race (sometimes interchangeably), it has wide ranging interpretations beyond this. So what exactly *is* "cultural identity"?

When she was in grade 3, my eldest daughter Emilia was asked to bring a "cultural suitcase" to class as part of a class inquiry into cultural identity. In helping her to pack her suitcase my husband and I drew on our distant Irish, English and French ancestry. We sent her off with an eclectic assortment of artifacts; everything from a Beatles song book to a family tree tracing the first Tartakovers to come to Australia. We even threw in some potatoes to represent the potato famine in Ireland. She studiously painted the Irish, English and French flags on the outside of the suitcase. I asked what her classmates had brought in to share. She was interested in Ajlam's prayer mat and the fact that she wakes up in the middle of the night to pray. She was also impressed by Jessie's Irish fiddle. I asked her if any of the items she'd packed were meaningful to her. She nonchalantly replied: "No, not really".

In helping Emilia pack her suitcase we had conceived "culture" as something "sentimental", reducing it to "little more than a yearning for a past that never existed, or an idealized, sanitized version of what exists in reality" (Nieto 2008, p.129). According to Nieto (2010), this results in a "'culture on a pedestal' that bears little resemblance to the messy and contradictory culture of real life" (p.9). Clearly none of the items in Emilia's suitcase resonated with her in any way. Granted that she was very young to have a cogent grasp of her cultural background and the implications this had on her identity, the fact remains that it can be a complex task to unravel the many intricate layers of our cultural identity. We had very

narrowly reduced Emilia's cultural identity to her distant ancestral heritage, about which she had very little experience or interest. Drawing from other anecdotal experiences, it appears that this is a typically Australian response to the question of locating one's culture. Perhaps valuing our historic past is linked with our colonial past, serving as a way of preserving our Anglo-settler identity (Ireland 2002). This would explain the response in my personal narrative of cultural identity, which favours my Irish and Welsh background over my Jewish one despite, like Emilia, having no real connection with any of them. This "choice" of ancestry may also be explained by awareness as a young adult that having a Jewish background was more controversial and possibly less "acceptable" than an innocuous Irish and Welsh one. This was reinforced by jokes I'd heard as a child made by some adult family members and friends, which depicted Jews as mean spirited, conniving and untrustworthy.

These reveries prompted me to consider how the pre-service teacher participants involved in my study identified with their cultural identity and the meanings they abstracted from the term. Rather than turning to social theorists for a definition, or imposing my own meaning on them, our inquiry commenced with a series of brainstorming tasks around the question:

"How do you see yourself in terms of your cultural identity?"

Initial responses were largely limited to ancestral heritage; birthplace, birthplace of parents and grandparents as well as migrant stories of forebears and origins of surnames:

Emily describes herself as a "rural Victorian country girl". Brought up in Mildura, her background is English, Irish and German. On her German side, her great great grandmother had to change her name to live in Australia. She says:

> I think people perceive me as Australian – as just a normal Australian, but I suppose if they look at the history of my family there's a lot that's in there that you can't see from the surface. In the country there wasn't a lot of cultural diversity, there was only Australians and then there were Italians and Greeks. The thing I remember most is the Italian boy trading salami for mandarins with the Australian boy.

Jacinta: The first thing to come to mind was my background; Polish Greek and Ukrainian... I'm Australian but I was brought up quite strongly with strong Greek values. So we often went to Greek Church during Easter and I went to Greek school and did Greek dancing while I was

growing up. So I identify with the Greek side quite strongly – unfortunately with the Ukrainian side not so much because my Mum never was able to identify with her Ukrainian side, mostly because my grandparents had difficulty dealing with the war, so I think that played a big part of it.

Jenna: I'm Australian with Scottish and Japanese tendencies. My grandparents and Mum are from Scotland and I lived in Japan for 6 years so I see that as part of my cultural identity.

Mat confesses that he doesn't really know what his cultural identity is:

I'm Australian...I don't really know much about my background. I know my mum's maiden name is German, but don't know how far back it goes. As far as I know my Dad's Australian. I'm into sport, that's the Australian culture in me I guess. I know there's this expected Australian culture – drinking culture, but I don't really go along with that. I think I've just got my own personal culture that doesn't fit in anywhere...I just don't know really.

Abdul identifies with his Arabic, African and Muslim identity – shaped by the languages he speaks Tigrinya (Eritrean) and Amharic (Ethiopian):

As an Eritrean born, living in Ethiopia at that time I had to decide whether to stay and face the consequences or leave the country. I came to Australia in 1991 as a skilled migrant. My son was born in '95 after we got our Australian citizenship, so he's 100% Australian. My daughter was born in '98, she's 11 now.

Helen shares her parents' story and the origin of her surname:

My mother is Vietnamese. My last name is Tam. It wasn't my father's last name to begin with, my real last name is Sam but it brings us back to history…My father grew up in Vietnam but is of Chinese origin and because he's of Chinese origin and they had communism, they kicked him out, but before they did that he was in some kind of detention centre. They detained him there and made him change his name…so Tam is a translation of Sam in Vietnamese.

Sabrina's grandma on her Mum's side was Spanish. They anglicised her name when they came to Australia:

On my Dad's side there's Welsh and Scottish and English. My Dad was born in Nigeria, and lived there until his family moved to Australia when he was sixteen.

Some of these pre-service teachers also shared their personal qualities, passions and interests, experiences travelling, significant family members and their teacher identity as being important elements of their cultural identity. In later sessions we used a range of activities to explore cultural identity in more depth. These included creating a housebox, tracing our family tree, interviewing family members and presenting a cultural artifact. These prompted pre-service teachers to rethink aspects of their past and elements of culture, which had previously not been considered. It didn't take long for their narratives to shift from temporal understandings of ancestral roots, to broader understandings of cultural identity. This included reflections on how their cultural identity was shaped by friends, place, religion, sport, the community they were born into or spent the majority of time in, national history, the way they were brought up, how they live their life, upbringing, the values instilled by parents – even the way they speak. Helen's response to the same question about her cultural identity in a later session marked a significant shift:

At first when I started reflecting on my cultural identity I said "Vietnam and China", 'cause even though I was born here people ask, "what nationality are you?"…you automatically say, "I'm Vietnamese and Chinese…you don't really say you're Australian. But when I thought about it again, I thought I *am* Australian, I was *born* here.

It quickly became apparent that there were no immutable categories or elements of cultural identity. Our conversations revealed the ambiguous and amorphous nature of cultural identity, and the complexity in articulating and understanding its many conflicting elements. It is also interesting to note the omission of important categories of cultural identity such as gender, sexuality and disability. As previously mentioned in the section *The impetus for this research*, the impetus stemmed from my interest in exploring culture and ethnicity as categories of exclusion. Therefore, focus group conversations were framed around these categories and I did not prompt pre-service teachers to consider aspects of their cultural identities in terms of gender, sexuality and ability. Nor did I ask them how these identities privilege or disadvantage the individual.

The absence of these categories arising spontaneously in conversations is a reminder of the difficulty in interrogating one's own hegemonic positionality relative to sexual orientation, gender and ability norms. As Barbour and Kitzinger (1999) state : "White, heterosexual, able-bodied researchers rarely theorize,

or are even aware, of how their own identities or self-presentations impact on research participants, except where they are researching 'the other'. Indeed, being white or heterosexual is seldom a thought-out 'identity' in the same way as being black or gay" (Barbour & Kitzinger 1999).

As Banks (2006) writes: "Individuals are not just African American or White, male or female, or middle- or working-class. Even though we discuss variables such as race/ethnicity, gender, social class, and exceptionality (member of a special population, such as having a disability or being gifted) as separate variables, individuals belong to these groups at the same time" (p.76). While I am aware of the intersectionality of all these categories on the individual, as well as the necessity of situating them within multicultural education in order to address long-standing practices of exclusion, there wasn't the scope in this research to include them in my analysis. It would of course be interesting and worthwhile to replicate focus group sessions around the categories of gender, social class and ability in future research.

Religion and culture

Abdul makes the astute observation that "Culture is not something that you show like an ID card; it has to be practised – showed". Abdul's Muslim identity, along with his Eritrean and Ethiopian background, are the strongest parts of his cultural identity. In a later session in which Abdul shares his housebox, he states: "Religion is very important – that's why I put it on the ceiling of the house…The mosque is very important; we have to teach them [our children]". He then read some words in Arabic about Allah. This brings up the interesting interrelationship between culture and religion and raises the question of whether it is one and the same.

For Abdul, religion is deeply embedded in a cultural context; in fact it seems impossible for him to imagine a cultural identity without it embodying religion. On several occasions throughout the focus group sessions he refers to his "Muslim culture". I have observed this strong identification of religion as culture with Jewish-Australian and Muslim-Australian students, colleagues and friends. In a recent end of year portfolio presentations one pre-service teacher introduced himself as "A proud Muslim man". While I have not heard anybody refer to their "Protestant culture" or "Christian culture", on several occasions Helen mentions the importance of her Christian church group on her cultural identity, with reference to the church as an institutional base for bringing diverse groups of people together:

Ever since I was born we've had a very multicultural society surround us, mainly through religion – we're Christian. We regularly associate with the congregation, and when my parents first moved here they became very close to an Italian couple, and because of that we've had a big Italian influence. Every year we come together to do the wine pressing, and to make the tomato sauce for the year and likewise for them they have a very big Asian influence on them too. Like in our congregation there's people of all nationalities, and the common ground is worship.

McLaren describes culture "as a set of practices, ideologies, and values, from which different groups draw" and the ways in which "a social group lives out and makes sense of its 'given' circumstances and conditions of life" (1998, p.176). Depending on what view of culture you subscribe to, you may or may not consider religion as culture. hand Hill (2007, p.712) claim people who share religious identity can be meaningfully viewed as members of different cultures. Their examination of the differences between individualistic and collectivistic religions sheds light on how this shapes one's cultural identity:

...certain religious cultures value social connections as an integral element of religious life, and group affiliations are seen as important, even defining, parts of religious identity. In collectivistic religious cultures, people are seen as fundamentally connected with each other and their communities…people's religious and spiritual behavior may be tightly regulated through ritual and tradition.

This may explain why many members of collectivistic religions such as Judaism and Islam identify strongly with their religion as part of their cultural identity (although this may also be influenced by their national context).

The majority of Australians have an affiliation with a Christian religion, although this has declined from 96% in 1911 to 61% in 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). While some Christians may wear a cross to identify themselves, the cross as a Christian symbol is more ubiquitous and is often worn as an aesthetic rather religious symbol. For example, although I was christened in the Church of England as a child I do not consider myself religious and the only time I attend church is when I am invited to funerals, christenings or weddings. However, I like the aesthetic appeal of crosses, and have a ceramic cross from Seville, Spain and a necklace with a cross on it. As a Christian there is no religious imperative to wear a cross. In the last twenty years Australia has become increasingly secular, with a growing number of people who identify with spiritual rather than religious beliefs. In the 2006 consensus 19% of people reported having no religion (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). In contrast to Christianity,

religions such as Islam and Judaism have distinctive markers in dress, such as the yarmulke, hijab, niqab and burka. Dress codes are culturally and religiously determined and there are a number of practices, such as prayer rituals, fasting and eating Halal food, which are deeply embedded in daily life. While Muslim-Australians are culturally and linguistically heterogeneous, their Arabic and Middle-Eastern backgrounds (Wise & Ali 2008) combined with the wearing of religious garments (particularly in the case of women), mean that they are often visible against a backdrop of majority Anglo-Celtic Christians. This can heighten experiences of being perceived as a "double Other"– marginalised and discriminated against for being both Muslim and a migrant. Certainly Islamophobia is a real issue among Muslim families in Australia (Pe-Pua et al. 2010, p.12) and is powerfully expressed by Abdul in the research film when he says: "Some people think all Muslims are terrorists".

While Muslims have historically faced obstacles to fully integrating into Australian society, this has been heightened by the September 11 attacks and the subsequent "war on terror", which has "resulted in a racialised, exclusionary discourse of demonization, misrepresentation and mistrust aimed at Australians of Muslim and Arab backgrounds" (Mansouri & Wood 2008 p.2). This social reality for Muslims in Australia makes Abdul's comment all the more poignant.

Media discourse and political rhetoric has fuelled anti-Muslim sentiment by focussing on negative stereotypes and values which are seemingly at odds with Australian culture and morality (Mansouri & Wood 2008). This has had the devastating consequence of legitimising racism and discrimination against Muslims in terms of access to employment, housing and equitable educational experiences for young Muslim Australian students.

Zine, a Canadian educator and scholar, describes Islamophobic attitudes as more than an "irrational" fear and hatred of Muslims, and rather as "part of a rational system of power and domination that manifests as individual, ideological, and systemic forms of discrimination and oppression" (2004, p.113). With the realisation, post September 11, that existing educational frameworks lacked the discursive foundations and resources to respond to Islamophobia, Zine argued that the key to redressing this was the development of a transformative pedagogy which critically analysed and challenged how this systemic form of oppression operates in society: "Developing critical pedagogical tools to analyze and develop challenges to these systems of domination is part of building a transformative and liberatory pedagogy, one geared toward achieving greater social justice in both schools and society" (p.115). Some of the epistemological foundations for anti-Islamophobia education suggested by Zine include providing counter-narratives to Muslim tropes of "Otherness", developing a critical literacy to examine

how Muslim representation in politics and the media contribute to the chasm between "us" and "them" and interrogating the power play in systemic mechanisms through which Islamophobia is reinforced.

Kincheloe, Steinberg and Stonebanks (2010) also propose a liberatory framework to teach against Islamophobia, underpinned by critical pedagogy which aims to "assist teachers and students to move toward the emancipatory education path of critically considering reasons for Islamophobia and popular perceptions toward Islam, Muslims, and Arabic peoples" (p.xi). Recognising a dearth of resources and information on Muslims and Islam for educators, they propose a theoretical approach aimed at creating inclusive spaces in classrooms to actively participate and critique the world. This includes developing a "literacy of power" that enables the relationship between knowledge and power to be analysed and understood.

Reflecting on the success of a study titled *The Diversity Project*, Mansouri and Wood (2008) advocate a multi-pronged approach to education to improve the academic outcomes of Arab and Muslim students in Australian schools. This approach entails a strengthened commitment to partnerships between the school and the students' families, teaching approaches which recognise the lived experiences of the students and recognition and understanding of a student's cultural background.

> By developing students' sense of their various cultural identities, the model aims to give them the skills and knowledge necessary to access the mainstream culture as well as other cultures. It therefore promotes transformation across those areas that contribute to social, institutional and educational disadvantages often found alongside cultural difference (p.86).

While the above mentioned authors are writing from the perspective of specifically teaching against Islamohobia, much of what they propose is indeed relevant to an effective multicultural education which provides a socially just curriculum and pedagogy to improve the lives of all students. Many of the themes raised will be explored more generally in *Part 2: Educational contexts.*

Can you choose your cultural identity?

The fact that culture is "dynamic", "multifaceted" and "embedded in context" (Nieto 2010, p.10) explains conflicting ideas amongst group members about whether you are able to "choose" your cultural identity or not. The following dialogue also sheds light on the distinction between culture as ethnicity as opposed to culture as religion:

Jacinta: I think it's a choice...rather than something hard-wired. It's what feels right for you...like if you identify with your religion...It depends on how you define culture...It's about the culture you're exposed to and how much you choose to be exposed to it.

Sarah: Is there ever a situation where you don't have a choice or your cultural identity is imprinted on you?

Helen: You can choose to be of this faith, or become a better person, but you can't choose your background...You can't change the culture you come from; you can't change your nationality... your heritage.

Mat: I don't think my heritage plays that big a role in my cultural identity...not as much as other people. If I found out I was German, I don't think that would have an effect on my cultural identity at all, 'cause I haven't had it growing up.

Sabrina suggests one doesn't always have the privilege of choosing one's identity, and the way you are perceived by others is a significant factor in shaping your identity. To illustrate this point she shares a story about her cousin, who has an Italian background, and is greeted as an Italian when she bumps into people in the street:

…even if she didn't want to relate to that…she couldn't. People would still see her as Italian.

The question of who decides one's identity is an interesting one. Several articles written by Melbourne Herald Sun newspaper columnist Andrew Bolt highlight this disjuncture between self-identification and how one is perceived and identified by others. In 2009 Bolt wrote a series of articles titled: *It's so hip to be black* (2009a), *White is the new black* (2009b) and *White fellas in the black* (2009c), which accused eighteen light-skinned Aborigines of identifying with their Aboriginal heritage over other aspects of their cultural heritage to further their careers and receive a range of benefits and awards. He argued that these nine Aboriginal artists, activists and academics could have just as easily chosen to identify with other aspects of their ancestry, and suggested that they were rorting the system by unfairly competing with darker-skinned Aborigines for funding. The following excerpt from his article *It's so Hip to be Black* (Bolt 2009a) captures the gist of Bolt's snide and systematic attack:

> MEET the white face of a new black race – the political Aborigine.
>
> Meet, say, acclaimed St Kilda artist Bindi Cole, who was raised by her English-Jewish mother yet calls herself "Aboriginal but white".
>
> She rarely saw her part-Aboriginal father, and could in truth join any one of several ethnic groups, but chose Aboriginal, insisting on a racial identity you could not guess from her features.
>
> She also chose, incidentally, the one identity open to her that has political and career clout.

Bolt was ultimately found guilty of racial discrimination in a landmark Federal Court ruling. The Court declared that the "articles were reasonably likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate some Aboriginal persons of mixed descent who have a fairer, rather than darker, skin and who by a combination of descent, self-identification and communal recognition are recognised as Aboriginal persons" (Federal Court of Australia 2011).

In response to Bolt's claims, Quinn (2011) makes the excellent point about identity choice:

> Imagine, then, the degree of "freedom" enjoyed by the little girl who gets called "boong" or "coon" in the playground, even though she's relatively light skinned. Is she "choosing" to identify as Aboriginal, or is she having that "choice" made for her?

This insight is illuminated in a subsequent conversation between Jenna and Sabrina:

Jenna: In class Greg was asking, "Have you taught an Aboriginal person?"
We said, "No" and he asked, "But how do you know that?"

Sabrina: I do an Indigenous issues class and we were talking about that today, 'cause my lecturer has pale skin and very blonde hair and she's Aboriginal and she was saying, "I've never met an Aboriginal person that questions me about it or who thinks that it's weird that I'm white. It's never an issue for them, only white people question it".

It is certainly the case that there is more to identity than self-identification. Consider the re-elected President Barack Obama, who is as much white from his mother's Anglo-American background as he is black from his father's Kenyan side. Yet our perception of him is as a "black president". Similarly many

people would classify golfer Tiger Woods as simply African-American, although he "identifies himself as a mixture of African, Asian, white, and Amerindian background" (Alland 2002, p.53).

I will come to skin colour, markers of difference and perceptions of race in the section *Not so Skin Deep: Skin colour as the predominant identity marker*. For the moment, however, it is interesting to note that amongst these pre-service teachers there was little mention of their skin colour when describing their cultural identity in our initial discussions, compared to their comments in the final focus group session in which it was given more considered attention.

Dominant culture norms and the invisibility of identity

Almost everything we do is part of our cultural identity; the way we greet each other, eat, drink, sleep, drive a car, sit, make love and display affection. Our "[c]ulture provides rules for all important aspects of human social life, such as mating, aggression, and cooperation" (Matsumoto 2009, p.5). These everyday cultural practices are meaningful actions, which are shared by other group members, and carry with them "normative expectations" about how we should do things (Goodnow, Miller & Kissell 1995). The remarkable stoicism displayed by the Japanese after the devastating earthquake and tsunami in 2011 demonstrates how culture is deeply ingrained in the way we do things. It is not that Japanese people experienced less grief than anybody else would have under these circumstances, but rather culturally they have been socialised to refrain from showing public displays of emotion. Sabrina makes a similar point by telling us of the frustration caused by an American friend who doesn't understand the nuances of Australian greetings:

> Whenever you ask him, "How's it going?" he says "Oh, yeah…it's alright", but then goes into this long winded thing. And we're like, "Just say '*good*' !!!!" But that's a really Australian thing, you ask, "How are you going?" and you say "Yep good, see you later" and then you just keep going. And that's part of our culture, and they don't have that. There's a lot of stuff you do that you don't even realise.

Because dominant culture norms are socially and historically constructed, (predominantly from a white, male, Anglo-Western Eurocentric perspective) many aspects of our culture are invisible to us, particularly if one is a member of the dominant culture. They are accompanied by their own set of normative beliefs, values and expectations which form the "dominant ideology" and are "shared by the majority of individuals" (McLaren 1998, p182). As a member of the dominant culture it is particularly

difficult to develop a self-awareness of these social and cultural practices, precisely because of their normative nature. When the identity of minority groups are juxtaposed against these dominant culture norms they are often perceived as wanting, deficient – or Other. Using a Marxist paradigm to interrogate this idea further McLaren explains:

> The dominant culture is able to exercise domination over subordinate classes or groups through a process known as *hegemony.* Hegemony refers to the maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force *but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system, and the family.* By *social practices,* I refer to what people say and do (p.177).

A good example of the perceived threat posed to the dominant culture by minority group practices was illustrated when a group of Muslim women organised a one-off ban on skimpy swimwear for a family day at a suburban Melbourne swimming pool during Ramadan (SBS 2010). The day was intended as an inter-cultural celebration to promote water safety and to encourage Muslim women to use the pool. Despite being organised to take place out of hours and during winter, the idea prompted a public outcry. Non-Muslims resented the ban being imposed, and the incident spurned a number of vitriolic anti-Muslim blogs with an "our country, our rules" sentiment. As one blogger said: "Bikinis have been acceptable swimming attire for many decades now, so this should not change in order to accommodate a minority of people, at the expense of the freedom of the majority" (Gardiner 2010). There were also a number of Muslims who disagreed with the ban. In one focus group discussion around this topic Abdul commented:

> "I think it's stupid imposing my culture on the majority. I don't agree".

Perhaps for Abdul, there is the expectation that "people with different cultures should conform to the dominant monocultural canon and norms" (Hsieh 2006). Certainly for the vocal non-Muslim protestors there was the conviction that anybody who is "unable or unwilling to fit into this dominant culture" is marked as a "deficient identity" (Hsieh 2006).

Also at work is the "discernible role in power relationships" that "culture and cultural difference" plays (Nieto 2008, p.128). This is exemplified by the claim that many white people make that they do not have a culture: "Whites frequently do not experience their culture *as a culture* because as the officially sanctioned and high-status culture, it "just is"' (p. 130). A recurring theme in conversations during this

research was the feeling that being a white Anglo-Australian equated with "lacking a culture". This was accompanied by the desire to have a cultural identity beyond what is perceived as a bland Australian identity or an equally mundane one that can be traced back to an Anglo-Celtic origin.

Sabrina: Especially in the western suburbs, as a teenager, people would say, "What's your natio?" I'd say "My WHAT?" and they'd be like, "Your natio – your nationality. And I'd be like, "I don't know…well…I'm a quarter Spanish". There's an expectation that you have to have something to relate to 'cause there's not really "Australian" in the context they're talking about. To not have something to relate to…I don't like it, 'cause I feel like I'm missing something, that everybody else in Australia has something…and I'm like, "I want something else". Even when I had to do the cultural mind map I put "Australian", then "Welsh", then "Spanish", then I put "No culture", then I put "I feel like I'm lacking a culture". I feel like I don't have anything to identify with.

Sabrina first found out that she was a quarter Spanish when she was fourteen. She had just started flamenco dancing lessons, and her Mum said: "That's interesting 'cause your grandma's Spanish". Sabrina explains that her great grandfather was a Spanish sailor whose last name was Ricardo. He apparently jumped ship when he got to Australia, changed his name to Richards, and never spoke Spanish again. Sabrina now learns Spanish, and has Spanish speaking friends. Laughing, she says: "I've latched onto that!". We later find out that her boyfriend is one of only four Panamanians in Melbourne – another curious connection to her Spanish roots, in which Sabrina sees the humour!

Jenna echoes the sentiment of "lacking a culture". Having spent six years in Japan as an adolescent while her Dad worked for Holden, she talks about how she absorbed elements of Japanese culture whilst living there by making Japanese friends as well as learning about Japanese language and culture:

> For the first two or three years I'd experience massive culture shock when I'd come back to Melbourne – not so much when I'd come back to Japan…I felt like I'd changed, and a lot of people here hadn't changed…I never felt Japanese but I wanted to be Japanese, and I wanted to speak Japanese fluently and fit in…Am I grabbing onto Japanese culture because I feel I am lacking my own?...I want to keep my Australian heritage, but I'm looking forward to teaching overseas and taking on another identity.

Trumbull and Pacheco (2005, p.47) point out that while teachers and others from non-dominant groups are usually deeply aware of their own cultural identity, those in the dominant group (like Jenna) often

see themselves as not having a culture or ethnicity. This is because as white, middle-class people, they are rarely forced to examine their own cultural beliefs and practices, thus rendering their culture invisible to them: "The norms of daily life…are accepted as 'the way things ought to be'" (p.47). Adding to this, Nieto (2008) argues that this invisibility masks the "culture of power" accessed by white people and not available to those who are not white (p.130).

Emily, who is engaged to someone who is Mauritian, observes the expanding nature of her cultural identity beyond her ancestral roots, and the desire to at least partly adopt a Mauritian identity when they start their family:

> I think of it (cultural identity) in terms of future heritage, and the heritage of my kids, 'cause they'll be half Australian and half Mauritian. We've been talking about how we'll teach them both languages. Their grandparents will be in Mauritius. Once I marry into that family I'll see myself as an honorary Mauritian I guess, 'cause that's the way they treat you...So it's not only the past but the future as well.

In their narratives, Sabrina, Jenna and Emily highlight an interesting paradox. On the one hand our many discussions acknowledge the alienation and exclusion experienced by those who are perceived as Other, usually marked by their physical, cultural or religious deviation from an Anglo-Australian Christian norm. Yet these women's narratives speak of a desire to actively seek out new identities and align themselves with some aspect of this Other. Jenna tells us:

> I remember having a friend who was Greek and I went and stayed at her house in Sunshine, and she took me out and told her friends I was Serbian. And I remember thinking, "Cool, I'm a wog!!!"

Sabrina and Jenna both use the notion of "latching on to another culture" as a way of describing the process through which they actively appropriate aspects of that culture. Emily also speaks enthusiastically of "taking on" her fiancé's Mauritian culture. This is interesting, as historically cultural differences are viewed with fear and caution. Riggins contends that the exception to this is the phenomenon of exoticism (1997, p.5). Exoticism is the romanticisation of another culture. In particular it refers to the ways in which Eastern cultures are exoticised by the West. It can best be seen in Hollywood films, for example in the portrayal of exotic, erotic "oriental" women. It often leads to a reinforcing of the Other, by "corralling heterogeneous ethnic and/or 'racial' groups into fixed 'types' "

(Alexander & Knowles 2005, p.157). It is also perpetuated by a discourse that Anglo-Australian culture is either "boring", or "not a cultural identity", as Mat and Jenna testify:

Mat: All through school I felt that I didn't have a cultural identity because I was always asked where I was from. And when I said Australia there was always the question,"Oh, what about before that?" It was always "Australia", and I felt I was constantly hounded for not having a background.

Jenna: I think Australians think "I have to find something". I could be wrong, but Australia is essentially borrowed from England and a lot of the cultural things you think of are from England, and because people from Asia and Europe have such far back histories...that's why it's so confusing. When people ask you what nationality you are, and you say Australian, and they say, "No, what nationality are you really?" Maybe that's why a lot of Australians say they're confused or not really sure about their identity.

The fact that the terms "ethnicity" and "culture" are predominantly used in Australian multicultural discourse to refer to minorities (Hage 1998) further obfuscates notions of diversity within Anglo-Australian culture. It could be argued that there is some unintentional exoticising going on in Jenna, Sabrina and Emily's narratives, which reflects a desire to embrace a new, more interesting culture. On the other hand, there is equally a sense of genuine excitement of and curiosity in exploring a new culture and the belief that this adds a positive dimension to their existing cultural identity. In Emily's case there is the practical consideration of planning to have children, and choosing for them to enjoy two cultures as well as embracing her fiancé's family as part of her own. After two years of living in Japan, Jenna made a concerted effort to immerse herself in Japanese culture by spending more time with Japanese friends than with Western or English-speaking friends. Listening to the passion with which the three women talk about their experiences, I would argue that there is a genuine appreciation of cultural difference at work.

Valuing Difference: Developing an appreciation of diverse cultural identities

So what are the factors that influence us to value diversity? While there is no magic formula for creating citizens with a worldview which values difference and rejects prejudice, pre-service teachers offered clear insights about what had contributed to their own cultural awareness and acceptance of people from backgrounds different from their own. Parents, family, other role models and experiences of diverse cultures were cited as the main influences in shaping their identity whilst growing up. Those who were living or had lived in Melbourne's multicultural western suburbs believed that it had enriched their lives and given them an appreciation of diverse cultural groups. Helen cites her family's involvement in a Christian church group as significant in her development of positive attitudes towards diversity:

> I've always been culturally aware, because our church group is very multicultural. Even looking back at my childhood photos I have photos with dark people, with light people – I've always been exposed to cultural diversity...There are a lot of different cultures who came together, and my parents became friends with different people.

Jacinta: As a child I think I was pretty culturally aware 'cause I went to Greek school and I spoke a little bit of Ukrainian with my other grandmother, and also some Polish because Ukrainian and Polish are quite similar languages and that was spoken by my grandfather.

While exposure to people from diverse cultures is an important factor in building positive relationships, it is not, ipso facto, sufficient for building "mutually-rewarding relationships", as indicated by Harrison and Peacock (2010, p.879) in their research into the interactions between "home" and "international" higher education students at university. In fact many of the classroom environments they describe signify a substantive lack of social cohesion between students from culturally different backgrounds.

Pre-service teacher participants who had travelled, or spent time living overseas offered this as an important aspect in shaping their sense of cultural identity and awareness. Sabrina notes that experiencing first-hand the frustration of travelling to non-English speaking countries gives one an appreciation of how difficult it can be for migrants to learn English. Jacinta spent five months in Korea, and has travelled to other parts of Asia. She recounts an experience of travelling with a friend within China, and the feeling of isolation at being unable to communicate:

We were on a 30 hour train trip, and I just wanted a bottle of water, and I couldn't get that across. I felt that they weren't willing to help, and I felt frustrated – that was my first experience of racism – on the other side!

Jenna: Living in Japan has had a huge effect on my personality and the way I think…it wasn't 'till I went to Japan that I became really culturally aware – where I was the different one.

These experiences of what it is like to be the Other appear to have played a significant role in pre-service teachers' development of empathy and compassion towards people who are marginalised.

In the same way that parents and other role models can enhance one's positive appreciation of cultural differences, they can also impact adversely on how we respond to difference. Van Dijk (1997) notes the critical role that discourse plays in producing prejudice and racism: "From the socialisation talk of parents, children's books, and television programs to textbooks, news reports in the press, and other forms of public discourse, white people are engaged daily in communication about ethnic minorities and race relations" (Van Dijk 1997, p.31).

On several occasions pre-service teachers noted the almost complete absence of any tension caused by cultural or racial differences at the primary schools at which they were teaching. This view was supported by their mentor teachers, and was often accompanied by the discourse that "kids just see each other as kids, and they don't really notice the differences". This view would suggest that children are colour blind and that they don't observe physical markers of difference. The vignette I included in the section *Background to the research* about my daughter Emilia's interest in skin colour at the age of four years old would counter this argument. To interrogate this theory further I remember asking Emilia, who was seven at the time, what her first memory was of somebody who looked different from her. She recalled a vivid image of an Aboriginal man playing a didgeridoo outside the Victoria Market in Melbourne. This would have been when she was about three years old. I also asked pre-service teachers to reflect on a time in their childhood when they felt aware of difference:

Mat: Even in grade prep, one best friend was Chinese and the other was Italian and my dad always made fun of me saying, "Oh, he makes friends with *anybody*", it was sort of just playing. As a really young kid I didn't see them as different, I just saw them as kids.

Sarah: At what age do you think you become aware of difference?

Mat: I reckon grade three or four. I guess kids are kids and they'll just play with whoever…

Sabrina: It's funny 'cause like I've always thought that as well, and I was at the train station the other day and I was on the platform and there was the Mum on my side, this white lady, and she had her child with her and there was a lady on the other platform who had her two kids and they all had dark skin and then the kid said, "Mum, mum, why do those kids have dark skin?" and the lady's like, "I don't know, why do you have white skin?" and he's like…[shrugs and makes a quizzical confused face] and then sat down. I thought it was a really good response.

Jacinta: I remember seeing a dark person for the first time when I was really young, and I was fascinated, I couldn't stop staring. It ended up being a family friend that I hadn't met before, and Dad had to pull me aside and said "Stop staring". I remember just being so fascinated.

Sabrina: I had one of my students when I arrived in Melbourne who asked me "Why are you white?" and I said, "I don't know".

Abdul: I think with growing children we just have to let them go, do whatever they want, they are still young. But once we start interfering then we are putting something in their head. Like I remember once I was walking in Ikea, this man was carrying his daughter, and she saw me and said, "Black man!" and the dad said "Quiet, quiet!" But she was innocent, she was a baby…like your dad said [talking to Mat] "Why are they your friend?" and you start thinking, "So they *are* different?" So when this man said "Quiet, quiet!" How does she know that it's wrong? She saw a black man, and said, "Black man"; it's not a big deal.

Jenna: I remember in late primary school years I became aware of the difference...there was Australian, there was Italian, there was Filipino, but there was no judgement about it. I don't remember any of that…I just remember becoming aware.

These conflicting anecdotes reflect the contested theories around whether children are colour blind or not. Most authors (Klein 2006; Ben Jelloun 1999; York 2003) agree that we are born without an innate sense of racial prejudice, and as this research supports, it is something which is socially constructed from a range of influences, including parents, peers, teachers and the media. Drawing on research findings into pre-schoolers' awareness of difference and attitudes toward diversity, York (2003) reveals the surprisingly young age at which children become aware of cultural and racial differences. She asserts that babies as young as six months can notice skin colour, and by the time they are toddlers

they have developed a preference associated with skin colour (p.20). York explains that living in a racialised society, children quickly work out social values: "…young children pick up prejudice and stereotypes about themselves and other people simply as part of trying to make sense of their world" (York 2003, p.22). In the US children are socialised to fear people of color, in particular African-American men (2003, p.46). In her work with Australian pre-service teachers, Hickling-Hudson (2005) discovered that early conditioning cultivates a deep seated fear of Aborigines.

In contrast to the relative absence of racial prejudice in primary school, pre-service teachers acknowledged its prevalence in the secondary setting. They reflected on their own schooling experiences:

Mat: At my school probably from grade 5 up until year 12 it was always "wogs" versus "skips" in footy or soccer. There was never any thought about "Pick a team", it's just how it was, and I don't think anybody was excluded, except perhaps for people who were Asian I guess…

Jenna: They wouldn't even fit into that category…what's your category of "wog?"

Mat: Wogs were pretty much "the rest".

Jenna: When I started high school that's when I was aware of nationality and appearances…I remember how important it was at (names same school that she and Mat attended), it was "wogs" and "skips" and it was all about that…maybe that was from western suburbs…I was only there for a year and a half, and I got all that, and then I went to Japan, and it was the opposite. *I* felt excluded.

Jacinta: When I was really young my Dad sent me to Greek school, and I got picked on 'cause I had blonde hair, and I didn't understand…if I was Greek, how could I have blonde hair?…and that was a pinnacle moment for me, 'cause I remember thinking, "But I'm Greek and I've got blonde hair, why am I getting picked on?"

Perhaps the question we need to focus on is not whether children are colour blind or not, but how they are socialised to respond to cultural differences.

The Australian cultural disposition: What is Australian cultural identity anyway?

While there is no agreed upon national Australian identity, there are certainly many prevailing stereotypes of Australians and strong views of what it means to be Australian. There is clearly a perception about what the cultural fabric of Australia is, as indicated by letters to the editor in the Melbourne newspaper *The Age* around the time Julia Gillard was flagging the idea of off shore processing of Asylum seekers in East Timor. One reader suggested that those arriving by boats take refuge within a country more "culturally aligned" to their own. Our politicians in particular like to remind us of what it is to be "un-Australian". It is worth pondering whether, if refugees arriving by boat to Australia were of Aryan appearance, there would be a different response. In fact, a Republican candidate for US Presidency encapsulated this very sentiment in a disturbingly stark comment:

> If British subjects, fleeing a depression, were pouring into this country through Canada, there would be few alarms. The central objection to the present flood of illegals is they are not English-speaking white people from Western Europe; they are Spanish-speaking brown and black people from Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean (Bradlee Jr. cited in McLaren 1998, p. 274).

In one focus group I asked pre-service teachers to use images and text on butchers' paper to explore their perceptions of Australian identity. Covering the pages were iconic images associated with Australia such as the Australian flag, kangaroos, sports, AFL (Australian Football League), sausage rolls, pies, pasties, Victoria Bitter (VB) beer, lamingtons and vegemite, wattle, bushwalking – even sheep skins, Akubra hats and Ugg boots. Like all stereotypes, we can recite the "Australian type" down pat: a beer-swilling, barbeque cooking, sporty type. When my daughter Lucinda brought home a panel of her own housebox to work on, her older sister – who was nine at the time – humorously suggested with insight and sarcasm beyond her years that she could represent her Australian identity by: "Just drawing a can of VB, a barbeque, and writing 'Aussie Aussie Aussie, Oi Oi Oi'". These stereotypes are not helped by jingoistic advertising campaigns and promotional films, such as Phillip Noyce's short promotional film used for the FIFA 2012 World Cup bid that featured an oversized animated kangaroo alongside past sporting heroes. These chauvinistic and one dimensional images of being Australian are not only sexist, but as Castles notes, they are also racist (Castles et al. 1992, p.7). This may explain why some people (including myself) feel uncomfortable with patriotic displays of the Australian flag – especially when draped over one's shoulders and used as a symbol to assert one's "Australianness" and sense of belonging. The 2005 Cronulla riots in Sydney are a good example of this. In retaliation for an attack on

life savers at Cronulla beach by eight men of Middle Eastern appearance, a series of SMS text messages were widely circulated to instigate the clash:

> *This Sunday every Fucking Aussie in the shire, get down to North Cronulla to help support Leb and wog bashing day...Bring your mates down and let's show them this is our beach and they're never welcome back.*

> *All leb / wog brothers.Sunday midday. Must be at North Cronulla Park. These skippy aussies want war. Bring ur guns and knives and lets show them how we do it*

> (Jackson 2006).

Some of the chants and slogans on the day of the riot included, "We grew here, you flew here" and "Aussie Pride", along with prominent displays of the Australian flag, making it obvious who was and who was not considered Australian (Teo, 2006).This adoption of the myth of Australianness makes an interesting contrast with the previously noted feelings of Anglo-Australians having "no culture".

A discussion about the ways in which migrants identify with Australian culture indicates the perplexity of adopting a unified national identity along with a perceived common ideology:

Jenna: There's a technical sense and a personal one. Technically when you become a citizen you're Australian and then if you're Australian and if you feel Australian, that's a matter for the person.

Sarah: (to Abdul) Do you feel Australian?

Abdul: You have to be born here I think like my daughter and son.

Sarah: So you don't feel Australian?

Abdul: It takes time, but this is home to me. If I go back to visit my family back in Eritrea, I can't wait to come back here, even if I don't feel Australian, this is home. For my kids, they want to come back to Australia – to the country of birth.

Jenna: The fact that you're calling it home...you feel a bit Australian?

Abdul: Yeah...75%.

A theme in Abdul's narratives throughout this exegesis is the different ways in which people position him, depending on the given social, cultural and political context. This exchange, where Jenna and I question him about his "Australianess" to the point that his identity is reduced to a percentage, is a good example of this.

Abdul goes on to explain that if you're not Aboriginal and not white, then you're not considered Australian. He shares a story to illustrate his point:

> When I was driving taxis, I had a woman, I think she was a Pauline Hanson supporter, she asked me where I was from. I said "Northcote". She didn't like it and she said "No, before that", and I said, "From South Yarra". I was just playing games with her. After a while she asked me where I was born, and I said, "Oh, I was born in Africa". Then after a while I asked her, "Where are you from?" 'cause I detected a slight accent in her voice, and she said, "Oh, I came here when I was very little". So she's Australian, but she came from somewhere else. So it's ok for *her* to be Australian, but it's not ok for *me* to be Australian...it's very narrow minded thinking. Because she was white and blonde she can fit in, but I don't fit in...I'm an outsider. Firstly I don't have an Aboriginal face and secondly I'm not white.

Abdul's narrative invites thinking around when a migrant stops being seen as a migrant and starts to be seen as an Australian. On the flipside Jenna and Sabrina respond to his story by commenting that they often ask people about their background because they're genuinely interested in knowing something about their culture. Others in the group, including myself, agree that one is often motivated by the desire to connect with somebody as a result of having travelled to their country of origin. This throws up the question of how and when we acknowledge difference in our daily interactions with people. Several pre-service teachers suggest that one's intentions are a good starting point. Although the fact that many racist comments are unintended suggests that maybe this is not a fool proof or guaranteed indicator of when it is appropriate to enquire about somebody's culture, and when it isn't.

Sabrina: I think it's easy to tell people's intent as well when they're asking – 'cause I've had the
        same thing – like I've been, "Oh where are you from?" and a taxi driver or someone goes,
        "Oh, Australia" and I'm like, "But what's your background" and when I say that they go,
        "Oh yeah...blah blah blah..."

Abdul: Some drivers I know are offended when you ask, "Where are you from?"
          I think – you come from somewhere, tell them – they want to know more about your
          background or your country.

Abdul's comment here contradicts his previous position in which he evades or challenges his taxi passengers' queries about his cultural origins. It shows the many processes Abdul uses to respond to discrimination, racism and exclusion. In some cases he ignores it and brushes it off, and in others he defiantly resists it.

In one conversation about Australian identity formation Sabrina and Jenna discuss how many cultural traditions and customs have been borrowed from Britain. Sabrina gives the example of how many Australians celebrate Christmas with a hot three course dinner, decorated fir trees and painted snow on the windows, despite the high temperatures which we often experience in our summer. She adds that even our four season calendar has been transplanted from Britain to Australia, noting that Indigenous Australians have six seasons. Another example was the tendency of ABC broadcasters to emulate English accents when broadcasting the news during the early days of ABC television and radio. Stratton and Ang (1994) explain this transplantation of British culture to Australia and the subsequent identification with an Anglo-Saxon British culture throughout most of the nineteenth century:

> The Australian type – sometimes spoken of as "the Anglo-Australian race" – was believed to be a new product of the multiplying British stock, the "race" which, in the heyday of British imperialism, saw itself as superior to all other "races" (a view legitimated by the then immensely influential ideology of Social Darwinism) and therefore as possessing the duty and destiny to populate and "civilise" the rest of the world (p.148).

Adopting or refraining from a colour blind approach to cultural identity?

Recently a colleague of mine expressed her frustration at being constantly asked about her origins, based on her Eastern European accent. There are times when it is important to recognize and acknowledge a person's cultural identity, and other times when it is not appropriate. The challenge, of course, is knowing the right times.

SooHoo, noted earlier as a key researcher informing this exegesis, is a teacher educator at Chapman University, California. As a way of understanding the experiences school children have of Otherness she took a group of pre-service teachers undertaking a course in Critical Multiculturalism on a personal

journey by exploring the ways in which ethnicity, amongst other things, can underlie social exclusion and marginalisation. This culminated in her publication *Talking Leaves (2006),* in which she drew on her own experiences as an Asian-American. Over a cup of coffee she told me that it is common for her students to approach her at the beginning of the course with statements such as: "I don't see you as being different to me", or, "We're all humans – you're just the same as me." Their well-intentioned motivation is to negate any differences between her and themselves, with the belief that a colour blind approach is more desirable. Her response is: "Yes, but my Asianess is actually a really important part of who I am".

Similarly, Abdul's Eritrean and Ethiopian roots are an important part of his identity, yet his collection of stories from his experiences as a Melbourne cab driver reveal a deep sensitivity when asked by passengers about his cultural background:

> I had a professor from Melbourne Uni who got in the taxi and enquired into my name. He said, "Don't get me wrong, I'm an anthropologist, and I want to know about your name". Another time I went to pick a person up. He saw my name on the photo ID. He was struggling to pronounce my name and asked me to tell him. I said, "It's for you to read it, not for me to tell you. It's just photo ID, don't worry, you'll be safe." Then at the end he said, "Why don't you change your name to John or Peter or whatever?" "Why, to make life easier for you? No, I don't change my name!".

Abdul vacillated in his responses to questions of identity. His narratives reflect the complexity of transplanting himself from another culture, adapting to a new country, desiring to maintain cultural traditions and instilling in his children a balanced appreciation and respect of both their Australian and Ethiopian heritage. Abdul indicated that there were times when enquiries into his cultural background and origins were inappropriate as well as unwelcome. They were often underpinned by assumptions and prejudices of his passengers and sometimes were possibly designed by inquirers to highlight his Otherness. He tells me that when he was new to Australia, he would often be asked "Where are you from?" Initially he was happy to share details of his background, assuming that given Australia's migrant history it must be customary to open conversations with these questions. He quickly found out that reciprocating the question caused offence in certain people: "As if they had the right to ask but not me". Abdul's reflections suggest that questions into his background are embedded in a hierarchy of power and privilege, in which the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture is positioned firmly on the top. Whether intended or not, they *do* contribute to his sense of exclusion as well as undermine his sense of entitlement to live in Australia. His sensitivity can be further understood in terms of the racialised society

in which we live. The fact that the situation was "racialised from the start" (Essed 1997, p.138) contributes to his sense of anticipation that passengers and others will respond to him in racialised terms.

Abdul admits that: "Sometimes people take advantage of your colour". He articulates the exclusion he experiences through his acute awareness of his cultural differences and skin colour and his constant confrontation and negotiation of his identity in a white hegemonic mainstream society:

> Anyone who leaves his homeland for any reason is always aware of his cultural differences with the culture of the host country. Wherever they go, whatever they do or say, they are always watching their surroundings for approval...During my teaching rounds I met teachers who never heard of Eritrea, have no idea of Islamic culture...some teachers and students have never been near a dark skin person. Some teachers and students never heard of someone speaking with my accent.

Abdul's narrative demonstrates the complexity of positioning himself in his new country and the challenges of straddling two cultures – of preserving his culture on the one hand, and of adopting elements of a new culture on the other. His comments about his teaching placement remind us that despite Australia's culturally diverse student populations, schools are still largely sites dominated by white hegemonic practices and values. Teachers from minority backgrounds are still a rarity. In an Australian class of twenty-five to thirty pupils, five to ten are likely come from different ethnic and/or linguistic backgrounds, and the teacher is most likely to be a monolingual English speaker (Clarkson & Dawe in De Courcy 2007).

The sense of isolation and exclusion experienced by Abdul as he shares this and other similar stories was palpable, and further explains why he may outwardly appear defensive when people enquire about his cultural background. It emphasises the work still to be done in not only encouraging teachers from minority backgrounds into the teaching profession and supporting them once they are there, but also of providing ongoing critical awareness for all teaching staff around 'white' systems of privilege and ways of knowing. There is a growing body of academic discourse on 'whiteness' dominated by scholars from the US, and Whiteness Studies is a growing interdisciplinary field taught at universities. Sharing a similar fictitious nature as race in terms of it being situated in an individual temporal and historical context (Garner 2007), it is generally understood in terms of the social construction, which

systematically positions white people in our society as part of the normative dominant culture and affords them privileges and power. As Garner explains:

> The function that whiteness as a social identity performs is to temporarily dissolve other social differences – sex, age, class, religion and nation – into a delusion that the people labelled white have more in common with each other than they do with anyone else, purely because of what they are not – black, Asian, asylum seekers, etc."
>
> (2007, pp.12–13).

A good way of understanding the effects of whiteness is to observe its social consequences for those considered to be non-white – for example in prisons, schools, board rooms and courts (McLaren 1998, p.282). McLaren, like other scholars and writers insists that we must choose against whiteness by making its effects visible: "The white mask must be removed so that whiteness as a discursive configuration, a narrative space, a semiotic density, and a set of lived social and economic relations can be deconstructed, challenged, and quite simply put – destroyed" (p.238). He suggests that "Rather than stressing the importance of diversity and inclusion, as do most multiculturalists, significantly more emphasis should be placed on the social and political construction of white supremacy and the dispensation of white hegemony" (p.271).

Whiteness as a theoretical approach or framework helps us to understand the colour-blindness of whites and the invisible or unmarked nature of whiteness as a racial category (Gronold & Lund Pedersen 2009), which contributes to race-based prejudice. It is a useful tool to critique "social relationships referred to as racism" (Garner 2007 p.1). Adding to the discourse from an Australian context, Shaw's book *Cities of Whiteness* (2007) identifies the glaring omission of Indigeneity in whiteness studies. She writes about the processual nature of whiteness, which works towards dispossessing and marginalising Aboriginal peoples in Sydney's inner-suburb of Redfern. Her book is an important reminder of including Indigenous peoples' experiences of whiteness – both past and present.

Comprehending the consequences of whiteness can be challenging and confronting to a person who has enjoyed the disproportionate privilege of being white. Its pervasive nature makes it difficult to "identify, challenge and separate from our daily lives" (McLaren 1998, p.264). "Removing the white mask", requires an understanding of the ways in which dominant white ideology works, in particular the historical oppression of minority groups. It takes a great deal of self-reflection, awareness and commitment to social justice to examine our white cultural lens.

The following section analyses the language of exclusion as a vehicle through which to contextualise and critique some of the ways in which whiteness has operated in Australia's history. This, I believe, provides a good start to beginning to understand our cultural positioning as teachers.

"The tall black guy...": The language of difference, diversity and exclusion

One day I arrived to pick up my seven year old daughter from Little Athletics. I realised that she was missing her bandana and asked her where it was. She explained that it had fallen off, and one of the marshal's had held onto it while she ran her race. I asked, "Which one is he?' and she replied, "You know, the tall black guy".

The uneasiness I felt at hearing my daughter use the word "black" prompted several conversations with colleagues and friends about using skin colour as a marker to describe somebody. One colleague said adamantly: "If somebody's black, then you call them that. It's a physical description, like if they're a woman". The language of cultural difference is implicitly awkward. At times it is deficient in conveying meaning and at other times it carries negative connotations. It can be used as an aggressive weapon to exclude certain groups. Sometimes it is a practical device to describe somebody based on their physical appearance. In discussions with pre-service teachers over the years, I have heard them refer to groups of children in their classes, as "the Aussie kids", "the Asian kids", "the Muslim kids". One of my former students shared this story with me:

> I was explaining to my lecturer about a fight between two kids in class. I said that it was between the Indian kid and the Vietnamese kid. The lecturer went crazy. She said, "You shouldn't distinguish between kids based on their ethnic appearance. What about the clothes they were wearing?" I said, "But they were all in school uniform".

This exchange highlights the limitations of the language of difference and reminds us that language discourse is rooted in broader discourses of colonisation about race in Australia. The narrow singular identities "Vietnamese" or "Indian" are commonly used by pre-service teachers to describe students in their class. This contrasts with a more developed language of difference used in the US which reflects a greater ease with dual identities and hybridity. For example, it is commonplace for people to use clearly defined identities such as African-American, Chicano, Latino, Hispanic-Americans, Native American and Asian-American. In Australia descriptors such as "Vietnamese" and "Indian" *can* be used as pejoratives – as socially constructed categories around perceived race to define Otherness. The teacher's reaction

in the above scenario could be explained by the guilt and anxiety provoked by this discourse.

So how do we discuss ethnicity and race without essentialising difference? How is language used as a tool to exclude people based on their ethnicity and cultural background?

These questions guided one of our focus group sessions in which we attempted to analyse the language we use to articulate difference. Armed with large sheets of butchers paper I asked pre-service teachers to get into groups and write down any words they could think of to describe a person's race, ethnicity or cultural background. I encouraged them to include words they'd heard in the playground, read in books or heard on T.V., even if they found them derogatory or confronting.

The group was initially embarrassed and reluctant about putting down words that they found offensive. They found many of the brainstormed words shocking (see Figure 1 for full list). An alarming number of the words had been part of the secondary school vernacular. Our discussions reflect an attempt to deconstruct some of them. Significantly, the beginning of the session in which pre-service teachers shared their lists of words, was the only time in the focus group sessions and classroom filming that they asked not to be identified by name:

- My mind's telling me not to say it…it's an offensive word that people call Aboriginals who are really black.

- My Dad says "I-talians". He loves the I-talians.

- Oh...what's the one...I read in …oh, septic tanks, sepos...yanks.

- Oh...have you ever heard SEF? It's something people used to say at high school…Slanty Eyed F_ _k.

- I know heaps for Asians.

- Paki...people always call people Paki, even if they're Sri Lankan or Indian.

- This is so bad...but we're learning.

- There's the "n" word.

- Sarah, are you going to use this? We should have a ceremonial burning!

Figure 1

Listing of words used in the brainstorming activity:

Pan-head, Pom, Skip, Wog, Kiwi, Yank, Jap, Arab, Mozzies, Gook, Muzza, Negro, Chink, Spic, Nigger, White, Ching-Chong, Black, Abo, Towel- head, Chicano, Camel-drover, Golliwog, Choco, I-talian, Sheep-rooters, Convicts, I-ties, Mouldy, Throwback, Frog, Wetback, Nip, Petrol-sniffer, Nazis, Spook, Lebo, Half-caste, Turks, FOB, Piccaninny, Curry-muncher, Malbar, Paki, SEF, Charlie, Asian, Seppo, Filo, Terrorist, Koori, Mafia, Gook, Madsnake, Coon, Aussie, Anglo, Asian, Jew

Despite the sensitive and confronting nature of the subject matter, the atmosphere in this session was relaxed, open and respectful, and for this reason I have included the full transcript below. It captures the defining elements of our focus group conversations; the toing and froing of ideas, self-reflection, humour and thoughtful exchanges between group members. The transcript emphasises the importance of dialogue within a safe and open community (Polanyi 1967) and the power of collaborative learning. It also achieves the "central purpose" of dialogue as defined by Isaacs:

> establishing a genuine meeting and inquiry …a setting in which people can allow a free flow of meaning and vigorous exploration of the collective background of their thought, their personal predispositions, the nature of their shared attention, and the rigid features of their individual and collective assumptions (2008, p.233).

Our dialogue offers a snapshot into the meta-cognitive processes of the participants. This is best illustrated in the exchange around whether the word "black" is offensive. Jenna interjects: "I want to know *why* though", indicating a genuine desire to understand her own thinking and judgements. The active process of inquiry, reflection, shifting views and construction of knowledge demonstrated in the layers of conversations are the hallmarks of reflective practitioners, and offer pre-service teachers an approach to model this dialogical exchange in their own classrooms.

Sarah: On butchers paper write any words that describe somebody's ethnicity, culture, race….it can be something you've heard said, or you've read...some words will be derogatory...they don't need to be words you agree with...is everybody OK with this? When you've finished we'll look at the ones that are most offensive and why.

[Pre-service teachers complete the task.]

Sarah: Firstly, how did you feel about doing that?

Emily: Naughty! 'Cause we don't talk about these things, because we know it's derogatory.

Jenna: It doesn't matter if you say, "It's not offensive, it's not offensive", it doesn't matter what happens after you say this, there's a risk after you say it anybody could be offended by it.

Sarah: I want you to choose a word that is particularly offensive to you.

Abdul: Oh, it depends how they say it. If joking, they say "nigger", oh, well big deal, forget it, but if they are angry and say it, that means they want to hurt me. My daughter in the classroom was reading some countries on the map, and there is a country called Niger, and this boy said "nigger" so he thought the word nigger came from this country, and then she (the teacher) was angry, and then she started laughing, this boy could not read, that's it. But don't take it personally.

Sarah: What about a lot of African-Americans address each other as nigger, is that ok?

Sabrina: I think it's a way of taking the insult out of it...it's like making a joke out of something which is really quite offensive and hurtful. It's like, well we can just use it and it takes away from it being so horrible...like take something and making it nothing so it doesn't hurt you anymore.

Helen: I only found out today that a gook was a really offensive word for an Asian.

Jenna: *I* think that it is, when I hear it, and I've lived in Japan...

Sarah: What about the words to describe Anglo-Celtic – is "skip" offensive?

Jenna: I don't think so, but why? Is it because there are so many worse terms?

Sarah: So you're not offended by white, but calling someone black can be offensive?

Jenna: I want to know why though.

Abdul: It depends on the tone. If they're joking, then forget it, but if we're in an argument and that person says "black"…

Sarah: Does anybody feel uncomfortable with saying, "I have a black kid in my class"?

Abdul: No.

Sabrina: I would feel uncomfortable. Even like today I was trying to describe someone 'cause she wasn't at gymnastics, and I'm like, "You know, Amanda, the little flyer, the Asian one". Then I'm like – is that ...racist? It was like I was singling her out 'cause of her race, but I was just trying to describe her.

Sarah: So what is it about this...what's wrong with saying, "the white child", or "the black child", or "the brown child"? What if I was in Africa, and I had a class of black children and there was one white child, what's wrong with saying "the white kid"?

Sabrina: I think I'd still be offended the other way around, like if I was in Africa, and someone said, "You know Sabrina, the *white* kid".

Sabrina: It's singling somebody out because of their race.

Abdul: Between a group racially the same, it's ok, between us, but when it's said by someone different from us, it's not ok.

Sabrina: ...you're not really labelling them, just making sure the person you're speaking to knows who you're speaking about through describing their physical appearance. I think that's it, you don't want people to think you're being derogatory.

Sarah: So are you only being politically correct?

Emily: I think the media has made us a bit precious...at the end of the day if your intention was not to insult, then it shouldn't be taken that way...but the way the media perceives it

now, you can't say "Asian" without feeling guilty, or "dark", like I say "dark-skinned" if I'm speaking about someone.

Sarah: What about someone's religion? I had a pre-service teacher...she was in class, and all the kids were in school uniform and there was one student who was Muslim, who wore the hijab...and she said to the mentor teacher, "Oh you know, the Muslim student". How do you feel about that, is that the same as skin colour as a marker?

Emily: I'd probably be more inclined to say the girl wearing the headdress, 'cause they're not necessarily always Muslim.

Mat: Yeah, like I've got one girl who wears the headdress, but about another three or four who are Muslim as well but don't wear the headdress.

Abdul: I think it was easier for the teacher to say that…that's the problem…politically correct…this is the problem. We have to find something to describe a person. Now Mat, how would I describe him, the tall, tough guy? Now when you are going to describe me, you are going to find something distinctive – the dark skinned guy.

Mat: Or the guy with the beard. [Jokingly referring to Abdul who has a beard].

Abdul: You are not going to say Muslim, 'cause I don't wear the hijab. There must be some kind of description.

Emily: So how would you describe people – say if you were teaching?

Abdul: I'm coming back to the politically correct thing. You have to find something not offensive.

Sabrina: Like, she works in the store and is so and so's cousin.

Emily: So you can't say hair colour or eye colour?

Abdul: I think colour, like dark skinned person, you can't say that. If that person is not

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comfortable with skin colour, then don't say it.

Sarah: Is the discomfort with describing skin colour around historical white supremacy? The dominant culture is usually white.

Emily: In Mauritius a majority of people are dark skinned, but then they call each other a word that they use to describe Indians which is malbar. It's derogatory. I think it means something like pest. But even the dark skinned people can still describe each other, so they don't put themselves in the same category.

Sarah: So there are two questions. When is it appropriate to talk about difference, and how do we do that, what language do we use?

Emily: I don't think you would single out a student in class based on physical appearance – maybe their hair colour.

Mat: I think you could go by what country their origin is, I don't think that's offensive to anyone.

Sarah: That's an interesting one, 'cause often pre service teachers in describing their students will say "the Italians", "the Vietnamese", but is that accurate?

Jenna: I think that's as correct as you can get...

Mat: Yeah, but then maybe they're born in Australia.

Sarah: What about Vietnamese-Australian?

Jenna: Yes, that would be even more correct, if you're just saying that's the person I'm talking about.

Sarah: Have you had these conversations with mentor teachers when referring to your students?

Jenna: That's what we've been doing. That's what I think I've been doing this semester; training myself how to speak correctly, politically correctly, and when I go to see my friends, it's making me think about how I talk about certain things.

Abdul: Sometimes it gets out of hand, political correctness – people should take it easy. I have to describe something, and if I say something and if I offend you, then re-phrase it, sorry, [shrugs] just run out of words!

Sarah: So maybe it's a problem with the English language – we actually don't have many words.

Jenna: Some people don't have the vocabulary to say other words. I know a lot of friends who would never know other words. The only thing I can say is politically correct...'cause that's the thing, you don't want to offend people, and that's the thing, you're a role model and you're influencing your students, so if you start speaking like that they'll start speaking like that, so that's what we're trying to be taught.

Abdul: Like that Glass House comedian, Will Anderson, says, we can say anything in Australia, as long as you say, "No offence".

Sarah: How can language be used as a really powerful tool to exclude people and what language is acceptable and is there a shortcoming with the language?

Jenna: There are certain things that my friends will never understand, and I'll have to continually listen to their language.

Sarah: How would you weight the derogatory words used to describe white people, compared with those used to describe Others – Asians, Aboriginals, Europeans…

Mat: They weren't very strong. I don't think I'd be offended by any of the words on that sheet if they were used to describe me.

Sarah: Were there many words to describe Anglos, whites?

Mat: Skip, Pom, Bogan.

Helen: If I heard someone say "bogan" to someone I'd think that was offensive, 'cause they're generalising...How are they generalised?

Sabrina: Like stupid and racist and lazy.

Sarah: So there really weren't that many words to describe white people, why would that be?

Mat: 'Cause we made all the words up.

Sarah: So what does that tell you about society – if that's the language of the playground?

Mat: Whites are still on top.

Sarah: So the dominant culture in Australia is what?

Abdul: Anglo.

Sabrina: I think as well it's ok to call you "white", 'cause you've got the white guilt, so it's alright for people to insult me for being white, 'cause in the history of the world, white people are arseholes, so there's that guilt, you don't get offended as much.

Sarah: So is that something that you're aware of, like having white skin, are you aware of your position in society, just generally, as being more privileged?

Mat: I think so.

Jenna: Definitely.

Helen   [Turns to Mat and Sabrina and poignantly asks] "Do you guys realise it?"

Sabrina: I wouldn't ever think about it unless someone pointed it out to me. An example that correlates, is you know how really good looking people get treated like, "Oh yeah, the people here are so nice", and it's like, 'No, they're nice to you because you're really good looking' and they don't really switch on.

Sarah: [To Helen] What's your response, are you aware of it?

Helen: Yes, absolutely.

There are multiple avenues for explicating this conversation. The concluding remarks by Helen are particularly revealing in the context of the discussion around whiteness in the previous chapter. As an Australian woman with an 'Asian' appearance she is clearly aware of her non-white identity, compared to Sabrina who admits that she wouldn't realise her privilege as a white person unless it was pointed out to her. The notion that white people as a group lack awareness of their own whiteness, whereas those from other non-white groups instantly identify a white person as being white is observed by many scholars writing in the field of whiteness studies (Garner 2007; Frankenberg 1993; Gronold & Lund Pedersen 2009). It is reasonable to suggest that Jenna's time living in Japan heightened her awareness of her whiteness.

The conversation that ensued around the word "Asian" as an identity marker was interesting, with the group generally agreeing that it wasn't a racist word per se, but could be constructed or intended that way. A good example of this was the 1998 maiden speech by populist right-wing politician Pauline Hanson, in which she claimed that Australia was "in danger of being swamped by Asians", the sub-text to this statement was that there were already too many Asians in Australia. This statement also highlights the paradox that while Australia is located in the Asia-Pacific region, it is more culturally aligned to Britain and Europe – a theme raised by Jenna in a subsequent discussion.

There are several problems with referring to someone as "Asian". Firstly, it is ambiguous, particularly given Asia's uncertain geographical boundaries (Ang 2000). An Australian study titled *The Impact of Racism upon the Health and Wellbeing of Young Australians* (Mansouri et al. 2009b), identified a tendency by young white Anglo-Saxon Australians to: "view some other particular groups as homogenous, for example, categorising all people from China, Japan, Korea and other Asian countries as Asians, which in effect views them all as the same, by disregarding their country of origin" (p.54). This contributes to an Othering discourse, as identified in a later interview with Helen:

> Depending on where they're from they have different judgements about where I'm from. I had a lecturer in first year and we were talking about different cultures and different accents, and I was sitting next to a girl. We both have an Asian face, and for some reason she thought we were international students. She was trying to make a point about different accents...and she

asked me to pronounce something, with the intention that I'd pronounce it with an Asian accent. Everybody was laughing.

In this case Helen's lecturer's assumptions about her "Asian" appearance excluded the possibility that she could also be Australian, whereas obviously they are not mutually exclusive identities. Sometimes it may be helpful or necessary to use somebody's physical ethnic features as a way to describe or identify them, as I have just done in the previous paragraph about whiteness when I described Helen's "Asian" appearance to remind readers of how she is often positioned by others. However, often conversations that include details of somebody's perceived ethnic or cultural identity simply highlight the "racialised dimension of social relations" (Essed 1997, p.137). For example, I have noticed in conversations people referring to "the Muslim shopkeeper", "the Asian nurse" (often, the "little" Asian nurse) and "the Indian doctor", when the person's identity is irrelevant to the narrative context. In this way it is used almost subconsciously as a way of perpetuating a discourse in which minority groups are framed against a normative Anglo-white identity. It can also be a way of explaining a deficit in an interaction, for example, "He was a hopeless doctor – he was Asian" as if his hopelessness could be attributed to his Asianess.

Pre-service teachers agreed that the words used to describe people from minority backgrounds were more offensive than the words used for whites, and held the greatest power to exclude. In a talkback discussion over the racial vilification ("black c_ _ _") of several Indigenous players by spectators, a number of callers made the comment to the effect that it was just "name calling": "sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me". They suggested that it was no different to being called "fat", and that players should just "get over it." This view overlooks the fact that "it is not the use of offensive words in themselves but the system of injustice they symbolize that makes racist slurs so different from many other insults" (Essed 1997, p.149). Essed explains how racist slurs are used as "symbolic weapons" (p.146) by the dominant group as a form of intimidation and aggression as well as to "repress black opposition to racial injustice" (1997, p.133). Using the slurs "indicates the offender's apparent consent with existing racial injustices and inequities. In other words, the statements aim to hurt not only in a personal sense but also in a structural sense" (Essed 1997, p.134). A profound statement against this kind of structural racism is captured in an iconic photograph in which Indigenous AFL player Nicky Winmar responds to a barrage of racial slurs from opposition spectators by symbolically lifting his jersey to show the colour of, and pride in his skin.

Beyond the highly confronting, pejorative and offensive language which is explicitly designed to insult, (and which occupied large portions of butchers paper at the end of our session), there is a much more

subtle discourse of exclusion. Mat captures how this operates in a secondary school setting:

> I always knew I was Australian. When we had cricket or soccer matches it was always "wogs versus skips" and I was always a skip. There was that understanding that there was a "them" and "us" situation.

The study *The Impact of Racism Upon the Health and Wellbeing of Young Australians*, referred to earlier, "identified an underlying racism among white Anglo-Saxon Australians that emerged in their language, for example, the use of the word 'them' to describe students (from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds as opposed to the use of the word 'us' when describing themselves and others of Anglo-Saxon background" (Mansouri et al. 2009b, p.54). This can be observed throughout the focus group discussions when pre-service teachers referred to the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture as "our" culture. The study also revealed that participants from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds described students with lighter coloured skin as 'Aussie' or 'white', as if they too were a homogenous group, when they were in fact from culturally diverse backgrounds (Mansouri et al. 2009b, p.54).

Jane Elliot's "Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes" social experiment in discrimination with her all-white Grade 3 class is powerfully depicted in the film *A Class Divided* (Peters 1968). Elliot was motivated to undertake the experiment after listening to the language used in the aftermath of Martin Luther King's assassination. She describes being appalled to hear white reporters asking members of the black community questions such as: "What will *your* people do.... When *our* leader died *we*...". While it seems clear that using language in this way leads to a homogenising discourse, there is also the challenge of re-thinking this discourse, as articulated by Riggins: "Self and Other actually are so intertwined that to stop talking about 'them', one must stop talking about 'us'" (1997, p.6).

Language is a powerful and potentially dangerous tool for either granting membership to certain groups or excluding them. In the wake of the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, key Western leaders as well as Osama bin Laden relied on distinctions between "us" and "them" to justify past and future violence in a dangerous socio-political and religious Othering (Leudar, Marsland & Nekvapil 2005). The language we use not only reflects our reality, but it creates and shapes it. While Ben Jelloun (1999) acknowledges that the fight against racism begins with language, he notes that: "Fighting racism in the realm of language alone, or only in the world of ideas, without undermining the unjust structures that give birth to those ideas, is in the end a hopeless mission" (p.162). While it is important to use non-discriminatory and inclusive language, particularly in our classrooms, the concern is that by focussing

on language alone we may neglect to challenge deep seated prejudices and stereotypes. The result of this is that those around us simply end up walking through a minefield of self-censoring and using politically correct language so as not to appear racist, or upset or offend anybody. Rowan (2001) reminds us of our individual responsibility to communicate positive or negative messages about difference: "We need to become aware of the fact that every time we communicate, we are effectively making choices about what we will or will not include, what we will or will not represent positively, and what we will or will not value" (p.35).

Not so skin deep: Skin colour as the predominant identity marker

Skin colour was a theme in our conversations that we returned to often, and is worthy of considered attention. Unpacking it from an historical perspective helps to shed light on our discussions.

We all look different. We have different eye colours, different hair colour and texture and most noticeably, different skin colour. These visual differences are largely responsible for how we are perceived in society, and how we perceive ourselves. They are, in short, major determinants in our identity formation. Yet if skin colour is the most common physical marker, as suggested by Shahid Alam (2003), why did our discussions reveal a level of discomfort at using skin colour, or more specifically "black" skin colour as a marker to describe somebody?

In pre-modern European society one's sense of self was expressed by rank in society (Docker & Fischer 2000, p.4), that is, social positioning determined identity. However, for the past few centuries visual differences have been used to classify people into four or five so-called races, and to subsequently place them in a hierarchy (Herbes-Sommers 2003). Skin colour has been used to build systems of apartheid in South African and racial segregation in the US. *The Great Chain of Being* was a hierarchical system, which "invented and ranked racial groups from primates through lower 'coloured' races to Europeans and on up to Angels and the Almighty" (Hollinsworth 2010). It was the accepted theory at the beginning of the nineteenth century to explain European superiority. The relegation of Indigenous Australians to the bottom of the chain – barely advanced from apes (Rigg 1994) was used to promote a colonial ideology, which placed "superior" whites over "inferior savages". This has ultimately been used to justify the ongoing dehumanisation of Indigenous Australians. This has included the brutal violence towards Indigenous Australians upon the arrival of British fleets, the "Stolen Generation", in which thousands of Indigenous children were forcibly taken from their parents under government policy, and the continuing disadvantage and gap in Indigenous life expectancy, educational outcomes,

unemployment and juvenile imprisonment (Hollinsworth 2010).

The "White Australia" policy, conceived at Federation in 1901, was designed to maintain a white Australia by restricting migration of "non-whites", who were deemed to be undesirable. Introducing the Act to Federal Parliament, Prime Minister Edmund Barton declared: "We are guarding the last part of the world in which the higher races can live and increase freely for the higher civilisation" (Australia's Centenary of Federation 2001). In this way the Australian state was a racially based state and as Stratton and Ang (1994) argue, this official racialisation formed part of the Australian national identity. This historical fear and exclusion of non-whites and other non-Anglo minorities is well documented in a powerful three part documentary series called *Immigration Nation: The Secret History of Us* (Hickey & Shackleford 2010). It documents the British "imperial vision" of maintaining a "white utopia" through its social engineering policies of the first half of the 20th century, and the persistence of these xenophobic immigration policies for another seven decades after Barton's speech. Migration, not surprisingly, favoured British people with offers of assisted passage. But when Caldwell threw down the gauntlet after World War 2 to "populate or perish" a bizarre marketing strategy was hatched. The idea was to "market" immigration to the Australian population by shipping a group of "Beautiful Balts" to Australia from refugee camps in the Baltic States. Selected on the basis of their attractive looks (blonde hair, blue eyes, "nice looking", young) the plan was to challenge the negative stereotypical image of migrants as being ugly and threatening (Hickey & Shackleford 2010).

Before this there was anti-Chinese sentiment by European immigrants during the Victorian Gold Rush of the 1850s, which Curthoys (2000) attributes to "a belief in the superiority of the European and the inferiority of the Chinese: that is, by racial ideas of an increasingly explicit kind" (p.23). This may also have been fuelled by the hard work and success of the Chinese, and the threat this posed to Australian nationals working on the goldfields.

Although the White Australia Policy was eventually dismantled in the mid 1970's by the Whitlam Government, remnants of it persist and resurface from time to time. As Abdul muses:

> Even now, Australia has a majority white culture – it used to be the White Australia policy – maybe that was wrong, maybe they regret that. But now it goes on. Maybe accepting a different culture is hard for some people.

This ideology of white superiority has been pursued by many highly regarded scholars, psychologists,

scientists and others who have used "scientific" arguments to "prove" the inferiority of blacks. IQ tests have been a popular method of linking intelligence with race to demonstrate that whites are genetically more intelligent than blacks. Psychologist Hans Eysenck and his former student Arthur Jensen supported this controversial notion that intelligence is an inherited trait. Jensen's research concluded that IQ was hereditary and that whites were genetically superior in intelligence to African-Americans (Alland 2002, p.89). These misguided concepts of race (not to mention intelligence) are flawed. There is not the scope in this research to scientifically rebuff the "race as biologically based" argument in detail but the gist of the argument is that: "There is only a small amount of genetic variation amongst all humans, and of the small amount of variation that does exist, there is believed to be as much difference between 2 Chinese or 2 African-Americans as someone in another so called race" (Herbes-Sommers 2003). Conceiving of race in this genetic and immutable way is also dangerous. It justifies the continued oppression of black people (McLaren1998), and reinforces racial stratification in which white people are innately superior to Others. Hitler's systematic extermination of millions of Jews was based on Nazi eugenics and the idea that the Aryan race could be strengthened and improved by eliminating perceived "weaker" races from the gene pool. Yet while race is not real in this biological way, it is certainly real from a socio-cultural perspective (Alland 2002, p.12).

A shortcoming of arguing that intelligence is biologically based is that it fails to acknowledge that knowledge is fundamentally socially and culturally situated, contested and constructed. That is, the knowledge esteemed and tested on IQ tests favours the knowledge base of those who design them-largely white, middle class, Anglo-Saxon males. Wilson-Miller (2003) argues that: "The 'intelligence' one needs to succeed on an IQ test is based on 'knowledge' of how to 'reflectively operate' in a social system pre-determined by a society's decision makers". To demonstrate this he created an "IQ test" for non-Indigenous university students based on knowledge common to a majority of Indigenous people. It is an effective illustration for non-Indigenous students – who typically struggle with the "test" – of how knowledge is culturally constructed and biased as well as what it might be like for Indigenous people who have historically been assessed using criteria foreign to them.

Another point that is often overlooked is that people from minority groups as well as non-middle class are usually already constrained by poverty and prejudice, and administering an IQ test will often reflect their social and educational disadvantage rather than effectively measure their intelligence.

This brief history helps us understand that "black" as a descriptor is more than just an adjective that describes physical difference in skin colour. It is a significant marker of black oppression, disadvantage and racial prejudice. In western culture it has been associated with deviance and evil; for example the archetypal evil black witch depicted in children's fairy-tales is often dichotomously represented against the goodness and innocence of the white witch. It has been connected with tragedy and death: the black plague and black Saturday; It has been used in numerous negative expressions such as "blacklisted", "black magic", "black humour", "blackmail" and "black market".

Contemporary films often depict the villain as dark or of middle-eastern or Asian appearance, and the hero as white. There is even a phenomenon known as "black-dog syndrome" or "black-dog bias", in which black dogs have a lower rate of adoption from animal shelters and a higher rate of being euthanized due to people's heightened fear of black dogs over lighter coloured dogs. Given these negative associations with black, it is not surprising to find that experiments in child development and racial awareness over the past 100 years have shown that: "In doll play, white children associated white with good and black with bad" (York 2003, p.42).

Against this backdrop it is easier to understand the reluctance and discomfort of some (perhaps mostly white) people to use the word "black" to describe somebody. Underlying this reluctance is the concern that it will perpetuate oppression (underlined by what Sabrina refers to as "white guilt"), and perhaps the fear that one will be judged as "racist".

"We're all racist to some degree"

A pre-service teacher who was in her first year of a Bachelor of Education degree recounted a recent trip she had taken to Geelong. On the way she stopped at a milk bar for a drink. After standing for some time in the queue she noticed customers who'd just entered the shop being served ahead of her. She asked the shopkeeper why he wasn't serving her. The shopkeeper replied, "We don't serve people like you". Aneil has light brown skin, brown hair and dark eyes. She is Australian born with Syrian parents. Not long after this Aneil started her school observation round with a 1 /2 class and was asked by one of the students what it felt like to look like a terrorist. "What do you mean?" she asked. The child explained that anybody with black hair looked like a terrorist.

Racism operates at different levels and in different ways within our society. There is institutional, structural and "individually mediated racism" – described by Smedley (2012) as "an act of discrimination and racial bias committed by White individuals against people of color" – and exemplified in the above story. In one focus group session Jenna commented, "We're all racist to some degree". My immediate response was to disagree with her – to disassociate myself from this claim, and to defend my personal position as somebody who advocates anti-racism. However given that racism is "a system that shapes our daily experiences and sense of self" (Frankenberg 1993, p.5), it would be dishonest to make such a claim. Racism, as Connolly (2002) argues, is not something external that can simply be ignored or acted upon at whim. It is something that is individually internalised: "In essence, it provides the conceptual framework which not only guides the way people think about themselves and others but also, in turn, comes to influence and shape their actions and behaviours" (p.11).

As a beneficiary of structural and institutional racism it would be dangerous to become complacent, and I can see that resistance requires a high level of consciousness and ongoing commitment. Nieto phrases this well when she says, "Although not everyone is directly guilty of racism and discrimination, we are all responsible for it" (2010, p.71); meaning we must all work actively for social justice.

Moodley (1999) identifies seven manifestations of racism: subtle social, legal, scientific, cultural, economic, religious and psychological. In my experience it is often "subtle social racism" [which is] experienced subliminally through a cultural hierarchy of arrogance" (p.151), that is the most prevalent in day to day interactions with people. This often appears in the form of casual quips – often from unlikely people, which can catch you completely off guard. For instance, when my husband and I decided over fifteen years ago to buy our first house, we asked the real estate agent to show us houses in the multicultural inner city suburb of Footscray. He cautioned: "Are you sure? There's lots of Asians over there". More recently, driving through multicultural Footscray my passenger commented, *"There are a lot of foreigners here"*, followed shortly by, *"Gee, the Asians are really bad drivers aren't they?"* I have heard teacher friends complain about the Lebanese-Australian boys they teach, and neighbours joke that they will rent out their newly renovated room to ten Vietnamese families to help pay their mortgage. Even after I completed the oral presentation for this PhD one of the panel members completely took me by surprise by making stereotypical remarks about Asians living in Australia.

These comments seem almost purposefully designed to slip by unnoticed and unless actively challenged, one becomes complicit in the sentiments of the remark. Unlike children, adults are very good at self-censoring and manipulating politically correct language. Outside their circle of friends and

family, prejudiced people will temper their views so they appear less severe and unkind than the opinions they actually hold (Riggins 1997, p.7). Essed appositely explains the function of comments such as this: "Mechanisms of racial exclusion and the repression of other cultures are integrated in the mundane and routine practices of everyday life. In this process, the dominant group comes to perceive and experience the marginalisation and problematization of the Other as "normal" (1997, p.133).

Often racist comments are accompanied by humour – a self-justifying mechanism to deflect ownership of the comment, or perhaps to gauge how the response will be taken. Shortly after President Barak Obama was first inaugurated in 2009, I received a group email from a neighbour depicting Obama on a bank note. The apparent humour lay in the fact that it was impossible to make out his features on the note due to his dark skin colour. The comment accompanying the email read: "Wrong but funny".

Pre-service teacher participants acknowledged the influence that parents, friends and the media have on the development of racist ideas and assumptions. Lack of exposure to and knowledge of people from culturally diverse backgrounds was also offered as a potential source of ignorance and misunderstanding. The sense of fear with which people respond to racial/cultural difference is explained by Helen:

> I think it's [racism] a lack of acceptance, and it's also people being afraid. People who don't know too much about a culture – say you live in a culture which is dominantly white and you have dark people move in – you see that as different to you…you have your language barriers. In a sense you're afraid, so you attack. I personally think that racism exists because it's your own self being afraid of other people coming in or other people being different to you.

This fear that Helen refers to is identified by Jupp (2002) as "xenophobia" rather than racism. His distinction works on the idea that while racism is based on the belief of a hierarchy of races, "xenophobia" is an "almost universal condition", albeit "controlled" (p.2) in which people respond fearfully to people culturally or physically different to themselves.

Parallel to challenging the racist assumptions of others is the challenge of keeping our own stereotypical thoughts in check:

> In attempting to enthuse my eldest daughter Emilia to volunteer in a Sudanese homework program I suggested, "Maybe one of the girls can braid your hair". She retorted, "What, do you

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think all Sudanese girls can braid hair?"

Emilia's response challenged both my gendered and cultural assumptions in one blow, and served as a reminder of the narrow dimensions we construct of culture as well as the constant need to challenge well-worn stereotypes. As we will see in future chapters, it is particularly important for teachers to resist the pitfalls of stereotyping students. There is diversity within every culture, and making assumptions about particular skills or knowledge can damage or limit a student's potential.

While confronting racist comments is a good starting point in addressing societal inequities constructed around race, I believe it requires more than this. It must move beyond focussing on the individual practices of fearful or ignorant individuals to investigate the social, political and economic systems that are responsible for the unequal and unjust distribution of power and privilege (Mura 1999, pp.101–102). It must also be underpinned by the belief in what a friend of mine referred to in a class meeting as "the intrinsic value of humanity" (Varghese 2010). To facilitate this paradigm shift towards cultural difference, we must begin by observing how we are situated within this system and reflect on our own cultural lens. This is a lifelong process. McLaren makes the pertinent comment that: "People don't discriminate against groups because they are different but rather the act of discrimination constructs categories of difference that hierarchically locate people as "superior" or "inferior" and then universalizes and naturalizes such differences (1998, p.281).This is an important point to take into our teaching.

Part 2: Educational contexts

Introduction

Part One of this research centred around the first four focus group sessions and involved pre-service teachers reflecting on who they were as cultural beings. It established the complexities of cultural identity and the pervasive and systemic nature of racism. Part 2 builds on many of these themes. It frames the study in the broad context of multicultural education, and situates it geographically by giving an overview and rationalisation of multicultural education in Australia.

In the remaining four focus group sessions I asked pre-service teachers to reflect on how their cultural knowledge and positioning shaped their teaching practice and encouraged them to connect their personal understandings of cultural identity to an educational context: *How did their cultural identity influence their pedagogy? What were the indicators of a culturally inclusive classroom? In what ways were they challenging students' stereotypes and addressing racism in their classrooms? In what ways did their teaching take in a variety of cultural perspectives and values?* We explored these and other questions in these final four sessions.

An issue that comes to mind as I reflect on this – re-read previous chapters in this exegesis and review the 100 hours of film – is the central role of terminology in discussions such as these. I look back and see that in my introduction I start out with using the term "culturally responsive teaching". Conversations with pre-service teachers have borrowed from a range of theories and terms; "multicultural education", "culturally inclusive education", "culturally responsive teaching" (CRT) and "critical pedagogy". Recently I was even introduced to the term "culturally comprehensive teaching" in a conference pamphlet. While there are subtle differences between these, we often used them interchangeably in our discussions. These varying terms also reflect the different literature referred to in this exegesis. While scrutinising the language we use is a worthy pursuit, of equal importance is not falling into a semantic impasse. An imperative must be that our intended meaning is communicated to our audience, particularly as language evolves and it is likely that future discussions of the film and exegesis will include new terminologies. I turn to Wittgenstein – one of the pre-eminent thinkers of the twentieth century – to support this stance. As Wittgenstein (1953) outlines in his philosophical concept of language games, more important than attaching fixed meaning to language, which is inherently fluid, is the importance of understanding what is being referred to – of communicating the idea. He uses the notion of a game to demonstrate the analogy. Essentially we all know what a game is, whether it's a ball game or a board game. We don't need to define the rules of games and the intrinsic qualities of games to understand

what a game is. What *is* crucial is the overall similarities and defining characteristics which they all share.

Thus, my interest in the focus group sessions was in drawing out pre-service teachers' experiences based on elements of various theories rather than analysing distinctions between them, getting lost in semantics or advocating one approach over another. What was at the heart of our discussions was an exploration of pedagogy and curriculum that were anti-racist, committed to cultural diversity, equitable and which actively drew on and represented students' own cultural experiences, and were underpinned by social justice. These were the overlapping similarities and defining characteristics shared by the range of terms used.

Given the heterogeneous terminology identified in the previous paragraphs, some sort of clarity is needed before tying together the themes, discussion and analysis in this section. I attempt to achieve this by focussing on one theory to provide a conceptual framework. So before we return to the themes of the focus group discussions, "multicultural education" as described by Nieto (2010 & 2004) will be explored. This is partly because Nieto's description illustrates the intersectionality of the core components of culturally inclusive education, culturally responsive teaching and critical pedagogy. Nieto's writing complements the work of key theorists and scholars who have written in the field of multicultural education; in particular Banks' (1991) five dimensions of multicultural education, Sleeter and Grant's (1987) five approaches to multicultural education, and Gay's (2000) work on culturally responsive teaching as well as their more recent work. Most importantly it resonates most strongly with what was at the heart of our group discussions and reflects my personal ideological stance on education.

Nieto (2010) outlines seven characteristics which she believes are integral to multicultural education; that it is: *antiracist, basic, important for all students, pervasive, education for social justice, a process and critical pedagogy* (p.68). Importantly, she acknowledges that this is not a static definition, but rather a starting point to encourage thinking about how socio cultural contexts influence learning. She states:

> Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. Multicultural education permeates the schools' curriculum and instructional strategies, as well as the interactions among teachers, students and families, and the very way that schools

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conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the basis for social change, multicultural education promotes democratic principles of social justice (2010, p.346).

In this way multicultural education requires more than one's good intentions or a passing contribution to equity issues. It is a philosophy – a way of seeing and being. It is lifelong and lifewide, occurring throughout one's life and in a range of contexts (Kalantzis & Harvey 2004, p.21). It involves the willingness to *continually* reflect on practice and evolve as a practitioner. As Nieto says, "No one ever stops becoming a multicultural person, and knowledge is never complete" (2010, p.78). In this way teachers and schools are on a trajectory in developing skills and knowledge which support multicultural education. To indicate the progression along this journey, Nieto (2004) has devised five levels of multicultural education which may be evident in schools and classroom practice. Not unlike the various typologies designed by scholars such as Banks (2001), Sleeter and Grant (2006) and McLaren (1994) the levels "represent a continuum that ranges from compensatory or tokenistic efforts, followed by those that address specific ethnic or cultural groups with an emphasis on prejudice reduction, to more critical/transformative efforts that seek to address the systemic inequities within the education and society" (Schoorman & Bogotch 2010, p.1042). This framework is useful in enabling pre-service teachers in particular to see multicultural education as "a range of options across a wide spectrum" rather than as a "unitary concept" which they have to "get right" in the first instance (Nieto 1994, p.1).

While Nieto and these theorists are geographically based in the United States and are largely writing from that context, comparisons between multicultural education practices in the United States and Australia reveal many similarities between "philosophical orientation, content and methods, and teacher preparation" (Swetnam 2003, p.208). However, there are also differences. The main difference, as observed by Swetnam, is the way in which diversity is conceptualised. In Australia, diversity is categorised by ethnicity, whereas in the United States it is categorised by race. She compares the collection and recording of data for the census to illustrate this point.

Data on Australia's demographic diversity is recorded by asking residents their nation of birth and that of their parents. This allows for "a relatively accurate description of the ethnicity of newcomers (first and second generation) to the country…Under this system, which is perhaps a legacy of previous assimilationist thinking, all third generation or older individuals would be considered 'Australian' without reference to race or ethnicity on the census; this makes the current composition of the total population difficult to describe…." (p.208). In contrast, the United States collects census diversity data based on

racial makeup rather than ethnicity (p.208). The racial categories included in the census questionnaire enable citizens to report more than one race to indicate their racial mixture, such as 'American-Indian' and "White" (United States Census Bureau 2012).

This may explain the relative ease that North Americans have in acknowledging hybrid identities such as "Asian-American" compared to Australians, who often only identify with one identity – as discussed in the section *"The tall black guy...": The language of difference, diversity and exclusion.*

Ang (2003) argues for the importance of hybridity as a concept which acts to entangle, blur and problematise boundaries between "us" and "them". She suggests that the very essence of the fluid and in-between nature of hybridity produces an unsettling effect that interrogates and "destabilises established cultural power relations between white and black, coloniser and colonised, centre and periphery, the "West" and the "rest"" (p.9).

Multicultural education in Australia: A brief overview

In Australia, multicultural education has been a widely used term which has moved through contested meanings and conflicted phases since its official inception in the early 1970s (Lo Bianco 2010). As an educational response to the large number of migrants who were settling in Australia after World War 2, its primary rationale was to respond to cultural and linguistic pluralism by equalising educational outcomes – particularly for newly arrived migrants (Lo Bianco 2010). As a result, it was often conceived as predominantly "for" minority groups, and was often "celebrated" with nothing more than a Greek dance and a piece of Italian pizza. While this view is largely out-dated, multicultural education is still sometimes conceived as an "add-on" to the set curriculum rather than something that is holistic, integrated and central to the daily learning of all children.

Federal and State Government policies on multicultural education are consistent with anti-discrimination legislation and international conventions. They are characterised by their commitment to ensuring all students experience an inclusive learning environment, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background. They also reinforce the value and richness of embracing cultural diversity in our community. These policies inform a range of frameworks, structures, initiatives and standards in schools which work towards achieving these goals. As I mentioned in the *Background to the research*, the emerging Australian Curriculum which is progressively being developed and implemented, has "Intercultural Understanding" as one of its seven general capabilities. It also singles out three cross-curriculum priorities that are to be embedded in all learning areas. They are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

- Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia

- Sustainability.

(ACARA n.d.).

I will explore these in more detail in the section: *Developing an awareness of our cultural lens to unveil dominant culture Ideology in classrooms.*

In Victoria, where this current study is located, the multicultural policy *All of Us: Multicultural Perspectives in Victorian Schools* (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008) and the strategy *Education for Global and Multicultural Citizenship* (DEECD 2009) support the incorporation of "learning and teaching that utilises the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) domains relevant to global and multicultural citizenship" (DEECD 2009, p. 5). Similarly, PoLT as noted earlier, support a range of strategies to engage diverse learners with consideration given to their "social needs, and cultural perspectives", as well as to "encourage diversity and autonomy" (DEECD 2012).

The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has drawn on the Multicultural Victoria Act 2004 (State Government of Victoria 2004) to establish a number of important principles to inform the implementation of multicultural education in Victorian schools. In summary, these include the responsibility that the school and school council have in promoting and affirming principles of multiculturalism and ensuring that these are reflected at all levels and by all members of the school community. The Act also outlines the commitment of school staff to promote a climate of mutual respect, which affirms diversity in all aspects of their work practices and interactions with students, parents, and other staff. They must also ensure that curriculum programs and classroom materials incorporate multicultural perspectives and reflect a range of cultural experiences as well as using teaching and assessment strategies that cater for a range of learning styles. Importantly, and of particular relevance to this research project, is the responsibility that school staff have to examine their own culture, and the role it plays in influencing how they view and interact with the world. I believe this is a key ingredient for the success of all the other principles, and one which better equips teachers to develop a critical approach to curriculum and pedagogy. Additionally, it supports the development of what Leonard and Leonard (2006) identify as the three diversity dispositions required of teachers: cultural consciousness, intercultural sensitivity, and commitment to social justice.

Another key feature of current multicultural education in Victorian schools – articulated in *Education for*

Global and Multicultural Citizenship (DEECD 2009), is the development of anti-racist attitudes aimed at explicitly identifying and addressing overt, subtle and institutionalised racism, stereotyping and other forms of prejudice, (p.5). However, despite these government policies, there are patterns that indicate that much multicultural education continues to be misconstrued as something which is primarily intended for minority students. Evidence suggests that a number of Australian teachers and schools are ambivalent about embracing multicultural curriculum initiatives (McInerney 2003, p.5). This is exemplified by the low commitment to many of its principles in schools which have little diversity (McInerney 2003, p.7). This is particularly concerning given the growing ethnic segregation in Australian schools and the clear "pattern of cultural polarisation" (Ho 2011) or 'white flight', which suggests that many Anglo-Australians are fearful of sending their children to culturally diverse schools. As Nieto urges: "nothing is more divisive than a monocultural education, because such an education excludes so many people and perspectives from schools' curricula and pedagogy" (2010, p.67). This is a reminder of the importance of making multicultural education relevant to *all* students in *all* schools, not just those with a student population that is culturally and linguistically diverse. This is particularly important given the context of the broad community in which all schools are located and the technology and media available that enables students to become active global citizens in this twenty-first century. Today more than ever teachers and students have the capacity to affect change not only in their own backyards but in other parts of the world thanks to growing numbers of online social media sites and global activist sites.

Why multicultural education?

Reasons for adopting multicultural education are numerous and divergent, and can reflect philosophical stances on the purpose of education. For example, there is the argument that fostering students' appreciation of diverse perspectives is essential to keep pace with competitive and globalised educational markets: "Students who possess the skills, knowledge and attitudes of a global and multicultural citizen will have a competitive edge and contribute to our national advantage" (DEECD 2009, p. 3). The correlation of social inclusion and market driven productivity is epitomised in a speech made by Julia Gillard to the Australian Industry Group when she was Minister for Education, Employment, Workplace Relations and Social Inclusion:

> In today's world, the areas covered by my portfolios – early childhood education and childcare, schooling, training, universities, social inclusion, employment participation and workplace cooperation – are all ultimately about the same thing: productivity. So while my portfolios can

be a mouthful, I'll be happy to be referred to simply as 'the Minister for Productivity' (Gillard 2007).

Thankfully there are also richer understandings of the importance of providing a multicultural education to students. Kugler (2002) advocates the benefits of a diverse student population, particularly in terms of enhanced academic, social and creative outcomes. She debunks a number of middle class white myths about multicultural high schools; that they are unsafe, that minority parents are apathetic about the education of their children and that core values and beliefs are threatened when exposed to a range of perspectives. She replaces these myths with a set of positive realities, most importantly that because the skill set and range of ideas is more varied in a culturally diverse classroom than a homogenous one, students can offer each other a variety of insights, which can be used as a resource to enrich discussion and challenge perspectives (2002, p.51).

Some of the best reasons for multicultural education are found in the educational philosophies written by the seven pre-service teachers associated with this study and presented as part of their final teaching portfolios. Their philosophies emphasise the democratic right of providing educational opportunities for all their students and are underpinned by a profound desire to make a positive impact on the lives of the young people they teach. They are studded with expressions about how they will use their creative passions to engage children, and their drive to create safe and fulfilling learning environments for *all* their students. Emily writes:

> Education should be a priority in our society and children should be given the opportunity to receive a good education no matter what their socio-economic status, culture or gender. Education should be inclusive and available to everyone.

Mat shares his commitment to preparing his students to develop a critical understanding of the world in which they live and will help to shape:

> I am a teacher who aims to foster students to become active citizens of the community. I assist students to become critical of the world they live in, to question what they believe to be wrong and challenge and change this.

Over the years I have read many self-reflective portfolios by pre-service teachers that have their professional philosophies at the centre of the discussion. A common theme is a sense of almost idealistic hopefulness; a vital ingredient for conceiving of an improved future and impetus for change

(Nieto 2004) as well as redressing societal injustices (Hage 2003) and power differentials. As teachers and teacher educators, we have a responsibility to assist our students develop social consciences founded on awareness and respect of self and others. Economic rationalism and globalisation aside, I like to think that we are driven to include and value all students by our fundamental belief in what my colleague Basil Varghese, an activist in the Brotherhood of St Lawrence, refers to at my University as "the intrinsic worth and dignity of all human beings" (2010). When I first heard him use this expression at a meeting it struck me as a powerful expression of belief. In subsequent communication he has explained to me that: "If one internalizes this concept one develops certain sensibilities and sensitivities that can be seen or felt verbally and non-verbally...in other words – being respected is felt in one's relationship with people" (Varghese 2012).

It must be remembered that the seven pre-service teachers involved in this study self-selected. They chose to be part of this research because of their interest in issues around culture and identity and their commitment to creating classrooms which were responsive to diversity. They had a range of rich experiences to draw from: travelling and living overseas, teaching in culturally diverse schools and mixing with people culturally different from themselves. Most of them had lived or grown up in the western suburbs of Melbourne – a region that is defined by its ethnically diverse population (see tables 1, 2 & 3 overleaf). They had also spent the past four years of their teacher education degree at a university located in Melbourne's west. Their discussions revealed their belief in the potential that cultural diversity presented for rich teaching and learning contexts, and I observed them on many occasions drawing on the cultural backgrounds of their students and using teaching strategies that incorporated multicultural perspectives. Undergirding the mission, values and goals of Victoria University is a commitment to serving its diverse student population and forging strong links with the local community. The College of Education is cognisant of its role in preparing pre-service teachers to teach in culturally diverse classrooms as well as providing pre-service teachers who may be in mainly monocultural classrooms with the skills and knowledge to encourage their students' familiarity with the multicultural society in which they live. The teacher education programme at Victoria University is underpinned by collaborative partnerships and an inquiry model of teaching and learning, which Sachs (2004) believes are essential elements to preparing activist teachers.

Table 1

Maribyrnong census information: Summary of birthplace

Current area:	Current benchmark:	Data type:	Comparison year:		
Maribyrnong City	Greater Melbourne	Usual residence	2006		reset

Excludes countries with fewer than 20 people, or less than 0.1% of the total population.

Birthplace - summary 　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　export

Maribyrnong City	2011			2006			Change
Birthplace	Number	%	Greater Melbourne	Number	%	Greater Melbourne	2006 to 2011
Total Overseas born	28,389	39.6	31.4	24,456	38.7	28.6	+3,933
• Non-English speaking backgrounds	24,643	34.4	24.2	21,491	34.0	21.6	+3,152
• Main English speaking countries	3,746	5.2	7.2	2,965	4.7	7.0	+781
Australia	37,447	52.3	63.3	33,053	52.3	64.5	+4,394
Not Stated	5,798	8.1	5.3	5,634	8.9	6.9	+164
Total Population	71,634	100.0	100.0	63,143	100.0	100.0	+8,491

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2006 and 2011. Compiled and presented by .id, the population experts.

(Maribyrnong City Council 2012)

Table 2

Maribyrnong census information: Birthplace ranked by size

Current area:	Current benchmark:	Data type:	Comparison year:		
Maribyrnong City	Greater Melbourne	Usual residence	2006		reset

Birthplace - ranked by size 　　　　　　　　　　　　export　　reset

| Maribyrnong City	2011			2006			Change
Country of birth	Number	%	Greater Melbourne	Number	%	Greater Melbourne	2006 to 2011
Vietnam	6,778	9.5	1.7	6,133	9.7	1.6	+645
India	2,869	4.0	2.7	1,618	2.6	1.4	+1,251
China	2,128	3.0	2.3	1,652	2.6	1.5	+476
United Kingdom	1,832	2.6	4.1	1,594	2.5	4.4	+238
New Zealand	1,237	1.7	1.7	899	1.4	1.5	+338
Italy	1,036	1.4	1.7	1,235	2.0	2.0	-199
Greece	949	1.3	1.2	1,073	1.7	1.4	-124
Philippines	774	1.1	0.8	691	1.1	0.7	+83
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	555	0.8	0.4	591	0.9	0.5	-36
Bangladesh	544	0.8	0.1	501	0.8	0.1	+43
Show me more!							

Excludes countries with fewer than 20 people, or less than 0.1% of the total population.

(Maribyrnong City Council, 2012)

Table 3

Maribyrnong census information: Comparative country of birth

Country of birth, 2011

■ Maribyrnong City   ■ Greater Melbourne
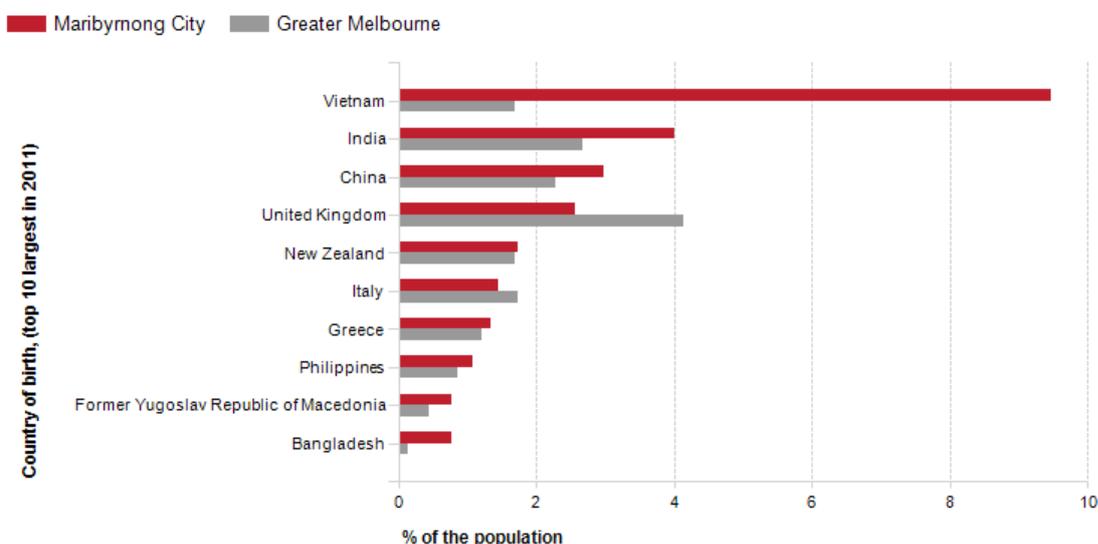
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2011 (Usual residence data)
Compiled and presented by .id, the population experts.

(Maribyrnong City Council, 2012)

These conditions favourably predisposed this group of pre-service teachers to take their place as "multicultural educators" (Gorski 2010) in schools with relative confidence. Indeed, they contributed thoughtfully to pedagogical discourse around culture and identity, and I observed many exemplars of good teaching practice as I filmed, and will continue to discuss. For example the range of texts used by pre-service teachers to promote discussion around identity and diversity is discussed in the section *Texts/curriculum and critical literacy*. Also worthy of attention is the artful practice adopted by Jacinta and Emily to engage their students in explorations of culture and diversity, detailed in the section *Using artful practice as a discursive device to explore cultural identity*. Juxtaposing this good practice were areas of tension and uncertainty. Some pre-service teachers struggled to articulate how they were implementing a multicultural approach in their classrooms. Some felt constrained by the content matter they were asked to teach, believing that it provided limited opportunities to initiate discussion around culture and diversity. This is evidenced in the next section through the conversations with Mat and Jenna about the dinosaur unit they were teaching.

Many of the struggles and conflicting perspectives experienced by these pre-service teachers have been captured in the film created for this research; offering insights which are particularly useful for informing teacher education courses. It is my hope that the film functions as a discursive tool to open up

discussion and encourage audiences to ponder the many issues with which these soon-to-be-graduates grappled, as well as celebrating their many achievements.

Complexities and tensions in conceptualising and practising multicultural education

As previously mentioned, because multicultural education in Australia was initially conceived as something "for" minority groups, the perception still remains that it is a tangential feature of the curriculum. Early conversations with some pre-service teachers involved in this research reflected this understanding. For example Jenna says:

> Every now and then I would put in a couple of things. But I felt there was so much that my mentor wanted me to teach them, that I didn't find the time to go "OK, I'm going to do this class on cultural inclusivity".

During their six week placement, Emily and Jacinta had the opportunity to design and teach a term unit based on Nadia Wheatley's *My Place* (2008), which explicitly focused on the themes of immigration, family, culture, identity and communities. In contrast to this, Mat and Jenna were involved in teaching a unit on dinosaurs, and were constantly grappling with how to make it culturally responsive to their 1/2 Grade. As Mat explains:

> Jenna and I were teaching dinosaurs, so it was totally different to what you (Jacinta and Emily) were doing in terms of promoting diversity.

The dinosaur unit that Mat and Jenna were asked to teach presented us with a conundrum, as they struggled to articulate how this unit reflected a multicultural approach to teaching and learning. Mat commented that he was aware of including all his students, but that this was a result of his personal demeanour rather than a conscious decision to create a culturally inclusive classroom. We had numerous conversations about the distinctions between curriculum and pedagogy, and agreed that even if the content does not have an explicit multicultural focus, a critical pedagogy can be adopted. We discussed how cultural inclusivity can permeate all teaching and learning content but in the teaching process especially and how this is a key feature of effective multicultural education (Nieto 2004 & 2010). However I am not sure that all pre-service teachers were convinced of the explicit multicultural curriculum and pedagogy focus. It is interesting to hold up the dinosaur unit to Nieto's (2004) five levels of multicultural education. Given the inherent nature of the content knowledge representing reality as

"static, flat and finished", it would appear that in terms of critical pedagogy at least, the dinosaur unit potentially only reflects the lowest level of "monocultural education" as characterised by Nieto.

This does not mean that it is fixed on this rung. Dinosaurs have been discovered throughout the world, and there are multiple ways to engage children in discussions about their discovery in other countries and to learn about other cultures. However achieving the highest level of critical pedagogy: "Affirmation, Solidarity and Critique" in which "decision-making and social action are the basis of the curriculum" and "students and teachers are involved in a 'subversive activity' (Nieto 2004) seems an unlikely outcome of a grade 1/2 dinosaur unit. Nonetheless the dinosaur lesson that I observed in Mat's class and referenced in the research film featured key elements of a multicultural classroom. Mat had gone to a lot of trouble to bury dinosaur bones in boxes of sand, and the activity involved small groups of students working cooperatively to dig these up and piece them together. During this lesson I observed students taking ownership of their learning. Mat created a safe environment which fostered respect and enabled students to take risks and ask questions. Nieto (2004) suggests that reorganising the social structure of the classroom in this way can lead to improvements in academic success, intercultural relations and social development: "Providing alternative means for learning is an essentially equitable endeavour, and it strengthens the democratic purposes of schooling" (p.374). The range of activities included all children and drew on a range of individual learning preferences. Interactions with the students suggested that Mat had a good rapport with them, and that he was caring and interested in them as individuals. Certainly Mat's lessons around Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* more explicitly drew on students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds and reflected higher levels of Nieto's characteristics of multicultural education by virtue of the subject matter of migration, belonging and identity.

When I initially asked pre-service teachers to suggest ways in which they could make their classrooms more inclusive of cultural diversity, some suggestions included hanging flags, learning words in a different language, sharing food, teaching a "celebrations unit" and holding a multicultural day or week. While none of these suggestions are inherently "wrong" per se, reducing representations of culture to "holidays and heroes" (Nieto 2010), "dance, dress and dining" (Srivastava 2007) or what a teacher colleague refers to as "the 4 Fs" (food, festivals, flags and fables), can be demeaning to cultural groups: "Whatever its name, it refers to the same response to diversity: a superficial, additive study of culture and culturally rooted differences and inequities" (Sensoy et al. 2010, p.2). Sensoy et al. (2010) highlight that deviating from this approach is an ongoing challenge because mainstream curriculum is so geared towards facilitating this approach.

Focussing on the "celebratory" and superficial aspects of culture risks perpetuating stereotypes and

encouraging token inclusions, particularly if this is the only time the school focuses on diversity. This was certainly the case as previously mentioned when my daughter Emilia packed potatoes and flags in her cultural suitcase. It was also the case in my own schooling when the only education I received on Indigenous Australians came midway through an Australian history topic that celebrated explorers and settlers and involved drawing Aboriginal boomerangs, huts and spears.

Conceiving of multicultural education in this narrow way may also further accentuate the chasm between "diverse"/"Other" cultures and the dominant culture. For example, children from minority backgrounds may feel pressured to draw on their family's ethnic heritage rather than celebrating a hybrid identity. There is the assumption and expectation that these children will have certain cultural knowledge; for example, that they will be able and willing to share information about the traditions, food, language and history of their culture, when in fact they may know very little about their culture. This yet again serves to highlight the messy and contradictory nature of exploring diversity and cultural identity in our classrooms and of the fine balance between including, acknowledging and drawing on a student's cultural identities and having an awareness not to essentialise cultures or project our understandings of students' culture onto them.

Conversely, children from Anglo-Australian backgrounds may grapple with identifying and expressing their culture. What traditional dress should they wear during a multicultural week? What platter of food should they bring to share? What languages other than English do they speak? These dilemmas were exemplified in the discourse in the section *Dominant culture norms and the invisibility of identity* when some Anglo-Australian pre-service teachers expressed their inadequacy at "lacking" a cultural identity as well as exoticising those who were outside the cultural mainstream. While of course we all have a "cultural identity" or "ethnicity", in Australia "ethnic" has tended to be used synonymously with recent arrivals. As previously mentioned, this is in part a consequence of our philosophical approach to diversity – those who are first and second generation migrants are generally considered to have an ethnic identity, but those who are third generation or older are simply considered "Australian" (Swetnam 2003). Additionally, dominant discourse on diversity often defines "diversity" from the vantage point of the hegemonic mainstream – which is middle class and white (Swartz 2009). In this way, people from the dominant Anglo-Australian culture do not easily identify themselves as part of the multicultural mix. Perhaps this can be explained by the way that multiculturalism itself has been constructed around the idea of the Other – seen as an add-on to some elusive Australian culture. This makes it difficult for Anglo-Australian teachers to locate themselves in a multicultural framework – to see themselves as part of the "ethnic", "multicultural" or "diverse". This was exemplified in conversations, with pre-service

teachers in which they differentiated between "our" culture (their own Anglo-Australian culture) and "Other" cultures (culturally and linguistically diverse cultures). More than anything, this calls attention to the ongoing need to reconceptualise diversity beyond an "us" (third generation and older Australians) and "them" (recent arrivals) dichotomy.

Reading this chapter you may be struck by the circular nature of the discussion and the arguments presented. This was precisely the experience I had in the many discussions with pre-service teachers during our focus group sessions. Just as I was neatly shaping my views on cultural diversity and creating culturally inclusive classrooms, one of the pre-service teacher participants would offer an alternative view point or counter argument. As this chapter title suggests, this is challenging work for educators and one that is undergirded by tension. Far more important than arriving at simple answers, is the process – the rigorous discussion, lively debate and creation of opportunities to engage meaningfully in discussion around culture, race and identity.

The research film *Classroom Conversations around Culture*, which accompanies this exegesis, captures the circularity and tension in the lives of the pre-service teachers and the schools in which they were teaching. Its value is as a discussion starter which offers the chance to explore a range of issues, and to examine them at this point in their life. As film-maker Mel Stuart says, "The wonderful thing about documentaries, if they're done honestly, is that they are the closest thing we can have to the chronicles of our time…I think you cannot have a more important record of how we lived" (Stuart 2005).

How do we acknowledge and respond to diversity and difference?

> The challenge for critical educators is to use a pedagogy informed by difference as a means toward a pluralistic democracy. This means inviting difference to the centre of the curriculum as a way of knowing and emphasizing the transformative power of difference in the rethinking of social structures (SooHoo 2006, p.10).

As explored in *Part 1: Setting the scene on culture, identity and language*, there is often an underlying caution and uneasiness about acknowledging and speaking about race, skin colour and cultural difference. For some teachers there is the perception that it may make their students uncomfortable by drawing attention or even considering difference – thus exacerbating the differences between people. Some teachers believe that "...by looking past skin colour they are above racist attitudes and actions" (Mazzei 2011, p.666). In his research with white beginning teachers working in predominantly white

classrooms in the UK, Jones (1999) discovered that pre-service teachers unanimously dismiss the idea of acknowledging a child's ethnic identity, opting instead to "treat children as individuals", a notion "which is equated unproblematically with 'treating them all the same'" (p.44). Pre-service teachers in my study often made mention of the fact that their primary school students did not notice the cultural/racial differences within their classes. They made comments such as "the kids just see each other as kids" and "they don't notice the differences". This seemed to confuse the issue of how much to draw on students' differences, as indicated by Jenna's comment:

> I never had any problems with race – discrimination. There were different cultures in the classroom, and there was never any problem. Everybody saw each other as the same – I guess that's why I didn't think of it as much.

In an interview with Jacinta and her mentor teacher Gary (referenced in the film), Jacinta brought up her concern, which hinged on the notion of "overplaying" or "reading too much" into cultural differences – highlighting the subtle balancing act between celebrating both similarities and differences:

> It's one of those sensitive things...if you play on it too much, then – what's the word? – it ignites it even more – you become over conscious of it and I think kids can be prone to doing that. So if you're celebrating each other's differences all the time, then it's like, "hang on, you are different" and "why are you different?". I think there's a fine line.

Eminent researchers caution the notion of adopting a colour-blind stance, urging that it may ultimately do more harm than good by ignoring or denying a student's ethnic identity and therefore not teaching to the whole student (Santoro 2005; Nieto, 2004; Milner & Ross 2006; Jones 1999). To explore this further in the context of their classroom practice, I asked pre-service teachers to rate from 1 (strongly disagree) to10 (strongly agree) their response to the statement:

I think teachers should be colour-blind to students.

Mat: (1) I don't think they should be at all. I think teachers should totally embrace the differences, and skin colour – I think they should teach to it. It's a great thing having diversity in your classroom – it's amazing. If you ignore it completely, it's just pushing it aside.

Jacinta:(1) I agree with Mat. I think you should acknowledge it, talk about the differences – embrace it.

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Nieto (2010) argues affirming differences rather than denying or ignoring them is clearly part of a multicultural perspective. She encourages teachers to not only see the differences but also to critically affirm and incorporate them into teaching and learning experiences. Viewing students' cultural and linguistic differences as an asset and strength rather than a deficit or problem is an important part of providing educational equality for students.

Interestingly Abdul – who was the only non-white person in the group on this particular day, as well as being a recent arrival – responded to the question of whether to adopt a colour-blind approach with a '10', saying:

> I don't look at their colour – it's there I have to admit it – a black, brown or white person, but I don't stress on that one.

Perhaps Abdul's response reflects his frustration at so often being defined by his "difference". In his stories of his experiences as a taxi driver he highlights the many misguided assumptions people make about him. He told me of one passenger who asked about his family, and upon hearing that his wife was a pharmacist, said, "That's a strange combination – a taxi driver and a pharmacist!" In his secondary school placement he overheard a group of students making a racist remark about him behind his back. It is little wonder that he often interpreted enquiries about his background by his passengers as challenging his legitimacy and sense of entitlement to being in Australia.

In a later interview, in which I asked Abdul about his experiences growing up in Ethiopia and the challenges of being a Muslim in Australia, he remarked: "There are some similarities in all cultures. Not all cultures are different." It is true that "....whenever we deal with an individual from an unfamiliar culture, we often use the key ways that he or she is different to define his or her entire culture" (Gurung 2009, p.13). While affirming diversity and looking for cultural similarities are not mutually exclusive, Abdul's comments reinforce the importance of connecting students through their commonalities as well as through their differences, a view that was often expressed by pre-service teachers and their mentors, as well as being supported by a number of researchers (Matsumoto 2009; Gaitan 2006). Abdul's reactions also give us an insight into why some teachers may be uncomfortable enquiring into a student's ethnicity in their classroom and prefer to adopt what they see as a safer option by being colour-blind. The potential for damage is illustrated by a story from a friend's daughter who is in year 8. During class one day, the teacher struck up a spontaneous conversation with a student who is first generation Australian with Indian parents. In front of the whole class the teacher discussed how she had seen a documentary on India and then pressured the student to speak some Hindi for everybody,

saying, "Come on, I know you can speak it". The student declared that she did not know any Hindi. The teacher may have been very well-meaning, but by all intents the girl was extremely embarrassed by being singled out and made to feel different. In contrast to this are the experiences of Jacinta and Emily's students in which discussions of culture included everybody. The sensitivity and skill that teachers must demonstrate when they discuss culture, religion, language and ethnicity cannot be underestimated. Above all, ongoing critical awareness must be provided for pre-service teachers and school teaching staff around responding competently to student cultural diversity. This will be discussed in more depth in the section *Walking the talk: Active, creative, courageous teacher educators and the implications for teacher education programmes.*

Some of the pre-service teachers in this study described a number of uncomfortable situations arising from cultural/racial differences in their classes. Sabrina, who was teaching at a school with a predominantly Vietnamese-Australian student population, noted the importance of addressing issues, but admitted:

> I find it really hard when it's the subtle stuff, because it's so – this sounds horrible – but it's so easy to ignore that…that tiny little comment that a kid has made, when you've got 50,000 other things going on. But you don't know the effect that's had on another kid. With Yumin, who's new and can't speak any English, and he's come from China, where everybody has an Asian complexion, and he kept pointing at Pauline – one of the only girls in our class who's dark skinned – and kept tapping me and pointing at her saying "black", "black" and Pauline was getting quite agitated, and I couldn't explain to him "no…" (don't go there) so that was a really hard thing, and I didn't know if I should stop and talk to Pauline. I didn't know what to do there.

Another difficult moment for Sabrina (referenced in the film) was when her student Maysa was not permitted by her family to attend the year 1/ 2 sleepover at school because of her religious background. Sabrina explained the awkwardness when her students started to ask Maysa why she wasn't participating in the sleepover:

> I started to brush it off by saying, "She doesn't have to sleep over if she doesn't want to". But then Maysa was saying "But I *do* want to!". So we stopped, and started to talk about cultural differences, and what that is. I said some people like carrots and some people don't like carrots, that's a difference. Then Tinny said, "Like Vietnamese school, some people like Vietnamese school, and some people don't, and I said, "And some people don't *go* to Vietnamese school"… Out of this conversation one of the boys, who's Maori, said, "I don't like black people". And I just

said, "Well that's really silly, why would you say that? and he said, "because they're mean". And I said, " that's the silliest thing I've heard come out of your mouth. What if I said I hate all New Zealanders. I think they're all mean", and he just didn't say anything back. I feel it's really weird that a kid that young has just heard stuff like that and picked it up, and thinks that it's normal, so much so that he would just say that in class thinking it was the right thing.

Subsequent discussion with Sabrina about this incident indicated that she felt inadequate about her response – both in assisting students to understand the meaning of cultural difference and in responding to the boy's comments about not liking black people. Her response shut down further classroom conversation, and it would appear shamed the boy into silence. She also made the erroneous assumption that because the boy was a Maori, he would not discriminate against other people with dark skin colour. Having dark skin does not ipso facto mean that a person will not hold biased attitudes towards others who have different backgrounds, cultures and skin colours. This inherent contradiction in racism is articulated by Connolly (2002): "We cannot assume that racism will always be associated by beliefs about racial inferiority; that it will always be signified by skin color; that it will be only White people who can be racist; or that racism will always be the most significant factor in the experience of minority ethnic groups" (p.10).

Sabrina, like Jacinta and Emily, had the flexibility to integrate explicit lessons on culture and identity into her final six week placement. Her Grade 1/2 students participated in a project that required them to research their culture – interviewing parents and other family members, sharing artifacts with class members and reading texts such as Shaun Tan's *Eric* (2010).

This topic inspired much discussion about different cultures, languages and traditions, and students genuinely seemed proud about sharing their differences. The boy's comment would have provided an excellent opportunity to engage in further discussion. Yet conversations about racism and race can be challenging and awkward, and teachers will often actively avoid opening up discussions because they feel uncomfortable and unprepared. There is also the belief that it will exacerbate existing tensions, for example, Sabrina indicated that she was concerned about Pauline's response, particularly given Pauline's discomfort when Yumin was pointing at her and calling her 'black'. There was also the added complexity of bringing Yumin into the conversation, given his limited English. However not entering into dialogue means that the boy will continue to believe that "all blacks are mean", but will possibly have learnt to keep these views to himself in class. It is the mission of schools and teachers to create an environment which is conducive to opening up dialogue about inequality (Nieto 2010).

Nieto's (2010) first characteristic of multicultural education is that it is antiracist, requiring teachers to work affirmatively to combat racism. I believe Sabrina had the desire and sensibility to respond effectively to this situation, yet lacked the confidence and experience. This highlights the need for ongoing opportunities for pre-service teachers to reflect on practice in schools and to participate in professional development that explores effective implementation of multicultural education. Pre-service teachers need to be introduced to quality resources, such as those available on the *Racism No Way* (NSW Department of Education and Training 2010) website, which cater for kindergarten to year 12 students. Confidence can also be gained through role-taking drama in university classrooms with the support of teacher educators. Rao and Stupansb (2012) explore the potential of using such role play in higher education and propose a typology and teacher guidelines. Of course they must also have plenty of meaningful opportunities to discuss race and racism within their own teacher education degrees.

In order for pre-service teachers to really know and engage their students, they need an understanding of their "'ethnic identities', that is, what their students' cultural practices, values and beliefs are and how these may shape their learning and social interactions at school:

Mat: If you see something going on in the classroom, like at our school there's a lot of Muslims, and when they saw somebody eating ham they were like, "Oh, that's disgusting" and you had to explain, "At this school some people eat ham – it's part of their culture."

On several occasions Emily mentioned her lack of knowledge about Islam, and was grateful when some of her Muslim students were able to share their experiences. It is also important that pre-service teachers continually critique this new knowledge – remembering that not all Muslim families will share the same experiences or beliefs, and that there are different constructions of Muslim identity as of all identities.

At the time I was filming in Jacinta's and Emily's class I observed students sharing the different ways that they celebrated the same tradition – for example Easter, and Christmas – reminding children that not all cultural groups are homogenous (Gurung 2009).This was a valuable lesson not only for students, but for pre-service teachers as well.

While the following story told by Emily is not specifically related to addressing cultural/racial prejudice, it is nonetheless a poignant example of the importance of challenging children to think more deeply about issues of intolerance, particularly in the context of their class topic which focussed on respecting others' differences.

Emily: That's part of teaching – to be accepting, of not just culture, but of everything. I had a boy who was a bit of a tough kid. He brought a very interesting sandwich to school the other day – he had vegemite and tomato and the kids all started saying, "Oh yuck, disgusting, disgusting" and this tough kid – it didn't seem to affect him – then he walked up and tried to hide that he was crying and I sat him up the front of the class and I made all the kids who'd picked on him stand up and ask why they thought it was strange. And I also discussed with them: "you don't have a right to pick on him for being him. No one has a right to tell him who he can be if that's who he is, you have to let him be that, you can't judge him for that, and you can't change him. And what makes people different makes them interesting". And I told them I eat chips and ice-cream!

This incident demonstrates Emily's active creation of a socially just and inclusive classroom by engaging the class in a thoughtful discussion about difference rather than responding punitively or simply ignoring it. Emily's belief about teaching as "accepting, of not just culture, but of everything" aligns with Sapon-Shevin's view of inclusive classrooms in which "teachers acknowledge the myriad ways in which students differ from one another (class, gender, ethnicity, family background, sexual orientation, language, abilities, size, religion, and so on); value this diversity; and design and implement productive, sensitive responses" (2008, p.49). By creating space to discuss the "unusual" sandwich and the subsequent alienating responses it provoked, Emily demonstrated that this was worthy of discussion, that difference was something to celebrate and perhaps most importantly, provided a safe environment to talk about challenging and uncomfortable topics (Sapon-Shevin 2008). Celebration and affirmation of diversity are good ways to interrupt oppression. The "Riddle Scale" (Riddle 1994) is a continuum scale to measure attitudes towards homosexuality, with positive appreciation and celebration of difference at the top of the scale. A similar scale with reference to diversity would be an interesting reflective tool for pre-service teachers to measure their attitudes.

Jacinta also described a class in which she made students examine the consequences of emotional and physical bullying behaviour, after she had witnessed some students being teased at lunchtime. As the students boisterously returned from lunch, she set aside some quiet reflective time. She then led a discussion around bullying and its effects, and invited students to empathise with what it would be like to be bullied. After the discussion she asked students to go to the person they had emotionally or physically bullied and apologise for their behaviour. This was a powerful example of seizing a "teachable moment". The perpetrators of the bullying were genuinely remorseful, and clearly gained a deeper insight into the effects of their behaviour. In this way, Jacinta gave students the "opportunity to

put social-justice principles into action…enabling students to *live* a social-justice curriculum rather than just study it" (Sapon-Shevin 2008, p.53).

Developing an awareness of our cultural lens to unveil dominant culture Ideology in classrooms

A key feature of becoming a critical educator is developing the ability to critically examine one's cultural biases and recognise and understand the discourses that inform one's teaching practices (McLaren 1998; White; Zion & Kozleski 2005; Villegas & Lucas 2002; Gaitan 2006; Nieto 2004; Welch 2006). Whether we realise it or not, every time we enter a classroom we are bringing with us our own set of beliefs, assumptions and judgements, which we continuously express through the texts we choose, our pedagogy, our behaviour and attitudes. Teachers are also influenced by the culture of the school, with attitudes and norms often implicitly hidden in the curriculum (Eisner 2002, p.158). Most of the pre-service teacher participants involved in this study were initially hard-pressed to describe the ways in which their cultural identity and cultural perspectives impacted on their classroom practice and their relationships with their students. Their quite narrow responses reflected the difficulty in grasping the ways in which our cultural identity impacts on our teaching, particularly for those who are part of the dominant culture, and for whom culture can seem invisible. This is because "it fits so seamlessly with prevailing opinions, beliefs, values, and expectations about behaviour, education, and life choices (White, Zion & Kozleski 2005, p.2). Yet through ongoing reflection and conversation, they began to cultivate a broader understanding of their identity as cultural beings, and started to question the assumptions that they brought into their teaching as well as identifying normative and habitual pedagogical practices. Horsley (2003, p.82) argues that this ability to "step outside their own ethnic orientation, and recognise the way in which cultural understanding imbues the teaching-learning process" is a necessary component to teachers embracing the idea that multiculturalism should frame all school practices. It also lays the foundation for interrogating prevailing hegemonic values and practices, which McLaren (1998) urges is a necessary step in defeating oppression and unjust power relations.

Critical pedagogy is a useful framework in which to ask fundamental epistemological questions such as how and why knowledge gets constructed in certain ways, why some constructions of reality are legitimated while clearly others are not, and who is included and excluded as a result of this (McLaren 1998, p.174). The following conversation demonstrates pre-service teachers' growing awareness of teaching within a dominant paradigm, and the potential this has for creating a culture gap between them and their students.

Mat: I don't want to push my culture onto anybody else – but is there a culture I should be teaching to? Should I teach Christmas? It makes me think about what other people's culture is – what other people do – what's important to them.

Abdul: Would you teach Christmas to Muslims?

Mat: I wouldn't, I don't think it's important enough to teach non-Christians.

Jacinta: I don't think it's really about teaching Christmas – I think it's about whether you encourage Christmas, and then there's Easter and Mother's day and Father's day…

Mat: You've really got to go along with what the other teachers do, don't you?

Abdul: I have reservations when I teach something…a parent sued a school because the teacher was talking about Noah's Ark, and the parent didn't want any religious education taught in the public school.

Mat: It's always at the back of my head…when I'm in the classroom teaching for 6 weeks, I'm going to undoubtedly put my values and beliefs into the teaching. The kids probably won't react, but what if they go home and say something to their parents?

Jacinta: How do you present your values? How do kids respond to you and what you believe, 'cause they're so sensitive, they're like sponges. They can be so malleable in their beliefs, and I think it's really important to be sensitive to these issues.

The questions and concerns raised in this dialogue reflect the uncertainty that pre-service teachers have in navigating a path through value-laden content, curriculum and pedagogy. On the one hand they recognise the incredible opportunity and responsibility they have to influence their students, yet this is coupled with the tension about whether they are doing the "right" thing. Mat's comment about not wanting to "push" his culture onto his students demonstrates his realisation of the influence he has on what and how he teaches his students, and the role dominant attitudes and values play in learning (Nieto 2010, pp.14–15). Mat's questioning of whether or not to "teach Christmas" demonstrates an interrogation of dominant values, traditions and beliefs, which are often intrinsically and unquestioningly embedded in the curriculum. While schools largely tend to focus on the celebratory qualities of

Christmas rather than the religious or spiritual ones, the fact remains that the school calendar is built around major Christian holidays and celebrations such as Christmas and Easter. This is just one way in which the dominant Anglo-Christian culture ideology becomes entrenched in the school curriculum and the potential this has for excluding some students.

Over the years there has been much debate about whether secular government schools should continue to celebrate Christian traditions such as Christmas and Easter (Masanauskas 2010; ninemsn staff 2011; Cooke 2010; Dillon 2011). The general pattern seems to be that in an attempt to be more inclusive schools announce their plan to remove or "ban" references to Christian symbols and rituals such as carols, Easter eggs and nativity plays. Large numbers of parents from the dominant culture become incensed and often direct their anger at multiculturalism and political correctness. Ethnic minority groups distance themselves from the debate and eventually the Government steps in to advocate a "sensible" approach, which entails reversing the ban.

Another celebration that has crept into the Australian calendar is Halloween. I have noticed an increasing range of mass-produced merchandise and paraphernalia in local suburban shops and large department stores. While my eldest daughter correctly cites its Celtic pagan roots in defence to my bemoaning its Americanisation and commercialisation, the fact remains that: "the modern day Halloween marketplace has become a huge business opportunity for many retailers" (McKechnie & Tynan 2008, p.1012). When I suggested to several neighbours that we could adopt the "Trick-or-Treat for Unicef" fundraising program that involves collecting small donations rather than sweets, I was met with disdainful looks. Even those who were supportive of the idea suggested that it would take all the fun out of the celebration. McKechnie and Tynan (2008) ask the question of Halloween: "Is it one big ruse by retailers to capitalise on yet another holiday ritual and prescribe how to enact the ritual, or does the marketplace provide consumers with an opportunity to create hedonic meanings by participating in the Halloween celebration? Is the experience indeed a consumption treat?" (pp.1012–1013). Given that my daughters and their friends gathered such a considerable amount of sweets that they decided to do a "weigh in", I would argue that it is quite literally a consumption treat.

The aforementioned Halloween and Christmas scenarios indicate the need for teachers to engage in meaningful debate around the importance of critically evaluating the curriculum to ensure that an inclusive environment is created and maintained in schools, as well as one which critiques the influences of our consumer society.

A core element of critical pedagogy, as articulated by Giroux (1992) is that: "Teachers need to find ways of creating a space for mutual engagement of lived difference that does not require the silencing of a multiplicity of voices by a single dominant discourse" (p. 201). In this way teaching and learning becomes a process of inquiry (McLaren 1998), "agency, or mutual discovery by students and teachers" rather than "socially sanctioned knowledge" (Nieto 2004, p.5). It is "socially constructed and mutually negotiated" (Nieto 2004, p.3). There is obviously richness in exposing students to diverse celebrations, religions and traditions, particularly for their intertextual understanding.

Adopting a critical approach to teaching celebrations such as Christmas could include initiating discussion around its commercialisation. This may entail exploring elements of our consumer culture such as the barrage of advertisements which bombard us at this time, and which ultimately obscure the true meanings of Christmas. I have noticed in recent years that some classes at my children's school have chosen to donate money to a child in a third world country rather than partake in the more familiar Kris Kringle or "Secret Santa" in which each student exchanges a gift with a classmate. They also enjoy visiting the residents of a local nursing home to sing to them. These acts have the potential to draw students together through the shared values of caring and compassion. When they are part of a wider conversation about social justice and equity, they can provide an important impetus for social action. For example, students may investigate wheelchair access for older people in the community and take steps to address this, or they may research third world poverty and devise a project to support a community. These kind of service-learning initiatives involve partnering communities with students, teachers and schools and recognise the positive educational outcomes and social justice outcomes (Service Learning Australia). It has also become an important pedagogical framework and method for many teacher education programmes – stressing "the mutual benefit of both the service and the learning that arises from the service" (Chambers & Lavery 2012, p.130). With a focus on inclusion and civic responsibility, key elements of the program include reflective practice, active involvement in the community and collaborative practice (Chambers & Lavery 2012).

In an interview with Mat and his mentor teacher Tammi, they discussed frankly and honestly how being part of the dominant culture influences the assumptions they make about their students:

Tammi: You can forget that people might not be coming from the same knowledge base as you...

Mat: ...it's the same with the kids who are fasting at the moment. You tell the kids to get their lunch and go and sit in the library, and you go, "Why aren't you eating your lunch?" and you forget sometimes.

Tammi: I think I'm really culturally aware, but I guess when it all comes down to it, it is the dominant culture values that I'm teaching, because that's sort of what I know. And I guess school values are those also, but I'm fairly aware of the cultural differences in the class, and I think you are too...

Mat: On crazy hair day, we have a girl who wears a head scarf and we forgot, and she came up to Tammi at the end of the day and said, "I'm not going to come into class tomorrow 'cause it's crazy hair day". And Tammi's shocked, and I'm like, man, how did we not think of that – she was sitting right there, and we just didn't think.

While this situation was successfully resolved by suggesting the girl wear a coloured head scarf, it once again demonstrates the invisibility of dominant culture values to its members, and the potential damage to those from minority backgrounds if their perspectives are not considered. Tammi's insightful point about school values coming from a dominant culture paradigm illustrates the way in which the school system predominantly esteems and reflects middle class Anglo-Australian interests and values, thus culturally biasing curriculum and practice (York 2003; Hickling-Hudson 2003). In one discussion about who drives education and school policy, Abdul commented: "School council are middle-class, white... My people in the community can't influence it". Hickling- Hudson encapsulates this well:

> The content of the school curriculum is shaped by Anglo-Australian perspectives and concerns. An Anglocentric conception of knowledge from mathematics to music is likely to perpetuate messages of white supremacy, in that 'other' cultural traditions and knowledges are either rendered invisible or distorted, an approach which represents strong legacies of a colonial past. In such schools, nothing in the curriculum promotes learning that would help the students to understand the real history or current profile of Australia and the possibilities for improvements in the future (Hickling-Hudson 2003, p.4).

Clear examples of how education is skewed in favour of the perceived dominant Anglo mainstream are the flaws and absences of Indigenous history within the emergent Australian history curriculum. These include grouping Aboriginal people with flora and fauna in a Grade 4 module that briefly explores

colonisation, as well as failures in teaching about the stolen generation (Rout 2011). Jakubowicz (2009, p.15) offers an excellent examination of the factors which have influenced the various writings of the curriculum: from the predominantly Anglo make-up of the initial advisory group and the neo-liberal political leanings of the Howard government of the day; to the choice of historian Keith Windchuttle, who had previously written a book claiming that the stolen generation was a myth. There is little doubt as to whose perspective and knowledge is represented in the curriculum – certainly not the subjugated knowledge of Indigenous peoples and minority groups. Traditionally, as noted in the University of Technology Sydney's online Jumbunna's journal, the "histories of Australia have excluded the rich and diverse cultural experiences of Indigenous peoples and played down the degree of injustice under which they have suffered since first European settlement" (2012).

As previously mentioned in the section *Multicultural Education in Australia: A brief overview*, ACARA has attempted to redress this by including "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures" as one of the three cross-curriculum priorities that is embedded in all learning areas in the Australian Curriculum, along with "Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia", and "Sustainability". The question is how well prepared will teachers be to effectively and meaningfully embed these three priorities into their teaching and learning? Initial conversations I've had with groups of graduating pre-service teachers about to teach in secondary schools indicates they are not confident about embedding these priorities in their discipline areas. They have expressed their genuine bafflement as to how they will embed these priorities into subjects such as physical education, maths and science. In fact, many of them have suggested that the only way they will be able to address the priorities is to create one-off lessons or short units; admitting that this will be tokenistic and will ultimately defeat the whole purpose of an embedded approach. How do you authentically integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in maths and science classes, and how will this knowledge be framed?

In 2012 a group of researchers conducted the first empirical study of non-Indigenous Australians' knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and knowledge, and the integration of this knowledge into classroom practice (Luke et al. 2012). Their findings revealed that many teachers reported low levels of knowledge of Indigenous cultures, limited encounters outside of school and generally felt that their pre-service teacher training inadequately prepared them to teach on matters of Indigenous education. Much work remains to be done in preparing pre-service teachers to develop pedagogy and curriculum that will enable them to effectively integrate these three cross-curriculum priorities, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. This will be particularly challenging given that very few people to date have experienced an education that has fully integrated

Indigenous knowledges across discipline areas. "Intercultural Understanding" has been outlined in the Australian Curriculum as a general capability designed to support students to value and critique their own cultural perspectives and those of others (ACARA n.d.). It offers the chance to move beyond conversations around food and celebrations, and encourage inquiry about social, political and economic contexts of language and culture. It holds the promise of addressing Hickling-Hudson's (2003) aforementioned concern of offering students a monocultural curriculum and a distorted history of Australia by addressing the omissions and including the more confronting and disturbing parts. This learning *would* actually assist students to understand the real history of Australia and help to shape an improved future.

In one meeting with the pre-service teacher participants, I handed around some pamphlets that I had collected from the Immigration Museum about their current exhibition – *Australia's Muslim Camaleers.* The exhibition celebrated the pioneering work done by Muslims in assisting expeditions in Australia's outback from the1860s–1930s. This was part of our history none of us had ever been taught at school, and comments from the group indicated the usefulness of knowing these virtually unknown parts of our heritage, particularly in valuing the contributions made by Muslims.

It should be said that during the filming of pre-service teachers at their partnership schools I observed countless examples of the school community esteeming the knowledge and experiences of minority and Indigenous perspectives; from an Aboriginal smoking ceremony to open a new school hall, to dynamic lessons exploring culture and identity. The importance of facilitating student conversations around culture and race was illustrated one day when my daughter Lucinda was in Grade 3/4. She rushed excitedly through the door after school and said, "One of the kids in my class said something racist, then we talked about racism for the next two hours – and we were supposed to be doing *maths*!".

Somewhat in competition with all this good work in affirming diversity and challenging racism are the growing demands for accountability and standardisation through high-stakes testing such as NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) and league tables of school achievement. The concern with standardisation is that it is sometimes yet another way of "...assimilating all school children into mainstream values, language and knowledge perspectives..." (Banks 2004, p.vii). It can also come at the expense of narrowing the curriculum, as teachers are pre-occupied with covering the content that their students must pass – ultimately leaving less time and freedom to design curriculum based on students' needs and interests (Nieto 2004). Certainly the informal conversations I have had with teachers over recent years point to the time-consuming nature of the literacy and numeracy

program in preparation for the testing, and the fact that there is less time for inquiry learning. There is also the concern that it impacts on the amount of available time to reflect on one's practice (Welch 2006). Several pre-service teachers observed that in some school planning sessions they attended, discussions were around what worked well and was easiest – not what was culturally relevant. Jones (1999) attributes standardisation practices to the decline of multicultural education in England over the past 20 years, stating: "Issues of equality have been overtaken in the classroom by issues of assessment, accountability and inspection - all presented as having no relation to stereotyping and race" (p.5).

In a focus group conversation around the values and knowledge assessed in nationalised high stakes testing such as NAPLAN, Emily got to the core of the issue by interrogating the very purpose of education and suggesting that we place greater value on making the world a better place in which to live: "The Nazi Germans were very well educated...maybe we should measure what people are doing for others – how ethical they are". This sentiment is echoed by McLaren (1998) when he cautions that mainstream pedagogies "generally avoid or attempt to obscure the question that should be central to education: What is the relationship between what we do in the classroom and our effort to build a better society?" (p.xv). The relationship between performing well on test scores and being good citizens is a tension explored by many educators and writers. Sapon-Shevin (2003) states: "Creating students who can pass tests but who treat one another cruelly or indifferently is not a formula for successful schooling or a democratic society" (p.27). Juxtaposed against this is the pressure from parents for their children to "achieve" well on such tests, and the "unfairness" of teachers not supporting them to do so. The key is acknowledging and building pedagogy around teaching that equity is not achieved by treating everyone the same. In fact sometimes when we offer equality (giving everybody the same thing) we fail to achieve equity and justice (Gorski 2010). As Clark says: "Treating everyone 'the same' today, even if that were possible, still does not erase the cumulative effect – the continuing impact – of historical inequality...Treating, or even attempting to treat, everyone equally ('the same') only guarantees that existing inequities will be persistently reproduced, or, worse, exacerbated" (2011). Equity requires eliminating disparities in access to opportunities and resources (Gorski 2010). Many of these disparities have been clearly identified in the government's *Review of Funding for Schooling Final Report*, otherwise known as the "Gonski Report" (Gonski 2011). The report calls for major reform in the school funding system to redress these disparities. Unfortunately, in our fragile political climate of hung parliaments and shifting political allegiances, education is often one of the first portfolios to suffer budget cuts. The current $300 million cuts to the TAFE (Tertiary and Further Education) system by the Victorian Government is a good case in point.

The quote mentioned in the section *Why multicultural education?* by Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, when she was Minister for Education, Employment, Workplace Relations and Social Inclusion about the correlation of education and productivity reverberates to this day.

Cultural challenges and clashes

While pre-service teachers advocated promoting a classroom culture which values and respects cultural perspectives, and which supports the home culture of the students and their families, they also acknowledged that there may be times when the teacher's values or the policies and practices of the school conflict with that of the student and their family. Mat's questions encapsulate multiple mixed messages:

> How can a teacher change the values held by students in the classroom? Is it possible? Should they? What if a student believes violence is appropriate or something?

Mat's mentor teacher, Tammi, echoed this concern in a subsequent interview and contemplated the best way to approach conflicting values between a student's home and school life:

> I worry about it...some of the things we say in class...kids must go home and their parents must say, "But that's not how *we* do things". There would be children who are hit at home…and I guess the only way you can deal with that is by saying, "At *this* school we don't swear, or hit".

Obviously physical violence is not a practice confined to any particular cultural group, and the necessity for the school to intervene is fairly clear cut. But what about other cultural practices? Levey (2011) offers an unambiguous stance: "…cultural practices that infringe on rights and liberties, such as female genital mutilation or the denial of a general education, are rightly disallowed" (p.34). But in practice this can be more complicated and challenging to work through. The Hmong people historically arrange marriages for their children at a young age. When I was teaching English as an Additional Language to members of the Hmong community at a small inner city community centre, many of the young teenage girls I was teaching were distressed about the marriages that were being arranged for them. Some were running away from home to avoid them. The coordinator of the centre arranged meetings with the families and encouraged them to consider postponing the marriages so that the girls could finish their secondary schooling. As an educator how do you straddle this cultural divide without devaluing or colonising age-old customs and traditions?

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When the spirit falls I'll catch you (Fadiman 1998) is an exquisitely written book which offers profound insights into cross cultural misunderstandings within a medical context. It is an achingly sad story about a Hmong girl who suffers as a result of the collision of two cultures (the Hmong community and the American health system) in spite of the fact that both her parents and the medical profession had her best interests at heart. It is a good reminder to us, as educators, of the consequences when there is an absence or failing of intercultural communication based on respect. It highlights the importance of looking towards a model of mediation rather than coercion which is based on "moral hegemony" drawing on only one legitimate approach to a problem that entails Westerners holding all the knowledge (p.261). It also allows the possibility that some cultural clashes may be attributed to the host society's structures of exclusion rather than the incompatibility of particular cultural groups (Jakubowicz 2009). In an educational context this creates a discourse that "place[s] the blame on students of colour and their families, when in essence, we must look at the institutional structures and the systems of power and oppression that work to (re)establish and maintain the status quo" (Ross & Pang 2006, p.xix). Most poignantly, it once again illustrates the need to be mindful of the influence of our cultural lens:

> If you can't see that your own culture has its own set of interests, emotions, and biases, how can you expect to deal successfully with someone else's culture? (Fadiman 1998, p.261).

The idea that cultural diversity needs to sit within a broader framework of democracy and universal human rights is articulated in the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council's statement on cultural diversity and recommendations to government:

> A sound multicultural policy will strike a number of fragile balances: it will encourage cultural diversity and celebrate it, but only within the broader aim of social harmony, national unity and fundamental freedoms such as gender equality. It will confront prejudice in all its forms, including racism, yet in the spirit of democracy, refrain from forcing on the broad community anything resembling an official ideology (2010, p.15).

The discussion with Tammi and Mat referred to above exposes a range of tensions that teachers face and emphasises the need for committed awareness and aware commitment in responding to these tensions. It reinforces the usefulness of situating ourselves on Nieto's (2004) multicultural education continuum, prompting us to continually assess our own biases and problematize any awkward incidents around culture, diversity and identity to improve the learning in our schools. As Nieto maintains, critiquing the status quo of not just one's own culture, but the culture of others is consistent with the

aims of multicultural education and is a healthy and necessary process of reflection (1994, p.6). Some pre-service teachers discussed the challenges of navigating cultural differences between themselves and their students. Emily recounted a story of a girl in her class who was fasting during Ramadan:

> She just got sicker and sicker, was really unwell – she developed an ear infection, was coughing all day, was falling asleep and didn't learn anything. We didn't have the right to question the parents, but it was really hard. The kids tell me, and we were reading it in the books, that if you're sick you don't have to fast, and if you're under 10 it's half fast, and she was only just 10, and they wouldn't let her have a break.

Mat tells a similar story of a girl in his class who was very sick as a result of fasting. His mentor decided to ring her father to ask if she could have some water, and the father agreed. These two different responses to a perceived similar situation again reinforce the importance of not having pre-set expectations about cultural groups and illustrate the importance of remaining open to the possibility of a multiplicity of outcomes. Abdul reinforced this by explaining that often the children themselves are determined not to break the fast, giving the example of his own daughter who was adamant to fast one year despite Abdul's suggestion that she forego fasting because she was quite thin. Abdul's observations of the flexibility of the Muslim community at his partnership school pleasantly surprised him:

Abdul: On the concert day, I was expecting Muslim families wouldn't participate, but they participated, and bought raffle tickets. Raffle is wrong in Islamic culture. They had full participation, which was really impressive.

On another occasion, as a Muslim, he was also able to assist the school avert a cultural mismatch by making a simple suggestion:

Abdul: They had a dog at the school, so all the Muslim kids stayed behind. Why? Because their parents told them not to come close to the dog – to any dog. But there's nothing about that in the Koran. It's mostly a cultural thing, or misunderstanding: "Don't go next to the wet areas (the muzzle) or if you touch it, wash your hands". So I suggested to the school – because there are a lot of Muslims – to call the mosque for a permanent fatwa – permission: "If there's a dog, it's ok to do this, if there's music, it's ok to do this". So set a guideline, so if a parent objects, you can say "the mosque gave us approval". If they are really fanatical, then you can't help it.

Encouraging more teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds to help bridge gaps between the cultures of students and their families and the school is vital to creating successful experiences for everybody. It is also important as a way of reflecting the growing diversity in our population and improving minority students' self-concept and attitudes. Of course this does not mean that *all* teachers from diverse ethnic backgrounds will be successful in the classroom, just as not *all* teachers from the dominant culture will be. They are not a homogenous group. They are different ages, different genders, from different socio-economic backgrounds and have varied life experiences. All these factors will influence their ability to effectively teach and understand their students. It is possible that "these teachers may not necessarily understand their ethnic minority students' experiences and needs any better than Anglo-Australian teachers" (Santoro 2007, p.94). Yet while homogenising them can run the risk of "obliterating differences", (West 2005, p.103) the fact remains that they have the potential to understand the experiences of children from culturally diverse backgrounds. This unique capacity is captured in the film through the narratives of Sabrina's mentor teacher Nelly, who migrated from Uruguay, and Emily's mentor teacher Libby who migrated from Greece. In mapping out successful educational experiences for their students, these mentor teachers drew on their own experiences as children from non-English speaking migrant backgrounds, and some of the challenges this posed.

Nelly reflects on the deep connection her teacher made with her and the other Spanish-speaking students when she first arrived at school with no English by greeting them with a few words of Spanish and singing "La Cucuracha". She also notes the damage that can result from failing to build bridges with students' families, as was the case in her own schooling:

> I remember when I was little I missed out because, you know, well, the teachers obviously didn't approach my parents and my parents clearly didn't approach the teachers, so who misses out? Me!

Drawing on these formative experiences and insights, Nelly was successfully able to negotiate with her student Maysa's parents for her to attend a Grade 1/2 incursion, despite their initial reservations. This is examined in more detail in the next section.

Emily's mentor teacher Libby also tells of her experience arriving in Australia and having to learn the language and navigate her way through unfamiliar customs. As she recalls, the first word she learnt in Australia was "Choc Wedge", an iconic Australian ice-cream coated in chocolate, which is associated with Australian images of sun, surf, sea and nubile men and women, thanks to various advertising campaigns. As referenced in the film, Libby acknowledges how these early experiences

have enhanced her capacity to work with children and their families who may be going through similar experiences. This is supported by Santoro's (2007) research in which teachers from non-Anglo-Celtic Australian backgrounds also demonstrated an ability to empathise with the experiences of minority students which in turn contributed to their increased commitment to social justice issues.

A corollary of Nelly and Libby's narratives is the unique understandings that teachers from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds bring to teaching, particularly given that the profession is dominated by Anglo-Australian teachers. This is in stark contrast to the increasing cultural diversity of school students. Abdul captures the benefit of seeing more teachers from minority backgrounds in the classroom:

> Unfortunately there are not many teachers of my background – very few...Our presence… teachers from ethnic backgrounds born overseas understand those young students. They can communicate with them, and it will be good to see us as role models.

While Abdul was a role model for the Arabic speaking and Muslim children in the class, he was also a role model for other class members. He shared positive experiences of his own culture – particularly around Ramadan – opening up opportunities for students to discuss their own cultures during lunch and recess. During Eid (the celebration that marks the end of Ramadan), the students were asked to bring a platter of food to share. The non-Muslim children were reluctant to try the food prepared by the Muslim children. Abdul was able to create a cultural bridge for these children, and encouraged them to taste the food.

Basit and Santoro (2011) recognise this importance of teachers from minority backgrounds acting as "cultural experts", role models and advocates for minority ethnic students. Santoro (2007) claims that "teachers of difference" have the potential to draw on their status as "outsiders" to understand more fully the needs of their students. She suggests that the cultural knowledge they possess positions them to act as "cross-cultural mentors" for non-minority colleagues and strengthens their ability to positively impact the education of minority students. It would seem that in the short time that Abdul was at his placement school, this was the role he was developing for himself. Research presents convincing evidence that teachers from diverse backgrounds use their knowledge and experience of social, cultural and religious norms to empower their students through challenging dominant culture norms and working towards social justice (Nieto 2004; Santoro 2007; Basit & McNamara 2004).

The narratives of Abdul, Nelly and Libby strongly point to the need to recruit more teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds to the teaching profession and to acknowledge their contributions and support them once they are in the school setting. Unfortunately the initial challenge is attracting them to teaching in the first place. In England a career in education is an unpopular choice amongst ethnic minority students given their "fear of racism, gender stereotypes and negative perceptions of the status of teaching" (Basit & McNamara 2004 p.98). There is the likelihood that they will experience discrimination when applying for a teaching position. Once in the profession, their fears are often well founded, and it is not uncommon for them to experience prejudice from colleagues and parents as well as professional isolation. The situation in Canada is similar, with teachers from immigrant backgrounds experiencing systemic discrimination as an impediment to inclusion (Schmidt 2010). This makes it all the more important to provide full support to these teachers during their careers, particularly in their first years, to make their experiences as unproblematic and enjoyable as possible (Basit & McNamara 2004).

In Australia, teachers from non-Anglo-Celtic Australian backgrounds may also experience a range of challenges in their careers, including racism from teachers, students and colleagues, and a limited career trajectory in comparison to their colleagues from the dominant culture (Basit & Santoro 2011 p.38). Further evidence drawn from a national study into the experiences of overseas trained teachers supports these concerns. One of the key difficulties these teachers experienced was of "discrimination/racism; employment difficulties; and lack of support" (Collins & Reid 2012, p.50). The discrimination and racism they reported took a number of forms. One related to negative responses to their accents in the classroom setting. Interestingly, teachers with Irish and American accents also experienced students mocking their accents, and negativity towards their cultural difference. In order to attract ethnic minority teachers to the profession it is essential that more light is shed on how to reduce these instances.

While teachers from the Anglo-Australian mainstream culture may not be able to understand minority students' experiences in the same way that their ethnic minority colleagues do (Santoro 2007), they nonetheless play a vital role in determining how students respond to markers of cultural difference. They have the capacity to reduce racial conflict in the classroom and school environment through exhibiting positive attitudes and behaviour to cultural diversity (Banks 2006). Jacinta and Emily played an important part in fostering a genuine interest in cultural diversity through the delivery of a 3/4 unit based on Nadia Wheatley's children's book *My Place* (2008). Underlying the unit was the notion that there is richness to be found in different traditions and beliefs. There were many magical moments

when children sat cross-legged on the floor, captivated by the stories shared. In one class I observed Jacinta sharing the different panels of her housebox with her class: the languages she spoke growing up, the traditions of Greek Easter, her enjoyment of living in South Korea and travelling through Asia and her work with young homeless people. Sharing one panel she said:

> I've cut out some pictures about Indigenous people, because I find it really attractive – I find listening to Indigenous music really lovely, I like the idea of their Dreamtime stories, and I think it's really important that we respect them, because this was their land.

In another class Emily arranged for her fiancé to come in, and the group asked him questions about his Mauritian culture for nearly an hour. This laid the foundations for some open class discussions about culture and diversity, and the students could see the value of speaking more than one language and of celebrating different cultural traditions. It helped to establish a classroom culture in which diversity was valued and in which students felt comfortable contributing personal aspects of their own culture. In this way teachers from all backgrounds, not just those from minority backgrounds, have the capacity to act as "cultural workers" and "change agents" for students from culturally and diverse backgrounds by incorporating multiple cultural perspectives into the curriculum and creating positive cultural identities for students (Li 2013).

Creating bridges: Building on social capital and the importance of creating a home/school partnership

The value of creating an effective home/school partnership was introduced in the previous section through Nelly's story of her schooling. The gulf between her home and school life and the lack of communication between her teachers and parents impacted on her learning.

A culturally inclusive classroom needs to encourage all parents to become involved, after all, parents are partners in a child's education, and their support can go a long way towards ensuring successful outcomes for students. It is important to value and legitimise the cultural capital of families and to draw on their experiences to build rich teaching and learning experiences in the classroom (Bourdieu 1986; Nieto 2010; McLaren 1998). Too often, students from culturally diverse backgrounds are regarded as "deficient" (McLaren 1998, p.154), and may experience teachers' lower expectations of their capabilities to achieve success within the education system (Jakubowicz 2009; Nieto, 2010). This is disturbingly

illustrated by Sabrina's reflection on a previous placement in a junior class, in which she realised that one of the girls needed to be referred for identification of learning difficulties and for additional support:

> I said to my mentor, "Why isn't she being referred?" and she said she'd asked the Vice Principal, but she refused to because she was Aboriginal and she didn't think that she was at school enough and they just refused to help this kid at prep, so they'd already written her off at five years old. I couldn't do anything. She couldn't write her name, and I taught her to do that, and that was as far as I got, and this was halfway through the year.

This experience seems to have stayed with Sabrina, as on several occasions she referred to the high but realistic expectations she has of all her students.

Nieto (2010) and McLaren (1998) assert the importance of measuring the cultural knowledge students bring to school and the opportunity this provides to meaningfully build on their lives. Language is obviously an important part of a student's culture. Rather than seeing this as a deficit, acknowledging a student's proficiency in another language is a key way that teachers can demonstrate the value of their culture, and build on a student's existing strengths. During our housebox session facilitated by artist Mira Vuk-Nikic, she and Abdul discussed their experiences of bilingualism:

Mira: Most of migrant children are actually trying to escape all this thinking about background. They want everyone to be born here, and to know English and that's it; "I'm Australian" and they think that it's a disadvantage to be a migrant speaking two languages...My experience with my children as well as my students is that they don't like to talk about their background. They like to be the same as the other, and the language that most people speak here is English. I was 42 when I come here – how could I talk with my children in English, and even now, how could I express in English all my emotion and I have to concentrate on English, how to say something and not to make mistakes – and there is no space for emotion?. It's much easier in my language.

Abdul: I'll tell you my experience with my children. They were born here. At first we tried to teach them to speak Tigrinya. My wife speaks her mother tongue, but the problem is they spend more time at school than with us, so when we speak to them they don't understand or don't want to understand. Then their homework has to be done in English. Then we forget about our language.

This loss of language is clearly lamentable for Abdul. For parents who are not fluent in English, the outcomes can be quite devastating, as children may lose the ability to communicate with their families and may also be academically disadvantaged (Nieto 2010, p.122). Nieto (2010) stresses the importance of schools encouraging students to maintain their home language and culture, and school's role in providing bilingual education. Yet while 70% of the world's population speaks more than one language (York 2003, p.84), Australia remains a largely monolingual nation with a generally low tolerance of people speaking a second language. Government figures show almost a third of primary schools don't offer a second language, and nearly 60 % of secondary school students do not study a language (Tomazin 2011).

Sabrina's mentor teacher Nelly, reflects on her school experiences. As the daughter of Spanish speaking parents, she understands how some parents from minority backgrounds can feel detached from the school, or feel like they don't have a lot to offer:

> …because that's who *my* parents were. They never went to a parent teacher interview, so the school didn't get a lot out of them, or me, because I couldn't participate in camps or after school activities because there wasn't that connection. So I think in order to get the best out of the kids you have to build a relationship and connection with parents because then you can ring them and they will trust you – if you want to take their child away on a camp – and for some of them that's a really hard thing to do. The Grade 2 sleepover – for some of them that's a really hard thing for them – and when we first started, they weren't sleeping over a lot. But it's built over time – slowly – they realise we're here to look after their kids like they would. The teachers need to go *to* the parents because we want them to be part of that partnership.

As referenced in the film, this is exactly what Nelly did when Maysa, one of the girls in her 1/2 Grade, didn't bring back her permission form to attend the sleepover and activities day at school. Nelly explains:

> Culturally their background is not to allow their little girls away from home. So did I want her to go through missing out on that experience? No! So my initial thing was that I needed to negotiate something with the parent, because this parent's not comfortable approaching me about it. And I didn't want her to miss out, 'cause I remember when I was little I missed out.

Nelly, mindful that this experience was important for Maysa's social development, rang her Mum to ask why she hadn't returned her form. After Maysa's Mum had explained that she wasn't allowed to sleep over because of her background, Nelly respected her decision, and asked if she would be happy for her to come to the activities after school, reassuring her that they would look after her very well. The mother agreed. Nelly noted that this was a big first step for the family, and as Maysa was their oldest child, it had paved the way for the younger siblings. Sabrina referred to this incident on several occasions – impressed by Nelly's proactiveness in ensuring that Maysa did not miss out on the experience and reinforcing the importance of the mentor teacher in role modelling for pre-service teachers.

Nieto suggests once teachers acknowledge students' differences, then they can "act as a bridge between their students' differences and the culture of the dominant society" (2010, p.17). Nelly successfully created a bridge between Maysa's home life and the school, both literally and metaphorically, helping "visitors from both sides become adjusted to different contexts" (Nieto 2010, p.17). The housebox project initiated by Jacinta and Emily across the 3/4 Grades was also an excellent vehicle in which to build meaningful bridges between home and school experiences. All students were given panels to work on at home and were encouraged to get other family members to help them with creating something unique. This provided a rich opportunity for knowledge building and sharing. Of course, at times it can be difficult to navigate and negotiate this terrain. Principal Ken Ryan told a story of a male primary student who was exhibiting sexist behaviour towards a female classmate. Realising that this behaviour was coming from his home environment, it seemed futile to simply discipline the boy, so he invited the parents and their son to a meeting to discuss why the behaviour was inappropriate. This demonstrates the ways in which schools and teachers can create ongoing opportunities for all members of the school community to engage in critical reflection.

The following exchange was part of a discussion that explored how one's education and upbringing influence the relationship parents have with their children's schools:

Abdul: In Ethiopia in grade four we were one hundred students in one classroom – one teacher. It was a big public school. Back home, as a primary student, there was no question asked of the school, the teacher – I'd come home, I'd do homework – no pressure from home. No communication between school and home.You are the teacher, you are the master – you are everythin...I've noticed that in the week, the Anglo Saxons are more interested in communicating with the schools. From non-Anglo Saxons, they come when they are called. They don't come and say, "How is my son going?".

Sarah: Maybe they see initiating communication as disrespectful?

Mat: Maybe they're not confident in English?

Abdul: Questioning a teacher can be challenging. At my children's (Islamic) school we are
         one of the few parents who ask the teacher how our children are going.

Mat later added that very few parents from the large Lebanese-Australian community attended the school's annual arts fair at which students exhibited and sold their artwork. This observation highlights the complexities in exploring the diminished interaction between the Lebanese-Australian parents and the school. It also illustrates the potential problems and pitfalls in emphasising difference when we explore culture, particularly when we forget that differences exist as much within a group as between different groups (Gurung 2009). There may be multiple reasons to explain the absences of Lebanese background parents at Mat's school; for example, other siblings may have had sports practice or working parents may have been unable to attend. One would not like to make any assumptions. Yet failing to explore possible reasons to explain their absence; for example, conflict with prayer times or the English only newsletter, runs the risk of continuing to exclude this particular community. Once again there is the fine balance of exploring differences without essentialising them.

In one interview Sabrina's mentor teacher Nelly shared the success of an approach they used when the Vietnamese community started accessing the school. They employed a Vietnamese multicultural aide, not so much for the students, but for the parents. Additionally the school bought bilingual English/Vietnamese books, which they housed in the library. Nelly explains:

> What we tried to do was encourage parents after school to borrow bilingual books from the library so they could enjoy reading with their kids. So it wasn't just establishing that sense of inclusiveness it was actually giving the parents the power by saying "What you do at home is valued by us and will be valued by us", because they do come from a culture where it's not valued. So we had to spend quite a lot of time showing them that what they brought with them was valued and that their culture was important to us.

Allen (2007) offers a range of creative ideas in which teachers and parents from diverse communities can strengthen their relationship by participating in dialogue around different cultural perspectives and collaborating on school projects. Some of her ideas include storytelling, writing cultural memoirs and

involving parents in visiting students' homes. Not surprisingly Allen finds that this home-school partnership leads to increased student achievement.

Multicultural education as social change: The theory/practice gap

> Although not everyone is directly guilty of racism and discrimination, we are all responsible for it. What does this mean? Primarily, it means that working actively for social justice is everyone's business (Nieto 2010, p.71).

One of the underlying goals of multicultural education is to affect social change by challenging ethnocentric values and perspectives, and by addressing inequities and injustices. One of the key responsibilities of educators is to work consciously and creatively to provide spaces for individuals to embrace principles of social justice and inclusion (Rowan 2001; Nieto 2004). Inclusion, as Sapon-Shevin notes, *is* social justice (2003).

Victoria University's teacher education courses use a praxis inquiry paradigm to encourage pre-service teachers to reflect on theory and practice to initiate social change in response to inequities and injustices. Pre-service teachers are also introduced to the work of Giroux and Freire – founding theorists of critical pedagogy, and exponents of the idea that schools have the potential to serve as sites of social transformation. Given this context, it wasn't surprising to find that many comments made by the pre-service teacher participants demonstrated an understanding of social justice and awareness of the opportunities that their classrooms could provide to affect change:

Emily: We're one of the most influential people in children's lives, so if we don't (affect social change), who's going to?

Mat: I think as teachers we have a responsibility to create active, global citizens who question what's wrong and act to change it, 'cause that's how things get better.

Jacinta: We have a really important role in highlighting the importance of being culturally aware and culturally responsive, and coupled with that is our role as being facilitators of social justice; so going through things such as morals – what's right and wrong – and why are these things right and wrong.

While pre-service teachers were relatively confident in their role as change agents, articulating exactly *how* they implemented social change in their classrooms was difficult, and some of them were not able to adequately describe or analyse it in the context of their teaching. This is perfectly understandable given that they are at early stages of evolving their own teaching theories and practices, and that sometimes conceptualisations of social justice can be nebulous, misguided or narrow. It also points to the continuing work that needs to be undertaken by teacher educators in finding ways to bridge the gaps between practice and theory; between the abstract academic context of the university and the messiness of implementing multicultural education in the daily workings of school life. How can we create practical opportunities for our pre-service teachers to engage in deep levels of social justice whilst they are undertaking their teaching practicum? In considering this further in the context of the education subjects I have taught this year for the one-year Graduate Diploma of Education degree, I am surprised by how many opportunities I have missed to encourage activism. For example the "Ideal School" project for a subject on the socio-cultural contexts of education is a group task which involves conceptualising possibilities of an ideal school. Inclusion is the cornerstone of these schools. These projects have the potential to provide the building blocks for how we might go about transforming schools (Nieto 1994, p.18) but remain in the realms of "Ideal" as there are no direct ways of connecting pre-service teachers' insights with making changes in schools. Perhaps a further requirement of this project could be to work towards creating one aspect of change they have identified within their school setting.

A distinctive feature of the education courses at Victoria University is that all pre-service teachers, regardless of year level or degree, are asked to complete an Applied Curriculum Project. These involve pre-service teachers and mentors working collaboratively on a curriculum initiative identified by the school. Typically they are educational tasks that benefit the learning of school students and range from organising events such as camps, performances and lunchtime buddy activities, to creating maths and literacy resources, and building school websites. There are approximately 3,500 (and rising) pre-service teachers working on these projects in any one year; committing a lot of time and energy, and largely completing high quality projects. However these projects do not have an explicit social justice focus. Transforming Applied Curriculum Projects into Social Justice Projects would provide a perfect vehicle for accomplishing social good. Clearly, many of the same projects could be undertaken, but they would require pre-service teachers and school staff, perhaps with the help of teacher educator colleagues, to work within a framework of multicultural education.

Another missed opportunity is presented in a semester two assessment task in which pre-service teachers develop an integrated unit which uses an inquiry approach to teaching and learning. This year we asked pre-service teachers to include Intercultural Understanding and one of the ACARA cross-curriculum priorities (ACARA n.d.). Units created by pre-service teachers were innovative and presented opportunities for "structural changes in content and process" (Nieto 1994). For example one of my groups' created a year 7 unit on Southeast Asian orang-utans, which integrated Science, English and ICT. Embedded in this unit was the cross-curriculum priority "Asia and Asia's relationship with Australia" as well as "Sustainability". Another pair came up with a geography/music unit with a sustainability focus, and another group a humanities/performing arts unit which included Indigenous perspectives and a theatrical response to European settlement. Unfortunately pre-service rarely get the opportunity to teach these units or share them with the school. This is for the simple reason that they do not correlate with unit planning that school staff have already done for the year and that the unit required for university is due towards the end of semester 2, when the school year is coming to an end. Clearly more opportunities need to be opened up for pre-service teachers to not only create units with a strong multicultural focus, but to also teach them. This could be done earlier in the year in collaboration with year level coordinators and mentor teachers, and university class readings and discussions could provide theoretical perspectives.

The learning for me in reflecting on these three missed opportunities is that teacher educators must continually ask, "Where are the possibilities for action?" in university coursework and seek to build bridges between university and school requirements. Multicultural education is about teachers and students having agency: "Multicultural education invites students and teachers to put their learning into action for social justice. Whether debating a difficult issue, developing a community newspaper, starting a collaborative program at a local senior center, or organising a petition for the removal of a potentially dangerous waste treatment…students learn they have power collectively and individually, to make change" (Nieto 2004, p. 355). In some cases, moving beyond rhetoric may require a complete redesign of pre-service programmes (Mills & Keddie 2012).

"Culturally responsive pedagogy is not only about teaching, but is also a political endeavour" (Sleeter 2012, p.577), which is precisely why instituting social change can be difficult work which takes a good deal of courage. Preparing future teachers to be change agents involves "explicitly teaching them about the change process, including the obstacles they will face and the skills they will need to overcome those obstacles. Change agents need moral purpose, a personal vision, empathy, passion, and

idealism. But these worthy qualities must be accompanied by skills if change is to occur" (Villegas & Lucas 2002, p.62).

Silverman (2010) argues that enabling pre-service teachers to become champions of social justice requires more than embracing a culturally inclusive pedagogy:

> ...a strong sense of responsibility is required for radical social justice orientation, but not necessarily for implementing cross-cultural and culturally relevant pedagogy. Effecting social change – inspiring students to ask themselves how they might change social stratification – requires specific attention to activities that will expand and employ students' sociological imaginations (p.300).

As teacher educators we must be mindful that we do not impose our own assumptions and perspectives on pre-service teachers about what social justice should look like, otherwise we will alienate them (Keating 2007). Pre-service teachers need access to a myriad of examples of how to create culturally inclusive classrooms. They need a range of games, songs and activities that they can integrate into their classrooms, such as those provided by Sapon-Shevin (1998) in her book *Because We Can Change the World*, which offers practical examples of building inclusive classroom communities. They also need encouragement to create their own resources and activities for their students.

Changing social stratification and challenging the status quo is unsettling work; not just for those instigating change, but for those whose lives are unsettled by change. Jane Elliot's well known "Blue Eyes Brown Eyes" lesson in discrimination threatened many people in her predominantly white community when she first taught it to her Grade 3 students in 1968 (Peters 1968). Elliot has continued to use this powerful exercise with adults; bringing to the surface their unconscious prejudices, demonstrating the ways in which bigotry works in our society and exposing the myth of white superiority. But it is not easy work. Elliot admits that after nearly four decades, she still gets migraines and feels anxious about doing the exercise with each new group.

The Hobart Shakespeareans (Stuart 2005) is a documentary which captures the positive impact that teacher Rafe Esquith has on his Grade five class of students from migrant and low socio economic backgrounds attending Hobart Elementary School in Los Angeles. These children come from poor families, many have troubled backgrounds and few speak English as a first language. Esquith transcends boundaries of race and class by providing a rigorous academic program and fostering self-respect and self-determination. The class study novels usually reserved for secondary school such as

To Kill a Mockingbird and *Huckleberry Finn* and each year the class performs a Shakespeare play. Social justice is at work in many ways; through the creation of a culture of high academic success, by engaging students in a social constructivist approach to knowledge and learning, and by possessing a fundamental belief in their capacity to achieve great things. Yet Esquith is still perceived by some as a maverick; out of step with dominant discourses of teaching. His passionate involvement in his students' lives seems to be the cause of resentment and jealousy and he finds himself ostracised by many of his fellow teachers. This may also be attributed to his self-sacrifice and the overwhelming number of additional unpaid hours he works. Nonetheless, it highlights that social change and disrupting the status quo can be difficult and a lot of hard work.

Recently I discussed the idea of challenging the status quo with a mature age pre-service teacher who was living and teaching in rural Victoria. We had just listened to Sir Ken Robinson's speech *Changing Education Paradigms* (Robinson 2010) in class, and the pre-service teacher was inspired by the idea of a creative education revolution. When I asked him what opportunities he had to implement change within his school his reply was blunt: "If I challenged the status quo, I'd get the sack". His comment reflects the reality that many teachers feel disempowered working within regimented institutional frameworks that are threatened by certain changes. It also indicates the negative connotations which activism carries within the teaching profession (Sachs 2003), something which I will discuss further in the section *Walking the talk: Active, creative, courageous teacher educators and the implications for teacher education programmes*. Yet if teachers are struggling to implement change, what hope can we have for their students?

The following story was given to my daughter and her classmates in their first week of grade six – a significant year of change in a child's life as they prepare for their transition into secondary school. Originally written by Eiseley (1969) and adapted multiple times, it is a comforting and hopeful story for those beginning teachers who may be overwhelmed by the magnitude of changing the world, as it reinforces the notion that becoming an agent of social change can start in the classroom – one child at a time.

<div align="center">

The Starfish Story

One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed

a boy picking something up and gently throwing it into the ocean.

Approaching the boy, he asked, "What are you doing?"

The youth replied, "Throwing starfish back into the ocean.

The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they'll die".

</div>

"Son", the man said, "don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish?
You can't make a difference!"

After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish,
and threw it back into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said,
"I made a difference for that one".

(Eiseley 1969).

Chernin (2004) describes something similar to what is captured in this story when she talks about the "politics of the small". She invites us to consider different orientations of political action, and concludes that while some people are naturally predisposed to act politically and enact social change on a large scale, others may awaken sensibilities in smaller ways. She argues that not every action needs to lead to grand scale social transformation, and that smaller acts have consequences. Her message is that it is not the size of our contribution to social justice but the nature of it that is important. She speaks of behaviour derived from the politics of the small, which includes individual acts, describing this behaviour as "the personally significant small acts of engagement in which you do what is a natural expression of your own temperament, without having to believe that you are going to change the world" (p.7). This is a reassuring insight for those who may feel that social justice is beyond their grasp.

Henkin (1998) makes the point that "[m]aking our classrooms better places to live is just as important as improving the world. We want kids to realize that they can make a difference and that they do" (p.89). She argues that for children to create a more democratic world, teachers "must insure that they experience democracy in our classrooms. Students need to talk about injustices and change them" (p.15). Henkin expresses the idea that it is not enough to know that discrimination exists: "The challenge for schools and for society is teaching children to respect each group while ending the injustices perpetuated against them" (p.18).

Texts/curriculum and critical literacy

Critically exploring literature is a good starting place to examine prejudice, particularly as many classroom texts predominantly favour the myth of white Anglo racial and cultural superiority. For those children from a non-dominant culture, this can make learning particularly difficult, for "it is hard to succeed when your learning environment is not congruent with your values, learning style, capabilities and a range of factors that form your sense of identity. It is hard to be 'good enough' if your classroom

context reminds you that you are "not normal" (Rowan 2001, p.23). Critical pedagogy offers a useful framework to look at the ways in which school knowledge reinforces stereotypes about minorities as well as the generally low status treatment that any work on minorities receives (McLaren 1998). This was explored in the following conversation when Abdul commented that most of the readers he read when his son was in primary school had Anglo names.

Abdul: In some maths books, the names of the examples are Mary, Thomas and John. But where is Ahmed, where is Nguyen, where is Kim?

Sabrina: Lots of resources or books have white kids.

Mat: The stories they read are from English speaking backgrounds. The fairy tales are taught from our culture.

Sabrina: There's an assumed knowledge, like Little Red Riding Hood – some kids have never heard that fairy tale in their life.

It is important for teachers to select texts (books, magazines, films, computer programmes etc.) that represent a range of cultural differences, so that children from minority backgrounds can see themselves and their experiences reflected in the curriculum, and so that children from the white cultural mainstream are exposed to different paradigms of cultural difference (Rowan 2001). Yet in the same way that a class of students from culturally diverse backgrounds doesn't necessarily ensure cultural cohesion, simply having a range of texts representing people from culturally diverse backgrounds in the classroom doesn't guarantee that students will develop a deep regard for people culturally different from themselves. The inclusion of people who are outside cultural norms may be included in stereotypical ways, which can perpetuate the marginalisation of minority groups (Rowan 2001) and reinforce racist attitudes (York 2003, p.34). Additionally, characters that challenge cultural norms are still associated with their difference; their cultural background or appearance is not normalised.

Rowan (2001) argues that classroom practice must support and encourage students to value those texts, and suggests that teachers use a transformative analysis to interrogate texts. This involves investigating how and why texts are constructed, who is included/excluded, the roles they have and the meanings they communicate. She advocates the importance of teachers developing a critical understanding of how a range of texts are culturally constructed to value and therefore include some

people at the expense of others, a point illuminated by Shaun Tan in the research film. This sort of textual analysis empowers teachers to challenge narrow or stereotypical representations of cultural difference and is particularly important given my observation of the inexplicable surge in popularity of golliwogs in boutique toy shops and the re-emergence of Helen Bannerman's (1899) *The Story of Little Black Sambo* at suburban book stores.

Souto-Manning (2009) successfully explores a range of issues such as diversity in her first grade classroom through multicultural literature, which she terms an "enabler of culturally responsive pedagogy" (p.50). There is certainly an increasing number of picture books and Young Adult titles that reflect culturally diverse viewpoints and provoke conversation around social justice topics. As part of my English method toolkit I bring in a range of these picture books to share and discuss with pre-service teachers. Amongst the books we use to explore different narratives of refugees are *The Happiest Refugee* (Do 2010) and Miller's (2005) *Refugees*, which introduces to young audiences the notion of what it means to be a refugee through an allegorical tale of ducks forced to flee their habitat. For older children we look at *Ziba Came on a Boat* (Lofthouse 2007) and Greder's (2007) *The Island*; a dark and disturbing story of a man who washes up on an island and the subsequent hostility that his difference invokes. It confronts the reader with the ugly repercussions of xenophobia – for both the victim and the perpetrators. Equally chilling is *Home and Away* (Marsden & Ottley 2008), which uses the familiarity of an ordinary Australian family, whose lives become shattered by war, to challenge preconceptions of who refugees are by inverting the notion of the Other.

Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2006) is another powerful migrant story; a wordless book that tells the story of a man who is forced to leave his wife and child and venture to a new country. The beauty and brilliance of this book is the evocative illustrations that not only tell in narrative detail the story of the man and his family, but invites us to actively experience what it would be like to navigate a culture that was alien to us.

Other titles that offer poignant windows into cultural differences and celebrate the connectedness of common human experiences are *Mirror* (Baker 2010), W*hoever you are* (Fox 1997), *Let's Eat*, (Zamorano 1998) and, on cultural misunderstandings; *Eric* (Tan 2010). *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan 2000) is an allegorical fable about colonisation and *We are all born free* (Amnesty International 2008) introduces children to the topic of human rights. *My Place* (Wheatley & Rawlins 1994) depicts Australia's changing multicultural landscape over the past 200 years through the eyes of different children who share a common connection to a particular piece of land in Sydney. Starting in

contemporary Sydney it travels back in time decade by decade to the traditional custodians of the land. We hear various tales from these children about their families, culture and experiences. It is an excellent resource and was successfully used by Emily and Jacinta, in conjunction with the 13-part ABC television series based on the book, as a springboard for rich classroom discussion around culture, identity and belonging.

While filming, I observed pre-service teachers using a range of texts in their classrooms to generate lively discussion. Emily noted the usefulness of texts that explored Ramadan, particularly for those students who were unfamiliar with Muslim culture. Jacinta, Emily, Sabrina and Mat drew on Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2006) and *Eric* (2010) to stimulate conversations around migrant stories and different cultural traditions.

Using artful practice as a discursive device to explore cultural identity

While the effectiveness of arts based learning to explore cultural identity was incidental to this particular research, I am deeply interested in its potential to engage academics in their own "transformational learning" as well as develop "professional artistry" (Kerr 2010, p.11). In teacher education classrooms there are a multitude of possibilities to create spaces for our pre-service teachers to engage in the arts in meaningful ways. Using an arts based methodology has provided me with an effective mode of inquiry to investigate research questions around culture and identity. The film provides an accessible medium in which to engage audiences and encourage them to reflect on these questions. My pedagogical approach during the focus group sessions was to draw on the arts by planning a number of creative activities to engage pre-service teachers. I found these to be effective ways to open up conversations – in particular our housebox session with Mira Vuk-Nikic at Yarraville Community Centre. It should therefore have come as no surprise to find pre-service teachers and their mentors engaging children in a variety of artistic forms during class time. This included drawing, painting, literature, music, role plays, culture pizzas, poems, and more. These artful practices helped to bring to life, interrogate, elaborate, share and explain the many issues around culture and diversity. It provided students with a powerful and meaningful way of sharing their unique experiences and making connections with their classmates.

Eisner (2002) recognises this potential of the arts when he asserts: "Aside from promoting our awareness of aspects of the world we had not experienced consciously before, the arts provide permission to engage the imagination as a means for exploring new possibilities" (p.10). Eisner (2008) discusses the transformative nature of the arts and its capacity to evoke emotions, expand the

imagination and offer a variety of ways of seeing. The arts enable us to experience feelings that we may not otherwise be able to access – providing a vehicle to compassion and ultimately action: "The arts are a way of enriching our awareness and expanding our humanity" (p.11). He suggests that this is because the arts allow for a diversity of outcomes, when so much of the curriculum requires uniformity of students (Eisner 2002, p.44). The arts have an important role to play in contributing to student inclusion, equity and encouraging acceptance of cultural diversity (Hall & Thomson 2007; Joseph & Southcott 2006). Joseph & Southcott (2006) state:

> In contemporary society the arts are used as ways of understanding and communicating our identity, culture and heritage. Further, by engaging in arts practices, it is hoped that teachers and students can change stereotypical attitudes and create understandings between peoples of different cultural backgrounds. Such engagement in arts education (music, dance, drama, and visual arts) can foster respect, tolerance and an increased appreciation of our own culture, as well as that of others (p.1).

They conclude that one of the main barriers to integrating authentic multicultural arts education is the paucity of curriculum resources and teacher preparation. They also caution the potential danger of watering down the curriculum with the festival and celebrations approach, which centres on teaching about "other" cultures rather than from a place which is more aligned to "within" cultures (Hookey, cited in Joseph & Southcott 2006, p.4).

Two of the pre-service teachers, Emily and Jacinta, were fortunate in that they had the flexibility in fourth term to integrate many of the themes of this research into their own teaching of a 3/4 grade. They were invited to contribute ideas to an interdisciplinary unit, which centred on Nadia Wheatley's (2008) book and accompanying TV series *My Place* that focuses on notions of belonging, identity, community and culture. This unit provided an ideal vehicle for Emily and Jacinta to unravel layers about diversity and culture with their students, in much the same way as we had been doing in our focus group sessions. They were able to build on the unit by integrating a number of creative activities which looked at multiple notions of identity: family trees, acrostic poems on what it means to be Australian, Y charts on diversity, culture pizzas and Greek dancing. They were also able to integrate the housebox project, which was an expression and celebration of their unique culture and history. The unit culminated in a visit to the Immigration Museum. The unit opened doors for inquiring about their classmates' culture, and connecting the similarities and differences.

Emily and Jacinta reported on the success of this unit – from the initial exploration of tracing students' heritages through their family trees to the final exhibition of their houseboxes at the school's annual art show. They mentioned that the houseboxes were a great way to engage the students in developing a richer understanding about the diverse cultures in their class and supported students to come to a better understanding of themselves and others.

Emily: They all wanted to look at each other's things, especially the day they started to put them together in class. They were all helping each other out. They were walking around the class, looking at each other's photos, asking who that is, and not afraid to talk about their families.

Jacinta: The culture pizza was successful because they all had to start thinking about what makes up their family, and what culture is to them and what traditions they *do* have. Even if they celebrate Christmas at their uncle's house – that in itself is a special thing, and it's not done in every home. And they began to realise, "Wow, we do come from special families, we do have traditions, even if they're different from how other people celebrate Christmas or Easter."

Emily: And I think seeing that everybody had a different story – 'cause there's a couple of people like the Muslim girls, whose families obviously come from different countries, and then the ones who look more Anglo-Saxon – they actually have stories too. I think seeing that everyone has a story actually brought the class together and they're really similar.

When I asked if there were any instances that were challenging, Jacinta re-told an incident that occurred at the Immigration Museum. Students had the opportunity to simulate being an immigration officer by listening to a range of stories from the 50s and deciding whether people should be accepted into Australia as immigrants:

They were interviewing a Greek family whose little daughter was deaf, and they really needed to come out…and one of my Grade 4 boys was saying, "No, don't let them come in, they'll start a war" and I thought, "I won't say anything at first, he's probably just showing off". Then moments later, we were getting ready to move on and he walked past saying, "Don't let them in, they'll start a war". And I got so upset by it, and I said, "Right you're going to speak to me later" and we had a chat, and I wasn't aggressive or anything, but I just wanted to ask him *why* he was making those comments, and where those comments stemmed from, and his reasoning was 'cause the Internet tells him that people who come from other countries purely come down

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to start wars in Australia. And it was really quite perplexing and I said, "How would you feel if your family or your grandparents had died in a war?' and *I* was saying, 'Don't let anyone come to Australia 'cause they'll start a war'". He thought, "Yeah, it would make me upset, it would make me sad" – we just tried to work around where these ideas are coming from.

I was at the Immigration museum the day that this incident occurred. When the boy first made the comment I bristled, wondering if and how Jacinta would respond. I later observed her sitting quietly down with the boy, away from the rest of the group, and chatting with him. She was using a form of Socratic questioning (Paul & Elder 2007) to clarify and challenge his assumptions as well as to encourage him to think more deeply about his beliefs. Sapon-Shevin offers the viewpoint that "[e]xclusion is not about difference; it is about our responses to difference", suggesting that exclusion is not about race or language or gender – or any other difference: "Rather, the culture of exclusion posits that isolating and marginalizing the stranger, the outlier, is appropriate, acceptable, and sometimes even laudatory" (2003, p.25).

By questioning the student Jacinta was actively creating an environment that challenged these exclusionary practices. She questioned the boy as to why he believed his comments to be true, and offered him an alternative viewpoint from which to reconsider his position – rather than simply telling him what to think. In this way she offered the boy the opportunity to reflect on and shift his position.

Emily shared a similar story:

> I had an experience with a Muslim girl during Ramadan. One of the other kids said that Ramadan was crap and she cried. So instead of just telling off the little girl, I asked her why she said that, and she didn't know anything about it (Ramadan). So I got a book, and we read it together as a class and we discussed other holidays that people celebrate. You can't just chastise somebody if they're uneducated – it's your fault if they're uneducated – you have to educate them.

While Jacinta and Emily commented that initially they found it challenging to create a culturally inclusive classroom, by the end of their six week placement they felt more comfortable and confident. As a result of the experience of teaching the unit and the many opportunities this presented for rich discussions about culture and identity, they were much better placed than the other pre-service teachers when it

came to contributing their thoughts during focus group session on effective ways to promote inclusive classrooms.

Of course there are no standardised tests students can take to evaluate the effectiveness of the unit on enhancing their understandings of cultural diversity (nor do we want them), however there were many informal conversations I overheard between students about their backgrounds, the traditions they celebrated and the languages they spoke. These conversations took place with ease, and strongly suggested students had a heightened awareness, interest and respect of each other's' differences, leaving me with little doubt as to the success of the *My Place* unit. The following is just one instance:

On a sunny Winter morning I accompanied Emily and Jacinta and their Grade 3/4 class to the Immigration Museum. As we sat down on the banks of the Yarra River to have lunch I noticed a boy observing one of the Muslim girls who wasn't eating. He asked curiously, "How long do you go without food?"., "We go from sunrise to sunset" she answered proudly, adding, "It makes us think what it's like to be poor and hungry". The boy looked impressed. Another of the Muslim girls explained she wasn't fasting, as she was on medicine for an ear infection. Her friend turned around excitedly and said, "My father usually gives me $200 at the end of Ramadan".

This informal conversation illustrates the ease with which conversations around difference can take place, particularly the respectful curiosity of the boy and the pride of the girls discussing their Muslim traditions. It also points to the existing knowledge the boy had about Ramadan. He knew that the girl was fasting, and was genuinely interested in opening up a conversation around this. This could be attributed to the earlier example of Emily using the book to explain Ramadan, the many classroom conversations around diverse cultural traditions, and the inclusive classroom environment established by Emily, Jacinta and their mentor teachers. As Sapon-Shevin (1998) says, the goal of inclusive classrooms is not to "not notice" differences, but rather to "notice, understand, respond and connect" (p.64), which is exactly what happened in this incident.

Walking the talk: Active, creative, courageous teacher educators and the implications for teacher education programmes

Our final focus group session provided the opportunity for pre-service teachers to reflect on the ways in which their four-year degree had prepared them to develop an awareness of diversity and culturally inclusive practices. They cited two main influences that impacted on their confidence and ability to teach

students from culturally diverse backgrounds. For those whose own primary school experiences had been largely monocultural, the significance of being placed at a school that had a diverse student population could not be underestimated. Others in the group noted lecturers who heightened their awareness of cultural diversity by inspiring them to consider the different ways in which students learn, and the different cultural influences acting on their lives. A study into pre-service teachers' cultural consciousness and self-efficacy to become culturally responsive teachers affirms the importance of placement experiences which offer pre-service teachers the opportunity to teach culturally diverse students (Lastrapes & Negishi 2012). The study also notes the importance of pre-service teachers working with mentor teachers who are effective in teaching culturally diverse learners and the ongoing guidance and support pre-service teachers need to examine their beliefs, critique their teaching, and recognise inequitable school practices and policies.

Some pre-service teacher participants in my research mentioned they did not feel as prepared as they would have liked to in adopting culturally responsive pedagogy, a theme common amongst many pre-service teachers. Researchers point to the failure of universities to support pre-service teachers in this regard (Mills & Keddie 2012), and believe the rhetoric of social justice aims from education faculties often falls short of producing graduates who are confident teaching inclusively (Hickling-Hudson 2004).

In discussing the most effective ways to encourage pre-service teachers to teach in a culturally inclusive way, pre-service teacher participants made the astute observation that you must first have the belief that diversity is a positive characteristic before you are able to start thinking about developing an inclusive pedagogy. To illustrate this point, Sabrina recounted an experience from second year when she was team teaching a micro maths unit in a primary school with a pre-service teacher colleague:

> The school we were at had a lot of kids from the Horn of Africa. We were in the hallway, probably a metre or so from these kids and she said, "Ugh, I hope I don't have to teach any of those kids". And because we'd just taught together, I thought she was referring to the kids we'd just taught, so I said, "Which kids?" and she said, "Oh, the black ones. They're so rude and arrogant". I didn't know what to do. I was thinking – this girl's going to be teaching in two years. She's teaching now. I've seen racism, but I've never had someone think that it was OK to say that to me.

Sabrina's account of this pre-service teacher is worrying on many levels. Deficit discourses when speaking about students from cultural minorities are invariably accompanied by low academic

expectations, flaws in the child's home life and pathologising student behaviour – attitudes often held by pre-service teachers from Anglo-Australian middle class backgrounds (Mills & Keddie 2012).

Lively discussion amongst pre-service teacher participants unfolded after Sabrina's recount: "Shouldn't you fail somebody with an attitude like that?", "How do you weed them out of the system?". It is not surprising that pre-service teachers with strong biases towards cultural differences are less likely to develop multicultural sensitivity (Pohan 1996), but research by Haberman and Post claims that these undergraduates will not actually change their prejudicial attitudes within the scope of their degree. Given this, they suggest that rather than trying to change the dispositions of pre-service teachers once they enter the course, teacher education programmes should adopt selection criteria "to ensure that those admitted into teacher education are favourably disposed to diversity" (cited in Villegas & Lucas 2002, p. xvi).This is certainly one way to resolve the issue, although one wonders about the likelihood of prospective students disguising their true attitudes and prejudices with politically correct responses. Additionally, many institutions like Victoria University simply have too many enrolments and too few resources to undergo an interview process.

I asked the pre-service teachers what it would take for the young woman Sabrina taught with to develop sensitivity and shift her thinking. They suggested that empathy could be developed through exposure to a range of texts, films, case studies, histories and role play. To assist pre-service teachers critically reflect on their practices and the wider educational paradigm, teacher education courses certainly need to engage them in processes that encourage them to recognise, and alter their own cultural biases or oppressive attitudes. This is consistent with Kagan's (1992) view that to effect change in a pre-service teacher's personal beliefs, teacher educators must provide multiple opportunities for pre-service teachers to examine and make explicit their implicit beliefs and biases, and confront them with the inadequacies and inconsistencies of these beliefs (p.77). This is particularly important given the disjuncture between Anglo-Australian pre-service teachers and their students who are culturally different from them, as Sabrina highlights in her recount. The serious consequence of not addressing teachers' beliefs in the context of diverse Others is the risk of failing to meet the challenge of equity and excellence for all students (Pohan 2006, p.67). The pre-service teacher whom Sabrina refers to, I imagine, would have a limited understanding of students who are historically marginalised, and little awareness that institutional practices largely reflect the norms and values of the dominant culture. Yet, unfortunately, simply being aware of this marginalisation and having an appreciation of cultural diversity is insufficient to end discrimination and prejudice (Silverman 2010; Bennet 1995). Teachers must feel responsible for enacting social change.

There are a number of factors which impact on pre-service teachers becoming social justice educators. Mills and Ballantyne (2010) use pre-service teachers' autoethnographic work to build on Garmon's (2004) research into the three dispositional factors which influence the likelihood of developing multicultural awareness in teacher education programmes. They found that the three dispositions identified by Garmon evolve developmentally: "beginning from self-awareness/self-reflectiveness; moving towards openness; and finally a commitment to social justice" (p.449). The hierarchical nature of Mills & Ballantyne's model suggests that pre-service teachers will need to demonstrate the first two dispositions before they are capable of embracing a commitment to social justice, regardless of the quality of the course and intentions of lecturers. It is also possible that pre-service teachers may never attain the requisite self-awareness and openness to eventually become social justice educators (p.454). These are important findings for teacher educators when planning and delivering curriculum. Embedding social justice in our courses as well as being aware that all pre-service teachers enter the hierarchy at different levels when they start their degrees are key factors to supporting graduates with socially just dispositions. We must also be remember that individual pre-service teachers will take varying times to move along the hierarchy.

However, unfortunately disposition alone will not guarantee success as a social justice educator. The pre-service teacher who I mentioned in the section *Multicultural education as social change: The theory/practice gap* who commented, "If I challenged the status quo, I'd get the sack" had the disposition to enact social change, but lacked a climate conducive to taking action. What is needed, as outlined by Sachs (2003), is the "development and mobilization of an activist teaching profession" (p.3). Sachs describes an "activist teacher professionalism" as being "a politics of transformation" which is "enacted through strategic positioning" and in which being responsive and proactive are normalised:

> Its spheres of interest are concerned with changing people's beliefs, perspectives and opinions about the importance of teaching, the social location of teachers and the role of competent and intelligent teachers in various education institutions. A politics of transformation is not self-interested; its concern is with wider issues of equity and social justice (p.12).

While she concedes there is no simple formula for achieving social change, Sachs does offer a number of strategies around being active, strategic and political. In terms of pre-service teacher activism, what is reassuring is her notion of building partnerships and forming alliances, something which is a very strong component of many teacher education courses.

I would like to return to the conundrum of the pre-service teacher described earlier by Sabrina, and offer some suggestions as to possible responses by teacher educators to support such students. Like Santoro (2005), I believe that while personal reflections of identity are a good starting point for pre-service teachers to develop an understanding of their students' diversity, a richer understanding can be fostered through an examination of racism and the ramifications this has for educational contexts (p.8). I would also add that white pre-service teachers in particular need multiple opportunities to develop an awareness of themselves as racialised beings by exploring the idea of their whiteness and the associated powers and privileges afforded to people based on their skin colour. This encourages them to develop an awareness of themselves as cultural beings, and to see themselves as part of the multicultural whole, rather than outside of it. As Mazzei forcefully argues:

> If white teachers continue to effectively deny or fail to see their whiteness as raced then they will continue to see students of colour as "Other" and respond to them from that perception – i.e., they are raced, I am not. Such an orientation perpetuates a racially inhabited silence that limits, if not negates, an open dialogue regarding race and culture. In such an environment stereotypes are furthered rather than confronted and perceptions of self and Other are allowed to remain circumscribed in a protective caul. In short, education as a means of transformation or change is subverted and silence as a means of control and protection of privilege is accepted (Mazzei 2011, p. 661).

McLaren (1998) and other critical theorists have suggested that it is virtually impossible to have a rich understanding of students from minority backgrounds without "understanding their history as oppressed groups, their cultural frames of reference, and their everyday social practices" (p. 201). It is therefore vital that teacher education courses explicitly frame their courses to allow pre-service teachers to explore a range of cultural understandings and knowledges. As articulated by Mills and Keddie (2012, p.18), "encouraging the kinds of teachers likely to realise the social justice intentions of schooling demands a much more integrated and deconstructive focus that supports pre-service teachers to think deeply and critically about their attitudes and beliefs about ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity". Teacher educators need to create opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage in cross-cultural experiences that foster an understanding of and genuine interest in those culturally different from them: whether it is teaching abroad, volunteering as an ESL tutor or learning another language. They could also be encouraged to research the factors that influence people's decisions to come to Australia – for example, the Sudanese civil war, the Vietnam War, famine, poverty and religious persecution. Teacher education courses need to instil in pre-service teachers a commitment to ongoing learning, which includes

researching about different cultures and their histories. They also need to disrupt the normativity of whiteness by investigating the powerful yet invisible intersection between whiteness, power and racism. Ignoring these issues by focussing on soft approaches to multiculturalism and diversity, runs the risk of being hypocritical in so far as it perpetuates an ideology that reinscribes white privilege (Cross 2010, p. 266).

I have included in the introduction of the PhD film one of the most powerful moments for me in this research. This took place at the Immigration Museum after the Grade 3/4 children had shared their immigration stories of the birthplaces of their parents, grandparents and great grandparents. The tour guide bent down and, as if letting the children into a secret, said, "I promise, it's the way Australian history works; unless you're an Aboriginal Australian you *have* a story in your family about immigrating to this country". This is a powerful expression of the fact that regardless of whether migrants are first or fifth generation they share the common experience of arriving on Indigenous land, and contributing to the post-settler discourse that positions all non-Indigenous people as migrants. Nicoll (2004) builds on this discourse in her university classroom, using critical whiteness pedagogy to "present the ground of Indigenous Sovereignty as the place where all Australians come into relationship". She proposes that explicit recognition of Indigenous sovereignty is "the only ground on which subjective differences can be usefully and ethically negotiated in a 'postcolonising' Australia". In this way she shifts the "pedagogical focus from the racialised oppression of Indigenous Australians to the white middle-class subject position that is a direct product of this oppression". While there are many positive outcomes of integrating Aboriginal studies in teacher education; such as combating racism and fostering reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians (Mooney, Halse & Craven 2003, p.4), I suggest the importance of taking an approach such as Nicoll's, which situates pre-service teachers "within racialised networks of power", and which encourages them to understand, question and challenge these networks.

I would now like to return to the scenario I described in the section *The impetus for this research* about the email I received from Steve in response to the guest speakers who were seeking asylum in Australia. There is a post-script to this story. As you may remember, I was vexed over the best approach to take, particularly as I had also interpreted the lack of email responses from other class members as an indication of their complicit agreement with Steve's statements. The night before our next class, my email box was flooded with responses. They were beautifully crafted, well researched and compassionate. Many of them expertly balanced personal reflections and responses to the guest speakers, anecdotes, references to refugee statistics and rigorous critique of many of Steve's

comments. (When I later asked some of them why they'd taken so long to reply, they said "I was too angry", "I had to calm down". "I wanted to be more objective".)Our next class included a lot of fruitful discussion, respectful disagreement and challenging of each other's beliefs and assumptions. There were noticeable shifts in perspectives. This incident emphasises the need for teacher educators to be proactive in opening up discussion around potentially confronting topics such as culture, race, refugees and racism.

Recently I had the pleasure of meeting a French woman, Francoise, who had just completed her Master of Education on Cultural Diversity in Vancouver, Canada. For two years she met online with a small group of fellow students; French speakers (she was from France), others were from Canada and one was a man from a Francophone African Country, who emigrated to Canada. It was not until the final week, when Francoise presented a critical reflection to the class, that she highlighted the fact that despite doing a postgraduate degree on cultural identity, there had been no deep discussion about their own experiences of prejudice or discrimination. The African/French guy said "I wish you'd brought that up earlier, I would have really liked to have shared my experiences of discrimination as a black person but also how black people sometimes are racist". This story mirrors a powerful narrative by a white teacher of 12 years who uses autoethnographic pedagogy to explore her own racism teaching "children of colour". While her university course had provided lectures and readings on teaching culturally diverse students and teaching Latino students, Pennington directly states: "I had never heard anyone mention race in the context of the university courses" (2007 p.94). In her role as a university lecturer teaching pre-service teachers from white backgrounds, she says adamantly, "I had to bring up race, Whiteness specifically, as a means of exploring our own identities and understandings" (p.99).

In Sleeter's foreword to SooHoo's *Talking Leaves* (2006, p.x) she contends that lessons about oppression that do not open spaces for pre-service teachers to talk, trivialise their struggles. Yet when issues of race and identity are introduced by teacher educators into teacher education classrooms, there are often palpable silences. Mazzei's (2011) majority white pre-service teachers cite their reasons for remaining silent. They speak of "not wanting to offend, not wanting to be challenged, not having the 'right' answer or not being respected by classmates" (p.662).

It is unreasonable to expect pre-service teachers to be confident to confront racism or discuss culture and identity in their classrooms if they are not provided with adequate opportunities to practice during their teaching degrees. While all pre-service teacher participants involved in this study accepted their responsibility to respond to racism and other forms of discrimination in their classrooms, they were less

confident in their ability to do so. Power differentials between pre-service teachers and school staff is a major obstacle to pre-service teachers challenging racist behaviour in schools, especially when they perceive themselves as guests in the school and do not want to jeopardise satisfactorily completing their placement. This was the case with one former Indigenous pre-service teacher of mine who was mortified by negative stereotypical comments made by a staff member about Indigenous people. Perhaps the fact that the staff member did not realise the pre-service teacher was Indigenous was all the more distressing for her, as she often referred back to this incident with the regret of not having spoken up. Despite much of our course time being dedicated to discussions of valuing diversity and challenging racism, this pre-service teacher expressed a desire not to "rock the boat" by confronting the teacher, although agreed that after her placement had finished I could bring it up with the principal.

Pre-service teachers, school teachers and teacher educators in particular need to be better equipped with the skills to challenge prejudicial or racial attitudes – whether they occur in the classroom, in the school corridors, or in social situations. This is no mean feat, and much practice is required. Guerin (2003) offers an interesting analysis of the way in which racist comments can be made in casual conversations to regulate power relations and gain status rather than promote racism. This requires additional skills. Guerin suggests that rather than rebuffing these comments with evidence and facts, people need to be trained in conversational skills to intervene in conversations with witty repartee and counter jokes to combat prejudice and racism in social contexts. These skills are at work in the discussion that Emily has with her class in response to the boy who was teased about his unusual sandwich. Emily uses her enjoyment of chips and ice-cream sandwiches to challenge her students to view people's differences as a source of wealth rather than weakness. Jacinta similarly demonstrates these skills when she engages the boy at the Immigration Museum in critical questioning around his views that all migrants come to Australia to start wars.

The struggle for pre-service teachers to continue working towards social justice in their classrooms once they graduate is examined in a study by Philpott and Dagenais (2011) of 27 first-year-out teachers. Speaking from a Canadian perspective, many of the participants confessed to being concerned that bringing social justice into their teaching practice may jeopardise future employment possibilities or isolate them from colleagues, and therefore often abandoned their own beliefs and avoided controversial discussions. These new teachers "overwhelmingly agreed that the most significant factors encouraging new teachers' abilities to incorporate social justice into their practice were support, professional respect, and the freedom to explore new ways of teaching. For many working with a supportive, encouraging staff, or at least one staff member and/or administrator was

instrumental in their continued development as social justice educators" (p.93). It would be interesting to do follow-up interviews with pre-service teacher participants in my research (who are now graduate teachers in schools) to see how their involvement in this research has impacted on their practice. What did they learn, and in what ways are they continuing to advance a culturally inclusive pedagogy? What have been the factors which have constrained them?

Having dedicated much of this exegesis to critiquing various approaches to multicultural education, it seems remiss not to attempt to characterise my own work here and the work that was undertaken by pre-service teachers in their classrooms and documented in the research film. It is obviously difficult to locate the pre-service teachers and myself precisely within any particular framework. As Nieto (2004) acknowledges, the levels of multicultural education which she proposes are dynamic rather than static and schools and teachers may demonstrate characteristics of various levels simultaneously. Aveling's (2004) notion of moving along a continuum from dys-consiousness at one end and consciousness at the other is also a helpful way of understanding the journey we took together and reminds us that we are all at different positions along the continuum. As I look at Nieto's (2004) 'Characteristics of Multicultural Education", I see many elements of the work we did in the focus groups reflected in the third, fourth and fifth (highest) levels of her framework. The discussions in the focus group were useful in stimulating deep thinking about how to make classes more equitable, democratic and inclusive. The fact that some of the pre-service teachers embraced change by bringing conversations and activities around cultural diversity into their classrooms demonstrates "reflection and action as important components of learning" (level 5). Their students' experiences, cultures, and languages were explicitly used to guide the teaching and learning (level 3) through the creating houseboxes and culture pizzas, writing poetry and using a critical literacy approach to read Shaun Tan's books. The learning environment was imbued with multicultural education. It was seen in classroom interactions and materials (level 4).The excursion to the Immigration Museum encouraged consideration of different perspectives. This was an excellent way to introduce primary school students to a discourse around cultural diversity. While there were moments when racism was tackled in school classrooms, more consideration could have been given by pre-service teachers to addressing racism and planning concrete ways of interrupting dominant culture systems of privilege in their school settings. What is of concern to me is that we had a total of 24 hours in small focus groups to devote exclusively to discussing issues of culture, diversity and pedagogical implications. This is much more attention than most courses would have the luxury of devoting to these issues. Despite the inroads we made, to go beyond what we did together and what the pre-service teachers did with their students would involve further time and commitment.

Actively challenging racism involves critiquing one's pedagogy, the curriculum, the school culture and working towards a more equitable distribution of power in the classroom, school and in the wider community. While a number of practical suggestions and checklists have been provided by authors and scholars to make schools more inclusive (Banks 2006; Hyde 2010; Nieto 2004), some of the "next steps" as I see it for the pre-service teacher participants may include the following:

- facilitating student experiences which explore cultures different from their own – perhaps the housebox activity could be extended to include researching a culture different from their own through interviews with classmates and their families;

- in examining the demographic of the school, making sure that those students from marginalised backgrounds are represented in the curriculum;

- critiquing classroom and library books to see whose perspectives are represented and actively building resources which are more inclusive;

- organising meetings with Indigenous educators to suggest how best to include Indigenous perspectives in all areas of the curriculum, particularly in areas like maths, physical education and sciences;

- exposing students to a range of different views by inviting into their classroom people whose views are often underrepresented or misrepresented by the media and politicians – this may assist students to "un-other" groups such as refugees, asylum seekers and people with disabilities;

- having challenging discussions about poverty, discrimination and racism;

- using student diversity as a resource: finding out about students' lived experiences and integrating their interests, cultures, beliefs and customs into the curriculum;

- remembering never to confuse social justice with charity work;

- creating meaningful social justice projects into the school life, ideally in response to what students themselves see as socially unjust;

- using a range of experiences and resources to inform students and bring them to an understanding of racism. For example, using anti-Islamophobia resource kits, visiting the Holocaust Museum and studying the missing elements of Australian history such as the Stolen Generation, the Cameleers etc.;

- using activities that encourage critical and higher order thinking;

- forming a partnership with the local community and drawing on students' families and friends as resources.

This is not a prescriptive list, but rather some ideas that may hopefully be useful. Most importantly educators in schools and universities need to share examples of what culturally responsive pedagogy looks like in the classroom and what social justice means. Sleeter (2012) recommends the usefulness of video as a widely accessible medium to convey what culturally responsive pedagogy means and looks like in the classroom. She suggests that "such a resource could be very helpful for guiding teachers, parents, and other members of the public beyond simplistic conceptions of what culturally responsive teaching means" (2012, p.18). It is my hope that the research film can be used as a resource to initiate dialogue in teacher education classes, in schools and in the broader community. I believe the pre-service teachers in the film discuss with honesty and courage their understandings of race, culture and identity. They demonstrate with enthusiasm a range of ways to engage their students in meaningful learning around diversity and difference. Creating culturally relevant classrooms is challenging work and contested terrain which requires constant learning and reflection. Hopefully, future pre-service teachers in particular will be encouraged to reflect more deeply on their own culture and work towards creating more inclusive classrooms after viewing the film.

Conclusion: Drawing the threads together

It's December 2012, the Christmas season is upon us and I am driving to my first meeting at a Prep to Year 9 school in Point Cook where I will work with 24 pre-service teachers enrolled in our Graduate Diploma of Education degree. As I head south west from the city along the West Gate Freeway I turn on the radio. There has been another racial attack, this time on two Indian women who were told "to go back to where they came from" before being slapped by a female passenger on a Melbourne CBD bus. I wonder what needs to happen to reduce these occasions of discrimination. If I re-read this exegesis in 2018 what attitudinal shifts will I notice in the community?

As I drive through Point Cook for the first time, I notice the rapid urban development reflected in the uniformity of the new houses and street landscapes. This homogeneity belies the diversity of the student population I later observe in the school yard. Nearly half the population of Point Cook was born overseas, and almost one third are from non-English speaking backgrounds (Wyndham City Council). Within this shifting cultural landscape I consider the new cohort of pre-service teachers I will soon meet.

As I conclude this research I have a deeper understanding of the unique opportunities that pre-service teachers have to make a positive impact on the lives of their students, particularly in expanding children's social and cultural awareness, and exposing them to a range of different ideas that they may not experience elsewhere. As a consequence of this understanding, I feel that I am re-entering my role as a teacher educator with renewed vigour and heightened responsibility in preparing pre-service teachers to recognise how culture impacts on the curriculum and operates in classrooms, and to respond from a position of insight.

With this in mind, the first few sessions that I am planning for the pre-service teachers based at Point Cook in 2013 involve coming to an understanding of themselves as cultural beings. Using an inquiry framework to engage pre-service teachers in not only reflection and analysis of teaching but also about the socio-cultural contexts in which they teach will be our starting point. The value of engaging in reflective, critical praxis was demonstrated in the research focus group sessions as pre-service teachers developed deeper understandings of their cultural identity and its intersections with race, racism and white privilege – an unintended but perhaps not unexpected outcome of the research. This has provided me with a model for establishing conversations with future pre-service teachers, which I will continue to build upon and share with teacher educator colleagues.

Perhaps the greatest limitation of my research is my own positionality – as a white middle-class, educated, English-speaking heterosexual female I operate from a position of power and privilege in the dominant culture. I will never know what it is like to live on the margins. Hopefully, my examination of my own privilege in this research will encourage others to examine their positionality and the ways in which racial and cultural privileges operate in race relations. Pennington (2007) suggests that given the inherent lack of 'White confessions', the idea of teacher educators sharing personal examinations of their racial identity with their students is imperative.

While I have been very aware of the ways in which the media and the political and social sphere influence white hegemony, I had done very little work on interrogating my own white privilege before this project. Undertaking this research has forced me to examine and understand my position, and how dominant forms of knowledge operate tacitly in society. At the beginning of my research journey I deliberately avoided uncomfortable words like "racism" and "white privilege" and instead opted for "soft, safe code words" such as "culturally inclusive" and "diversity" (Cross 2010, p.265). As Cross writes, these words tend to mask a lot of things. She stresses that for teacher education reform we must analyse "the larger systems in place that maintain the privileges of whiteness, power, and racism along with inequities and injustices manifested by them" (p.265). To go beyond token approaches to multiculturalism, educators must place power, privilege, whiteness and racism at centre stage. Multicultural classrooms, as Nieto writes "should not simply allow discussions that focus on social justice, but also welcome them and even plan actively for such discussions to take place" (2010, p.77–78).

The ongoing "subtle social racism" (Moodley 1999) that I continue to observe still surprises me, although I am more confident in challenging it now. At a recent dinner party I persisted in challenging a neighbour about his stereotypes of Jews as "stingy" and "mean". My arguments did not seem to sway him, which made me realise how difficult it is to critique our own perceptions, how entrenched these opinions become and how resistant to change we often are. It also brought to light the different and sometimes curious ways in which people perceive themselves and others.

This point was reiterated by Indigenous singer/songwriter Kutcha Edwards (2013) at a public forum I attended titled *Ideas for Melbourne: Making Racism History.* Many of his comments were synchronous with the key contributions to knowledge that this research provides. In his discussion about how people see themselves, he retold the story of a friend visiting him during the Australian Tennis Open. He was bemused when she commented on "the many foreigners in town". The irony of her, as a non-Indigenous

person, saying this to an Indigenous person was lost on her. It demonstrated her lack of insight that from an Indigenous perspective, non-Indigenous people are migrants, foreigners and colonisers.

As Edwards talked about the dislocation of Indigenous cultures and the thousands of Aboriginal place names which have been displaced by English words, it profoundly struck me that I did not see myself as a foreigner, nor did I see the English language I spoke as a foreign language. I am sure this is a common experience for many Anglo-Celtic-Australians, and one which preserves the illusion of white cultural dominance and the myth of Australianness. The cultural invisibility, dominance and normativity of whiteness has certainly been a prevalent theme in this research, and one which contributes to the continued oppression of Indigenous and minority groups.

An explanation offered by Edwards (2013) for the racism in Australia is the fear that white Australians experience of having what was once stolen, taken away by new migrants. He suggests that until we properly deal with Australia's first people, in terms of recognising them *as* the first Australians and sovereign land owners, we will always struggle to respond adequately to Australia's newer Australians.

Cohen (2003) states that: "The dominant Anglo is what provides the multicultural image of the nation its core values and ordering structure. As such it is not surprising that multiculturalism is discussed and debated in ways that are separated from the indigenous peoples and their relation to the land" (p.39). Yet while multiculturalism and Indigeneity are separate discourses, acknowledgement of the relationship Indigenous people have to their land is helpful in framing multicultural discourse by dissolving the socially constructed hierarchy of cultural differences and its subsequent inequalities. The guide from the Immigration museum achieves this in my research film *Classroom Conversations Around Culture* when he asks the Grade 3/4 students to share their family's migration stories. He draws on the richness of cultural diversity while emphasising its newness by representing the history of migration with a short ribbon against the long history of Australia's first people – represented by a long ribbon. The idea reinforced by the guide is that all non-Indigenous people are migrants to Australia. This helps to re-conceptualise "diversity" by encouraging people from white Anglo-Australian backgrounds to see themselves as part of the "multicultural community" and of dissipating the idea of an "us" and "them" binary divide. It also emphasises the importance of not only learning *about* Indigenous cultures and histories but of learning *from* them. Instead of the paternalistic notion of involving Indigenous people with mainstream culture, we need instead to involve mainstream culture with Indigenous cultures (Edwards 2013). After all, "it's the longest living civilisation on earth, and if you can't learn something from a people *that* successful, then you're really defying your own intelligence" (Pascoe 2008).

The emerging Australian Curriculum (ACARA n.d.) provides a useful framework to begin to implement these ideas, particularly with its explicit focus on Intercultural Understanding and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. The success of meaningfully implementing these priorities into teaching practice remains to be seen, particularly in disciplines such as maths, science and physical education where pre-service teachers seem to struggle to find points of connection. It is of great importance that resources are developed in consultation with Indigenous communities and that professional development is offered to teachers. Supporting pre-service teachers to develop their pedagogies by embedding these priorities in their various disciplines should be a priority for teacher educators.

One of the most powerful messages I have taken from various readings of Nieto (2004; 2010) is that multicultural education is a continual journey. I realise that I still need to become more skilful in drawing people into a conversation rather than responding didactically. It is not enough to berate someone by saying, "You shouldn't say that". This may force them into hiding behind a mask of political correctness. In the words of President Obama after the outbreak of violence sparked by the anti-Muslim film *Innocence of Muslims*:

> "...the strongest weapon against hateful speech is not repression, it is more speech." (Obama 2012).

There is a strong need to provide ongoing opportunities for dialogue at all levels of education, ideally in collaboration with universities where research is being undertaken. As educators we must create safe spaces to contemplate our individual differences and to engage with a range discourses. Ideally we can strike a balance between allowing people to feel comfortable to disclose prejudices or declare ignorance, and challenging them to critique and shift their positions. We must actively seek opportunities to instil "committed awareness" of a range of perspectives, histories and knowledges as well as "aware commitment" to developing agency to enact social change. It is important that teacher educators support pre-service teachers to develop educational philosophies which make contributions towards social and educational equity, as well as building compassion into the curriculum and their pedagogy. Pre-service teachers need to understand how the curriculum esteems Anglo-Australian knowledge, values and customs and to consider ways to make it more inclusive. Using the lived experiences of pre-service teachers to investigate the themes of inclusion and exclusion is essential, as is guiding them to reflect deeply on how they are socially and culturally positioned. The importance of embarking on a lifelong quest to continually engage in critical inquiry is a major recommendation of this

thesis, and as the reader will note, is something that I have been attempting to model throughout this exegesis by posing a number of critical questions.

This research has evoked many of the big questions of our times. While it does not claim to have any one answer, or pretend that there is an overnight solution, it has contributed important understandings about how to encourage pre-service teachers to implement multicultural education and work towards achieving social justice in their classrooms and schools. The intention of the film and exegesis is to open up discussion around a range of issues to do with culture, race, and identity. I can see its value as a tool for initiating discussions amongst school communities and in teacher education classes. Because the film can be uploaded to online forums, social media networks and YouTube, it will enable conversations to occur with a global audience. When I started this research I wanted to change the world. Through this research I have begun to change myself. Like the story of the boy who makes a difference to the starfish he throws back into the sea, change *can* occur one conversation at a time.

> "Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek"
> (Obama 2005).

Appendix: Focus group session outlines 1–8

Focus group session 1: Welcome & Introduction

Introduction & Overview of research (handout)

In the first 4 sessions we will reflect on notions of your own identity. This is important, as you need to know who you are before moving on to reflect on the cultural identity of others.

In the last 4 sessions we will reflect on the cultural identity of your students and school and classroom environment. We will consider the ramifications your cultural identity has on your pedagogy.

Creative format

We will use a range of creative activities to explore questions; painting, drawing, scenarios, guest speakers, role play, group discussions, guided questions, diary writing etc.

Diary writing

There will be time at the end of each session to reflect on the session in your diary.
Also time to write your own questions based on the themes which have come out of session. These will be handed in to me and will inform future sessions.

It would be great to write further autobiographical reflections in your own time. For example poems, stories, collect newspaper clippings, find resources to share.

Protocol

What is said between the 4 walls stays in the 4 walls.
Remember to:

- Share personal perspectives, share from own experience & don't speak for others
- Respect each other's opinion…can respectfully disagree with each other.

Finally

I will take on the role of facilitator/ researcher – Not teacher!
You are all experts of your own life and history…There are no right or wrong responses!

Session One: Who am I in terms of my cultural identity?

Bring in: butchers paper, coloured textas

Warm up activity

1/ The Story of your name (Introduction)

   Share the story of where your name comes from and what your name means.

   How important is it to have your name pronounced correctly?

2/ What is your cultural identity?

Activity: mind map. Write your full name in the middle, and brainstorm anything that comes to mind.

Can write or draw.

Allow everybody to define what culture is to them when they share mind map.

Discussion: What does cultural identity mean? (does it include your parent's lineage?)

Write this on board as a mind map as students share

Does everybody have a culture?

What is important to you about your cultural identity?

3/ Writing Activity

Write for 5 minutes without stopping –stream of consciousness – can write in native language – could be prose or poetry

My cultural identity is ……………

Read over what you've written…pick something and share with group

4/ Discussion in groups of 3

What has shaped your sense of your own cultural identity?

How do you identify yourself?

Do others perceive your cultural identity as you do?

5/ Diary writing and questions for me

Conclude with 10 minutes of personal writing in diary.

What further questions have you got based on the themes which have come out of session? (5

minutes).

Follow up Task

1/ During the week, think more about this…bring in something meaningful from home to share and show for next session.

For example poem, song, fairytale, rug, painting, something significant from childhood that represents your cultural identity

2/ Reflect further on characteristics of your culture – language, celebrations, traditions, beliefs, practices, significant artifacts, customs, family events, and the ways in which you celebrate them. Consider cultural norms. Make your first entry into your diary

Session 2

1/ Recap week 1

Start thinking about how your block placement could become a vehicle to showcase cultural inclusivity

2/ Sharing of origins of names

Create mind maps of "What is your cultural identity" (Abdul, Helen, and Sabrina)

3/ Further thoughts on the meaning of cultural identity:

Look at mind map from week 1. Those absent in week 1 to ask questions of the rest, and contribute own understandings.

How do you know what your cultural identity is? How do you find it?
Can you choose it? Is this always the case? Is there some element of it that is hard-wired in? Can it change? How?

4/ Share something meaningful from your culture with the group (week 1 task)

Explain how it's significant.

Read Intro by Stuart Hall p. 4 + 5 in *Questions of Cultural Identity* (edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay , London:Sage, 1996

5/ What makes us Australian?
Is there an Australian culture? What is it? (pre-service teacher participants' questions from week 1)

8 x sheets of butchers paper…everybody draws whatever they like in response to the word "Australian cultural identity"

    A) Now add to or extend people's drawings…then look around

    B) Now respond through text to whatever you see in the drawings

    C) In pairs given 2 of the sheets of butchers paper

    D) Write 2 lines of poetry based on this. Doesn't have to rhyme.

    E) Put in order and read out…group discussion

How do people who migrate to Australia identify with Australian culture?

How Australian do you have to be to be recognized as having an Australian cultural identity? For example a migrant, child of a migrant…

Is there a part of your cultural identity you are not proud of?

Last week we discussed how you could adapt to a culture without being born into it, and take on the cultural identity of it.

Could you ever say you were Mauritian/Japanese/Chinese? What about Jenna who lived in Japan for many years, or Emily who is marrying somebody who is Mauritian?

Break

Writing task, or draw, use symbols, poetry or pose or a combination of these (10 minutes)

What is your earliest childhood memory of someone being included or excluded from your group based on race or culture?

What is your earliest recollection of being different or excluded based on race or culture? ? Describe a time when your difference made a difference.

Have you ever experienced a time when you have felt different, or you are aware of someone else's difference?

Role Play

Role play 2 of these experiences (groups of 2). The person who experienced it is to direct the others

Journal writing

Any thoughts from today's session (5 minutes)

Questions to give to Sarah to guide future sessions (5 minutes)

At home task

Draw a family tree tracing your family's migration to Australia.   (Bring in session 3)

Session 3 task will be to learn about your own history, heritage, community, family, and culture by interviewing a member of your family.

Group Mind map

Cultural Identity

Upbringing
Values
Way you speak

Religion
← sliding scale →

Physical location
(e.g. Australia)
history

Heritage
Where you were born
Parents/grandparents

Sliding scale

Community
friends
how you live your life
social culture

155
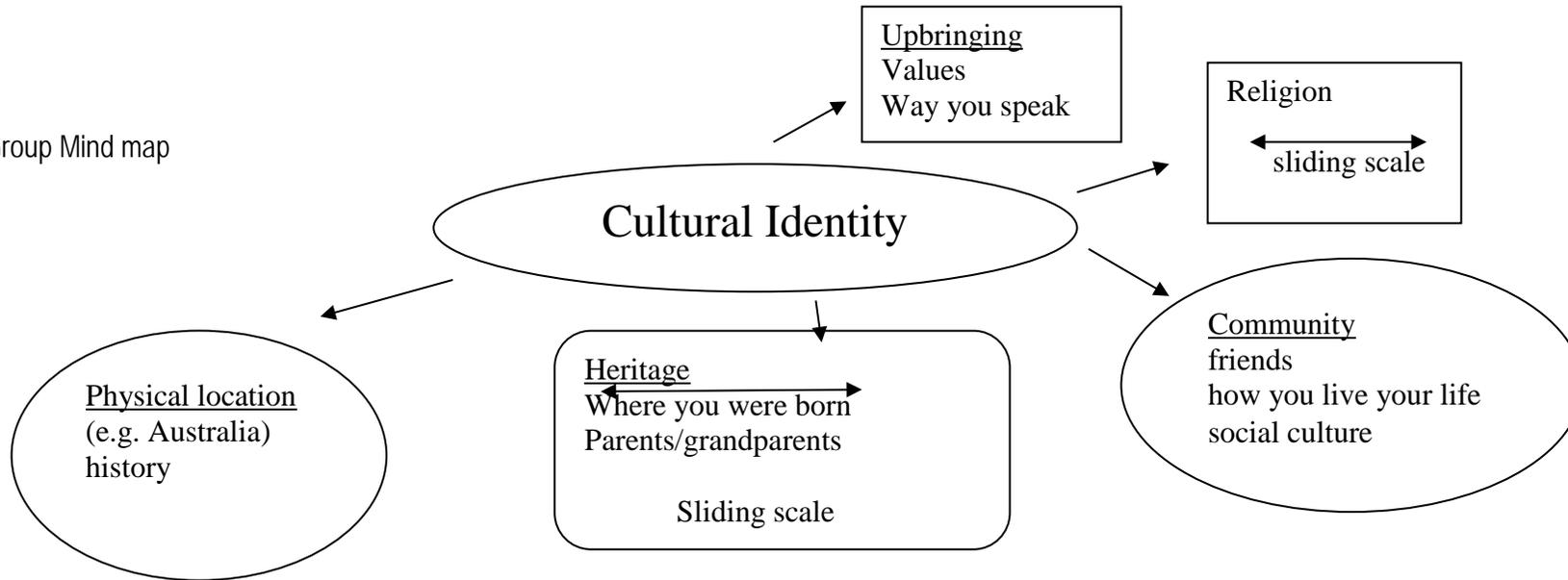
<u>Session 3</u>

Diversity/Difference/ Racism.

What language do we use to articulate difference?

(Explore literature to connect with theories of race and racism)

<u>Activity</u>

Share family trees

Do you feel any differently about your cultural identity?

<u>Acitivity</u>

Have a romantic fantasy...imagine yourself on a tropical island...describe partner…

are they similar to you? (Soo Hoo's idea discussed over coffee).

Think about the last week…who have you been associating with, friends etc…how

similar/different are they to you?

What sorts of experiences/exposure have you had with people from different cultures...kids you

mixed with, experiences of cultures at school/home/neighbourhood etc. What about now?

Abdul talked about how you "merge with the closest cultural group to yours". Why do we

tend to socialise within our own cultural group?

Is there anything wrong with this?

What if you won't go outside the safety of your culture?

Are some people uncomfortable going outside their culture?

<u>What Language do we use to articulate difference?</u>

1/ On 2 sheets of butcher's paper write down all the words we use to describe somebody

based on their ethnicity/race/ culture, .e.g. Anglo Celtic, white, black...there are lots of

derogatory words you would have heard and read, include them, even if they're confronting and

offensive.

2/ Share ideas: Which words are the most offensive? Why?

Which words do you feel most uncomfortable with? Why?

In what ways is language used to exclude others? (question asked by group member at last

session)

What is culturally sensitive language to use?

Do you feel comfortable describing somebody as white/black/ brown?

("wog", "nigger" etc. can be used as a term of endearment, e.g. between African-Americans: discuss)

Is skin colour a marker of racism? How/Why?

When is it appropriate to talk about difference?

How do we articulate difference? What language is appropriate?

What language do we use/will we use to discuss cultural difference?

What word associations do we have with certain terms?

Is this different or the same as describing somebody as Muslim/Jewish etc.?

Scenarios of Racism

1/ Write for 5 minutes on an incident of racism you've observed.

What was your feeling, response? Did you challenge it?

2/ Share incident. Discuss

If time permits, discuss questions below. If not, think about for next week

Guiding Questions

Do you think Australia is a racist country?

At what age do you think racism starts?

What shapes racist attitudes?

What influences people to have racist behaviors?

Has anybody else experienced it?

How often do we stereotype, prejudice, bias, and discriminate. How do we overcome this and the ways to avoid them?

What would it take to live in a society free from racism?

Is it possible not to be racist? (pre-service teacher participant question from week 2)

How much of racism can be excused by ignorance? (pre-service teacher question from week 2)

Discuss recent media coverage of police racism towards African community in Melbourne.

Discuss excerpt from :

Group Differences: The Markers

One group of humans may be set apart from others by one or more markers, defined as physical, cultural or social characteristics which are easily discernible.

The most common physical marker is skin color. Historically, descriptions of skin color have ranged from black, brown and white to yellow, red and blue. In addition to skin color, and often correlated with it, are the color of the hair, ranging from black and brown to red and blonde; the texture of the hair, ranging from straight, wavy, curly to kinky; the shape of the nose, straight, aquiline, or flat; or shape of the lips, thin or thick.

(Alam 2003)

MAKING HOUSEBOXES: **(by Mira Vuk-Nikic)**

The dream for this project, conceived by artist Mira Vuk-Nikic (see explanation below) is to create 1,000 houseboxes! From projects in 2009 at St Albans South Primary School and the Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning (SAIL) Project, we have around 60 and are always seeking more…let us know if you are interested in helping to build houses with the groups with whom you work.

Mira will be leading a team working with children and families on Houseboxes during the Brimbank Festival on Saturday 13 March…Join us there if you are interested.

Maureen Ryan

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SHIFTING (by Mira Vuk-Nikic)

In Australia, we are living in a society where every school, every street, whole cities and the country are multicultural.

Our country is home to millions of migrants. Moving from one place to another is our past and our future.

The 21st century is the century of migration. Figuratively, the family home is a big moving box.

Inside this moving box is a family story and culture. Outside the moving box is a family's relation to the new community.

When walking on the streets we can not reach all these family stories and cultures behind the house walls.

These stories and cultures are our treasure.

Through sharing stories and cultural richness we learn about each other and how to adjust in this society. In this process our cultures shift.

Exchanging of family stories and knowing other people's culture better is very important for adjustment, for making compromises, for respect, for being tolerant, for self esteem and for the ability to establish new friendships. It is especially important to fresh migrants, students and young people.

They are looking for their places in the society.

I chose a post box for making moving box houses. The post box symbolises sending items from one place to another.

It makes connection from one city to another, from one country to another, from one culture to other, from one person to another person.

Opening of the post box is exciting. Inside is something devoted to us.

Our moving box houses will be suspended from the ceiling at the height of our shoulders and there will be established suburbs/towns with streets.

Spectators will walk through exhibited streets and look at the houses. If they would like to know who is living inside the house, they have to bend to see inside the house. They have to be curious and a make an effort to establish a connection to the other person and to gain new knowledge.

Optional: Some houses will be suspended in opposite ways, so that the roof will be on the bottom. They will look like ships. This will be reserved for houses, which families have migrated to Australia in ships.

(This has to be decided later!)

Artist teachers who are working with students or in the community have to explain the main idea of moving box houses and give the possibility to participants to choose how they would like to make their own house. They could make paintings, drawing, collage, print, install objects, etc.

It is very important that they know that every house should be different, because they are different, and their story is different.

This house is a portrait of themself and their family.

It would be good if the preparation of each house involved collaboration between two or more members/generations of the family.

For example: - a student may be making a drawing or painting while mum or grandfather is writing a story in their own language or the brother is making the outside of the house and the sister is doing the inside of the house or vice versa, etc.

Don't forget to keep postage logo clear.

The inside and outside of the Moving Box Houses should be images and text.

Proportions of text and images are not regulated. (Would be good to have different proportions of text and images)

1. The outside of the moving box house presents relations to the community in which they live: neighbourhood, school, street, friends and what activities they do together

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2. Inside of the moving box houses presents the family's story and their culture: immigration history/travel experiences, writing in their first and other languages, communication between family members in Australia and other countries, food, celebrations, influences, etc.

3. The roof could be coloured differently.

At home task 3:
Learn about your own history, heritage, community, family, and culture by interviewing a member of your family. Think about why they migrated to Australia. Bring this to week 4 art session.

For housebox session bring any photos, images things for collaging, favourite pens, scraps of paper, material that's significant, photocopies of family tree, excerpts from interview etc.

Session 4: Housebox session at Yarraville Community Centre

Mira Vuk-Nikic – guest artist

Purpose of session is to conclude our personal reflections on cultural identity and to synthesize the thoughts and ideas that have arisen from the first 3 sessions.

You can repeat answers you've already given, or choose to share new ones.

Questions at end…

At completion, each participant is to present their box to the group.

What are the implications for all this for your classroom?

What further questions do you have?

Reflect on the process.

Questions

1. Tell me your name…and brief introduction of its origin.
2. Describe your cultural identity and the things that have influenced and shaped it.
3. What is the most important aspect of your cultural identity?
4. Tell me about your own school experience… in terms of whether it was culturally inclusive…was there any racism?
5. Do you think there's an Australian cultural identity as such?
6. Have you ever experienced a time when you have felt different, or you are aware of someone else's difference?
7. Do you think Australians are generally accepting of cultural difference…what's been your experience? What influences negative stereotypes/racism?
8. What questions have you had over the past few months, and what remaining questions do you have?
9. What did you learn about your own history, heritage, community, family, and culture by interviewing a member of your family?
10. Why did you decide to become a teacher?

(What story does your hosebox tell?....share with class)

Session 4

The next 4 sessions will focus on how our understandings of the first 4 sessions impact on classroom practice.
There are a few things I'd really appreciate you doing for this session:

1/ Complete poems (or prose) started in session 2 about Australian identity.

2/ Write a narrative inspired by the ideas that have come out of the sessions so far (look at pieces from SooHoo for inspiration). It may just be exploring one theme in depth, or combining a number of themes. (It would be great publish some of these with your permission!)

3/ Start thinking about dynamic ways of promoting a culturally inclusive classroom.
I will email you any interesting sites or readings that may help in the preparation of your 6 week block.

You might like to start by looking at the *All of Us* framework
http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/all-of-us/the-policy

Building Bridges
http://www.teachingdiversity.org.au/downloads/building_bridges.pdf
(Thanks Jacinta!)

The Immigration Museum
http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/education/
(great ideas for lessons…and maybe an excursion!)

Racism No Way
http://www.racismnoway.com.au/
(teaching resources etc.)

Enjoy your break!

Sarah

<u>Session 5</u>

Photocopies:

<u>http://www.pbs.org/kcts/preciouschildren/diversity/read_activities.html</u>

<u>To bring to session 5:</u>

1/ Completed Houseboxes to present to the group.

This will give us the opportunity to conclude the first 4 sessions of personal reflections on our cultural identity, and we can use this as a springboard to consider how this impacts on us as teachers. In presenting your housebox, you may like to consider:

*What have you learnt about yourself and others that you feel is important for you as a teacher? How does your own cultural identity impact on the way you teach?
*How has this helped prepare you for your 6 week block?
*What else do you need to know? (questions to frame the next 4 sessions)

You may like to read any writing you have done (prose/poetry) inspired by the ideas and themes that have come out of the sessions so far.

2/Please read pages 1–5 of the link below:

<u>http://eprints.qut.edu.au/1799/1/1799_1.pdf</u>

You may also like to browse through this site:
<u>http://www.teachingdiversity.org.au/downloads/building_bridges.pdf</u> (thanks to Jacinta!)

3/ We will be discussing racist behaviour/attitudes in the school setting, so bring as many examples from your own experience that you can think of.

1/ Sharing of houseboxes (approx 1 hour)

Houseboxes are the culmination of your reflection of exploring your cultural identity. What did you learn – about yourself, about others? Did you enjoy it? Do you feel more prepared to start thinking about how your own experience impacts on your classroom practice?

2/ Activity: (from Shanton Chan)

Describe an orange

Visualise a farm: Draw a picture or describe in a few words

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What will you do with that info now?

How do you think your culture will impact on your school placement?

Could do questions as a writing exercise

Questions

As a way of stimulating discussion about a number of issues and getting input from everybody, I have devised the following questions.

After you have completed this, we will go through your responses as a group and you can share any experiences, scenarios or thoughts you have.

1=strongly disagree   10=strongly agree

I think my cultural identity impacts on the relationships I have with students.

1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____10

My cultural identity (whether consciously or subconsciously) impacts on my pedagogy.

1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____10

I think teachers should be colourblind to students.

1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____10

I think students should always speak English in the classroom.

1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____10

Students largely form friendship groups based on their cultural background.

1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____10

I am responsible for stopping racist behavior amongst my students.

1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____10

I am confident in stopping racist behavior amongst my students.

1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____10

I am responsible for stopping racist behavior amongst parents.

1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____10

I am confident in stopping racist behavior amongst parents.

1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____10

I am responsible for stopping racist behaviour amongst other teachers and staff members.

1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____10

I am confident in stopping racist behavior amongst other teachers and staff members.

1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____10

I think there is a high incidence of bullying amongst students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____10

Teachers from culturally diverse backgrounds are more culturally responsive to students from minority groups.

1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____10

<u>Further Focus Questions</u>

School Environment

What are your observations of your school environment/class...is it culturally diverse...what are the responses to culturally diverse students?

How does cultural identity develop/change/make up a classroom? (a question from earlier session)

What is the social hierarchy in schools in terms of cultural groups at you partnership school?

Which groups suffer the most discrimination?

Your role as a teacher

Are you aware of cultural differences between yourself and your students? How does it feel to be the same/different from students? Where and how do you find connections with your students? What experience and knowledge do you draw on?

How does your own cultural identity shape your own teaching practice?
List the things that you do in your classroom that come from your cultural perspective.
Is stereotyping people by cultural background appropriate in the classroom? Is there any situation it would be? (pre-service teacher question from earlier session)

"What assumptions about their students' cultures underpin pre-service teachers' expectations of them as learners and in what ways are these assumptions socially constructed and shaped by their own positionings? In what ways are such expectations evident in how and what is taught?" (Santoro 2009, p. 11).

The curriculum

How do you design culturally relevant curriculum?
How do you determine what is culturally relevant?
What do you need to know about the kids you're teaching...how do you find out (without essentialising difference)?
How do you ensure you don't just focus on the dominant cultural group?

How do you know what to teach so that a multicultural perspective is included and regarded?

Is what and how you teach children from culturally diverse backgrounds different from how you teach kids from cultural mainstream? If so, in what ways? (Isn't a good teacher, just that, regardless of who they're teaching?)

In what ways can you challenge students' stereotypes, and address racism?

As a pre-service teacher, what sorts of experiences have you had of cultural exclusion/racism in schools? What were your responses?

Some Examples

Discussion of language:

Scenario 1: a group of students "affectionately" call a classmate wog…or they refer to themselves as wogs, e.g. "my wog parents/ friends",…what response do you have?

Scenario 2: Emilia's class had a substitute teacher one day in grade 3.

Emilia came home and said: "I don't know if this is racist, but one time at school there was a Chinese teacher, and all the kids were saying 'chingchongwang'".

(Discuss taking off somebody's accent…Is it OK to do for Irish? English? American? What about Indian, Asian, Spanish?...What about humour?)

- Making fun of people's clothes or food
- Making assumptions about a student's abilities or preferences based on their ethnicity or cultural background
- Teachers using examples that show stereotyped views of particular ethnic or cultural groups
- Causing students to participate in activities that conflict with their religious beliefs
- Using intimidating or offensive behaviour towards people from other cultural or ethnic groups. For example, threatening, stealing, spitting
- Ridiculing people's accents
- Bullying students from particular cultural or ethnic groups

Session 6: Becoming culturally responsive teachers: Reflection on 6 week block

1/ Reflection

2/ Discussion Starters

3/ Organise Shaun Tan's session…prepare questions

1/ REFLECTION on 6 week block

- How satisfied were you with promoting a culturally inclusive classroom? What were the indicators?

- Was there anything surprising or challenging that happened? How satisfied are you with the way you handled any challenges?

- What opportunities did you create in your classroom for your students to express their cultural identity? How did you find out about their cultural identity?

- Were there any clashes of cultural norms/values? (Hmong wedding, hair day, sleep over)

- Is what and how you teach children from culturally diverse backgrounds different from how you teach kids from cultural mainstream? If so, in what ways?

- How do you design culturally relevant curriculum? How do you determine what is culturally relevant?

- We all bring our life experiences, values and culture into the classroom.
  How does your own background and experience influence the way you teach?
  List the things that you do in your classroom that come from your cultural perspective.
  How does this shape the expectations you have of teaching and learning?
  How conscious are you of this?

- What role does the teacher and school have in promotion of understanding between different cultural groups ?

- Are you aware of school policies, curriculum materials about racism/promotion of cultural diversity?

- How do you encourage kids to value diversity?

- In what ways does the school curriculum take into consideration a variety of cultural perspectives and values?

Who drives education policy?

Who wins and who loses as a result of education policy priorities? Do children from minority groups do as well?

2/ <u>Discussion Starters</u>

In general, does society encourage people to practice their cultural heritage…what pressures are there to assimiliate? (discuss recent news items)

What pressures are there to conform to one language and one culture if you want to succeed?

How does cultural hegemony, characterized by a narrow Western ideology, shape curriculum and pedagogy?

Think about the role schools played in the dynamics of oppression when you were a young person.

Can you think of policies or practices that have negative consequences for members of a particular group?

Photocopy of Biles' *Activities that Promote Racial and Cultural Awareness*

http://www.pbs.org/kcts/preciouschildren/diversity/read_activities.html

 "What assumptions about their students' cultures underpin pre-service teachers' expectations of them as learners and in what ways are these assumptions socially constructed and shaped by their own positionings? In what ways are such expectations evident in how and what is taught?" (Santoro 2009, p.11).

How has teaching changed in response to more multicultural classrooms?

Discuss excerpts:

"…racism operates as a complex construct of privilege and penalty based on the belief that groups of people are inherently inferior. In turn, this belief is used to justify the unequal distribution of opportunities, goods and services. In its institutional form, racism can also be designed to keep the dominant group in the position to marginalize underrepresented groups, according them little power to affect large-scale economic, social or political change" (Rubal-Lopez & Anselmo in Phillion, He & Connelly (eds.) 2005).

Giroux (1992) says, "Teachers need to find ways of creating a space for mutual engagement of lived difference that does not require the silencing of a multiplicity of voices by a single dominant discourse" (p. 201).

Rubal-Lopez and Anselmo (in Phillion, He & Connelly 2005) advocate the importance of a

multicultural curriculum which is firmly embedded in the curriculum of a school rather than as an adjunct or peripheral activity. They suggest this is beneficial not only for those from a diverse cultural background but also in educating children of the majority culture.

"...a strong sense of responsibility is required for radical social justice orientation, but not necessarily for implementing cross-cultural and culturally relevant pedagogy. Effecting social change – inspiring students to ask themselves how they might change social stratification – requires specific attention to activities that will expand and employ students' sociological imaginations" (Silverman 2010, p. 300).

"The study identified an underlying racism among white Anglo-Saxon Australians that emerged in their language, for example, the use of the word 'them' to describe students from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds as opposed to the use of the word 'us' when describing themselves and others of Anglo-Saxon background. This 'othering' was also detected in a tendency by this dominant group to view some other particular groups as homogenous, for example, categorising all people from China, Japan, Korea and other Asian countries as 'Asians', which in effect views them all as the same, by disregarding their country of origin" (Mansouri et al. 2009b).

3/ Organise Shaun Tan. Bring books. Any ideas for alternative venue?
Need to spend some time planning questions…everybody think of 4…brainstorm kinds of questions (relating to research questions we have previously discussed)

<u>Session 7 : Shaun Tan</u>

Thanks and introductions of everybody…

Q1: For our focus group sessions we've been reflecting on our own cultural identity (which we've all defined in different ways), and how that impacts on our teaching. Could we start with an overview of your own cultural identity and how that impacts on your illustrating and writing?

Q.2 You mentioned in an article that growing up in Perth you experienced low level racism, and people asking you, "Where are you from?" This has been the focus of many of our conversations, in particular, the balance between inquiring about somebody's culture, and when that's just inappropriate. What are your ideas about that?

The Arrival
The nameless land where the migrant father arrives is multicultural and tolerant. How much of this is based on Australia?

What inspired you to write **The Arrival**? Did you research different migrant stories?

SCHOOL
You have a recurring interest in notions of "belonging". What do you think helps to create a sense of belonging? – particularly in a school environment?

Eric captures beautifully cultural misunderstandings. What are ways we can promote cultural understanding?

Open up discussion between pre-service teacher participants. Shaun may also like to ask participants some questions, for example Jacinta, Sabrina & Emily have been using *Eric* as a class text, and Mat has been using *The Arrival.*

<u>Session 8:</u>

<u>Reflection/Summary/Evaluation of participation in research project</u>

What personal knowledge/skills/attitudes have supported you in developing a culturally inclusive practice – being culturally aware?

<u>Reflection on BEd</u>

Cast your mind back to the beginning of the BEd.

What aspect of your partnership placement have been beneficial in supporting you developing culturally inclusive practice (diverse classrooms, lectures, tutes etc.)?

What has been helpful discussion around race, culture etc. – broadening your understandings?

Is there anything that has hindered it?

What more could be included?

One of the principal duties of a progressive educator is to challenge unjust social structures (Freire, McLaren) – challenge power holders.

To what degree do you think you should be a teacher who brings about a change? What sorts of change would you like to see? How are you to bring them about? Is it easy to take an activist stance in schools?

Clearly teachers need to have certain values when they graduate…what values?…reflecting back on classes – racist/ignorant students – need to evolve in their thinking – but how do we do that – what stories do you have of peers being narrow minded – what transforms them?

<u>In Schools:</u>

"Fighting racism in the realm of language alone, or only in the world of ideas, without undermining the unjust structures that give birth to those ideas, is in the end a hopeless mission" (Ben Jelloun 1999, p.162).

You can't just correct people for saying racist things.

Reflecting on you school placement, what have you learnt about how to create an inclusive classroom environment?

<u>Reflection on Research Project</u>

- Wrap up: What have you learnt about yourself/others from being involved in this project?

- Has your thinking changed in any way?

- What did you find useful/interesting?

- Challenges of the project?

- What other questions do you have?

15 minutes writing: poetry, prose, song

10 questions – recap of 8 sessions : Ask participants individually (approx 5 minutes each):

How do you define cultural identity?

What is your cultural identity?

How do people perceive you in terms of your cultural identity?

Were there any experiences in childhood which you remember as being significant in terms of understanding of culture/ identity?

What childhood memories do you have around your awareness of culture or race?

What influences people to have racist behaviors?

What classroom texts are useful to explore themes around cultural diversity?

How do you open up dialogue about cultural understanding with children?

What have been your experiences of cultural intolerance/ racism?

As a teacher, what's your role in promoting a classroom that is culturally aware and respectful?

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