*Educating for anti-racism: producing and reproducing race and power in a university classroom*

Educating for Anti-Racism: Producing and Reproducing Race and Power in a University

Classroom

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Abstract

In this paper I explore some of the issues associated with teaching about race, culture and ethnicity in a psychology program. These curriculum initiatives are part of a broader agenda of raising awareness about racialised oppression and exclusion and contributing to the development of ways of researching and practicing psychology that are transformative and culturally sensitive. I overview the broader context and describe our subject and the guiding principles. This is followed by a description and analysis of two events in the classroom that illustrate the ways in which students differentially respond to the challenges posed by writings that challenge taken for granted understandings of race. Part of the analysis shows that students can often engage in the reproduction of oppressive practices and invest in whiteness. It is suggested that more than single semester subjects are required to promote and support the development of critical capacities for anti-racism practice.

*Keywords:* Critical Pedagogy, Whiteness, Racism, Indigenous Australians, Psychology

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Recent statistics paint a picture of Australia as very diverse culturally, and linguistically. Thomas (2004) highlighted Australia's diversity stating that people who live here come from 232 different countries, that we speak 193 different languages, and that Indigenous people have lived here for thousands of years. Yet, even though we have this diversity many have argued that psychology has remained monocultural; it is white, and as a result often unresponsive to core issues that undermine the wellbeing of ethnic minorities and Indigenous people's in Australia (e.g., Riggs, 2004a, Thomas, 2004). This critique is of course not limited to Australian psychology. There is a large volume of work critiquing the dominant Euro-American worldview that forms the basis of North American psychology including those psychologies that have been transplanted into different countries through uncritical modes of research and practice (e.g, Sinha, 1997; Kao & Sinha, 1997).

In Australia, Indigenous and other minority voices are under-represented in psychology (Dudgeon & Pickett, 2000). Although, there is criticism levelled at what many regard as mainstream psychology, there are pockets that are proactive in redressing these deficits, omissions and ongoing exclusions. In Australia, the Indigenous Interest Group and the College of Community Psychologists of the Australian Psychological Society are two groupings that are actively engaged in promoting and responding to issues of cultural diversity and racialised oppression (Gridley, Davidson, Dudgeon, Pickett, & Sanson, 2000). There is also a body of research and writing by ethnic minorities in different countries that is part of the broader movement of indigenous peoples advocating for the reconstruction and development of a psychology that can positively contribute to social justice for Indigenous and other minority communities in Australia and elsewhere (e.g., Bulhan, 1980, 1985;

Comas-Díaz, Lykes, Alarcón, 1998; Harris, Carney, & Fine, 2002; Martin, 2003). In my view this writing is vital to informing critical pedagogy that is aimed at developing forms of psychological pedagogy and practice that is reflexive and transformative of oppressive racial power relations (see Denzin, 2003; Freire, 1972; hooks, 1990).

In this paper, I share some lessons about developing curriculum that is aimed at incorporating considerations of race, culture and ethnicity in psychology courses. I describe features of the curriculum that we have developed and incorporated into courses at different universities (see also Sonn, Garvey, Bishop, & Smith, 2000). I emphasise my own position relative to Indigenous and white positions in Australia. Specifically, informed by ethnography (Denzin, 2003; Patton, 2002), I focus on my observations and interpretations about ways in which students engage with notions of whiteness as part of the process of creating awareness about race and racism in everyday contexts.

**Different strands: Indigenous voices and whiteness studies**

*Decolonising methodologies*

As noted earlier, psychology, along with other social sciences, has been criticised because of its role in colonisation and oppression of different groups including many First Nation peoples. Smith (1999), for example, wrote in relation to Maori in New Zealand that:

Research is implicated in the production of Western knowledge, in the nature of academic work, in the production of theories which have dehumanized Maori and in practices which have continued to privilege Western ways of knowing, while denying the validity for Maori of Maori knowledge, language and culture (p.183).

In the Australian context, Indigenous authors (e.g., Glover, Dudgeon, & Huygens, 2005; Martin, 2003) have articulated Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Based on the work of Rigney, Martin (2003) wrote that Indigenist research "is culturally safe and culturally respectful research that is comprised of three principles: resistance as an emancipatory imperative, political integrity in Indigenous research and privileging Indigenous voices in Indigenist research" (p.205). She goes further to state that Indigenist research is both reactive and about opposition, it is about valuing the strength of being Aboriginal and "viewing anything western as 'other', alongside and among western worldviews and realities" (p. 205). Aspects of this are consistent with the writing about indigenous knowledges in global contexts and that it is not only about resistance and critiques about colonialism (e.g., Dei, Hall, & Rosenberg, 2000). From this vantage point, indigenous peoples are challenging and deconstructing colonising practices and articulating epistemologies by indigenous peoples as part of the process of self-determination. In my view this work challenges psychological research and practice, which in the Australian context has been seen as a colonising discipline (Gridley, Davidson, Dudgeon, Pickett, & Sanson, 2000).

*Whiteness studies*

In addition to this writing there is the area of critical whiteness studies that potentially complements the work in areas of decolonisation because of its focus on interrogating and transforming dominance (Fine, Powell, & Mun Wong, 1997; Frankenberg, 1997; Sue, 2004). Whiteness studies are typically concerned with antiracism and how white people's identities and positions are shaped by racialised cultures. Frankenberg (1993) wrote that whiteness can be broadly defined as "...the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage" (p. 236). In Australia, whiteness is something that places white people in dominant positions,

grants white people unfair privileges, and that this dominance and privilege is not visible to white people. The meaning of whiteness is also more complex than this. Although whiteness cannot be separated from hegemony, the relations of power within whiteness are not monolithic, complete, or uniform (Frankenberg, 1997; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). Whiteness is multifaceted, situationally specific, and reinscribed around the changing meanings of race in larger society. There is no single meta-narrative of whiteness, rather the meaning of whiteness varies in relation to context and history, as well as in relation to gender, class, sexuality, region, and political philosophy.

Some have written about whiteness studies as a different lens for pedagogy in the context of Indigenous and non-indigenous relations in the Australian context (e.g., Aveling, 2004a, b; Nicoll, 2004). This growing scholarship has brought into clearer focus the systemic issues that manifest in and impact interpersonal and intergroup relations as well as the challenges of whiteness for white students. They emphasise the challenging process of situating and recognising ourselves as social and cultural beings, as having power and privilege (Huygens & Sonn, 1999). The process is challenging because it often undermines what we take for granted. In engaging in the process we reveal the multiple resources and narratives that inform our own social, cultural, and professional identities – that is our multiple subjectivities (Mama, 1995). Importantly, through this process we reveal the different positions of power and privilege that we occupy in different contexts and how these can work in empowering and disempowering ways.

**Methodological orientation**

In this paper I use informal observations based on my experiences of teaching a particular content area. These observations can be viewed as working hypothesis. Broadly speaking,

there is a strong tradition of ethnographic work in program evaluation and educational research. Ethnographic inquiry was initially concerned with understanding the culture of different groups, where culture was understood as everyday patterns of behaviour, rituals, codes of conduct and beliefs, values and worldviews that informed interactions (Denzin 2003; Patton, 2002). Ethnography is no longer only concerned with the study of 'other' cultures. The meanings of culture are contested and diverse and many examples of applied ethnographic work are concerned with issues in a range of contexts including program evaluation and education (Denzin, 2003; Patton, 2002) and intercultural relations (e.g., Hanchard, 2000). Critical ethnographers (e.g., Denzin, 2003; Fine & Weis, 2002) are moving beyond descriptive work to engage in forms of action that are transformative of oppressive social realities.

In psychology there is a renewed interest in critically engaging with culture and exploring ways in which cultural meanings and taken for granted understandings structure everyday interactions (e.g., Parker, 2005; Squire, 2000). Central this work is the notion of reflexivity that requires critical engagement with discourses and systems of meaning that informs our relationships with people. This is a central aspiration of pedagogy aimed at deconstructing issues of race, ethnicity and culture as part of the process of educating about racism and oppression. Although, this paper does not report on a formal ethnography, it is informed by agenda of critical ethnography, especially the aim to engage with cultural meanings around race and ethnicity and how these are produced and reproduced within classroom contexts.

**Subjects, process and theoretical underpinnings**

Typically, the subjects that I have taught at different universities are offered as electives, so participation is voluntary. At universities in Perth the subjects were titled Cultural Issues in Psychology and are offered at the second and third year undergraduate level of study. Objectives of the subject are to:

- Explore race, culture, ethnicity and its relevance for understanding intergroup relations in Australia,

- Discuss theoretical frameworks for understanding and challenging oppressive intergroup relations, and

- Critically reflect on their own group memberships and identities and impacts on intercultural transactions.

In order to realise the objectives, students are introduced to writing by Black authors (e.g., Dodson, 2003; O'Shane, 1995). They are also provided readings that introduce concepts and theoretical models that critically engage with notions of culture, race, and ethnicity as well as responses to intergroup contact, especially contact characterised by oppressive race relations (e.g., Davidson, 1992; Moane, 2003, Squire, 2000).

I used this framework to develop a subject that I offered at fourth year level psychology majors at Victoria University. About 19 out of the cohort of 40 took the subject called I titled Race, Culture, and Power: Critical Issues in Exploring Intergroup Relations in Australia. The majority of the students who enrolled in the most recent subject that focussed on race, culture and power in the context of intergroup relations in Australia offered at fourth year level identified as white (as judged by a show of hands in response to a question). In this class, many students said that they were second or third generation migrants and were Italian, Irish,

Turkish, or Maltese-Australian. One person identified as Aboriginal and one as fourth generation Australian-born. Only one other time at a University in Perth did an Indigenous student enrol in one of my units on race, culture and ethnicity. This reflects the limited involvement of Indigenous Australians in psychology at a broader level, with the records of the Victorian Registration Board shows there are no Aboriginal Psychologists registered with the board.

Classes are typically structured as seminars and sometimes we invite guest speakers. Most of the time students are asked to prepare questions and to be prepared to guide discussions. Assessment typically requires students to keep a journal. Journal entries are made in response to set questions about the readings as well as students' reactions to those readings and issues that are discussed in class. Students are also required to submit a major paper on a topic relevant to the subject. I also keep a journal about my observations. I reflect upon these observations with a colleague who teaches in a similar area at another University.

The journal is a key part of the assessment. It helps track an individual student's development as well as promote personal reflexivity. Students are asked to consider the personal significance and relevance of the weekly topics and in this way their own lived experiences become significant and central to producing understandings – that is, knowledge. In the first class I share my own story and experiences of my cultural background and the Indigenous colleagues do the same. This is in line with storytelling as a valued pedagogical strategy for promoting different ways of knowing and being (Aveling, 2001; Iseke-Barnes, 2003).

This orientation is also a key feature of critical race theory. Critical race theorists strongly argue that issues of race and racism are central to understanding intergroup relations that have been characterised by racism and oppression and continuing social inequity (e.g., Omi & Winant, 1994; Twine & Warren, 2000). Ladson-Billings (2002; 2003) writes that

critical race theory often takes the position that race and racism is a normal occurrence. Marginal positions are valued because they offer a vantage point for making visible those assumptions and values that reinforce dominance and developing more complex understandings of race. Critical race theory also emphasises multiple ways of knowing and being as part of the process of developing and transforming hegemonic ways of knowing. To this end, writing is often in story form and modes of inquiry that allows for a fuller understanding of lives and subjectivities is favoured.

I tell students that I am an immigrant to Australia. I grew up in South Africa, in the Cape before migrating with my parents and two brothers. I have now lived in both places for more than 18 years each. The experiences of dislocation that follow migration can be profound; identities and many taken for granted sources of meaning and support becomes disrupted. The process of identity remaking is challenging and continuous. It involves negotiating aspects of the home and new community. In the new community there are stories and ideologies of race that positioned me. Here I am marked black, but a different black to Aboriginal black. I am also outside the dominant white community; looking in from the border. This positioning brings into clearer focus the relationality of black and white relations in the Australian context.

It is this position that I have found particularly powerful because it made visible the taken for granted power those in dominant positions hold as well as the multiple positions non-white immigrants can hold in relation to Aboriginal Australians (Sonn, 2004b). Ladson-Billings (2002) discussed the way in which one's subordinate position does not only speak about the economic, political and other disadvantage, but also is associated with looking from the outside into the centre, a position that makes visible that which is often invisible to those in the normative position. It is the disruption that follows migration and the position outside systems of racial dominance (although I may have privilege because of other social identities,

such as being a male and a parent) that I have found particularly powerful and potentially useful for deconstructing and reconstructing taken for granted assumptions about self and others. Therefore, a key feature of my research and teaching is to shift the focus from the 'other', and to emphasise critically reflecting on our own cultures and group memberships and the power that we are afforded by those memberships. These issues are negotiated within the context of dominance and subjugation, of race relations in Australia. Importantly, I also ask students to respond to the questions: How would you define your race, culture or ethnicity and what does it mean to be a member of that group?

In the next section I describe some of the issues and challenges that arose. These are not necessarily specific to this occasion and some similar issues and tensions have been evident in other classes I taught in Perth. However, these illustrate how over the semester students begin to critically reflect on the relevance of issues of race, culture and ethnicity for research and practice. They are decentered because they are asked to look internally and invited to locate themselves socially and culturally and this process make visible the various levels of privilege afforded by group memberships that are shaped by social, cultural and historical realities of intergroup relations.

**Negotiating Race, Culture and Power: Challenges to Understandings about Self and Others**

Overwhelmingly the students respond to our end of term subject evaluations in a positive manner. These evaluations are part of the quality assessment process that is conducted for all subjects offered at the University. Students rate on a Likert-type scale their experiences of the subject content, process, and staff. Specifically, when asked how important it is to offer these subjects to undergraduate students in psychology, they all responded

affirmatively. They are all also very positive about the format for delivering the subject. There are, however, deeper considerations that relate to student responses over the 12-week semester. These responses reflect various issues including discomfort, guilt, as well as the workings of whiteness as part of developing different subject positions. Below, I describe several issues that manifest in class that are illustrative of broader dynamics of race and race relations in the Australia context. These I deal with as The Hierarchy of Whiteness, Experiencing versus Knowing Racism, and Shifting Positions: Beyond the Class.

**The hierarchy of whiteness: Being shades of white**

One of the issues that became visible in the class can be understood using the notion of whiteness.  In one class, a student who identifies as Cypriot-Turkish Australian facilitated a seminar about the whiteness readings. The readings offered two perspectives; one that viewed white as a racial identity (Carter, 1997), the other offered a discursive understanding of whiteness (Frankenberg, 1993). To begin the class, the student asked who would define themselves as white. Most students raised their hands. The discussion then proceeded to explore the motivations for the identification. The student who defined herself as Cypriot-Turkish said that she did not identify herself as white, perhaps more 'off white'. She was asked to explain why she did not see herself as white even though others felt she was. It was as if she should choose to be white, as if she had this choice and why would she not identify as white. Those who saw themselves as white reached out, they included her. She chose not to be white; 'off white' was more appropriate. For her 'off white' reflected her own and her community's experiences of being immigrants in Australia.

In the Australian context whiteness is often invisible; it is not considered a racial identity. Here everyday commonsense notions are used including mainstream and Anglo-

Australia to denote whiteness. However, in the class whiteness was made visible and it was complicated. A hierarchy of whiteness that Hage (1998) identified was made visible. This hierarchy has at the top the Anglo-aristocracy followed by different layers of European migrants. This highlighted in some way that whiteness is something that is more than an essentialist category, but something that is socially, culturally and historically negotiated (Haggis, et al. 1999). Importantly, those who challenged the position of the Turkish student were those who did not see white privilege. They could not see their own social locations and that those positions will texture experiences of whiteness. Because of their privileged position they could choose white over other subjectivities and felt that others had the same choice. Thus, in the class whiteness was performed and resulted in making visible the differential experiences of immigrant and ethnic others who are marked white.

Another layer of complexity was added when a student who came to Australia as a refugee from the former Yugoslavia, said that she found the articles frustrating at first until she realised the dread of having to live in a context that stigmatises certain identities and demands constant legitimisation of those identities. This for her was a profound realisation of the power of racial identities and choice. The same student said that her experience of being white in Australia was not the same as the experience of those who speak English without an accent and as a refugee. As the discussion proceeded the student whom has a refugee background suggested that there are two groups in the class, those who have a particular story of 'migrantness' and those who do not. I was included in the immigrant category. Immigrants are 'others', those who are visible and those who may be white but not from an Anglo-Celtic background. Thus, the negotiation of identity shows that the nature and meaning of whiteness is context dependant and is not only about white skin, but also the histories of intergroup relations within a particular social, cultural, and political context that informs identification (see Haggis, Schech, & Fitzgerald, 1999).

**Experiencing versus knowing racism: Speaking positions**

The initial set of readings focused on the history of race relations in Australia and included two that focussed on identity and politics. Of the two dealing with identity, one focussed on Indigenous peoples right to self define (Dodson, 2003) and another focused on the psychological impact of white colonisation (O'Shane, 1995). Students mostly enjoyed reading the papers. Most of the time they are shocked to learn about the horrible history of race relations and they often ask why they do not get access to these things earlier. On this occasion one of the two male students, the one who identified as white commented that the articles made him feel guilty. Many others agreed about the feeling of guilt. We left the issue of guilt unresolved until much later in the semester. In fact, it was not until the last week that we were able to name the guilt and explore it in more detail.

There were, however, two important issues that are linked to how guilt was negotiated in the final class. The first issue relates to the way in which the Indigenous student responded to a set of discourses that I presented and how others in the class responded to her response. In one class I presented a number of extracts that were taken from interview data for a doctoral project exploring whiteness in the context of reconciliation (Green, 2005). The extracts illustrated how different white people make sense of Indigenous disadvantage. In these extracts people either blame Indigenous people, their culture or the history of oppression for their disadvantage.  An example of one the extracts follow:

> But I gather it's successful and Aboriginals up there, they've got a proper job,
> they've got work and, cause that's another aspect of Aboriginal culture that is
> hard for us to come to grips with is this continual sharing. Anything that one

person owns has to be shared with the family and I gather that a lot of

Aboriginals are brought down as a result of that. (quoted in Green, 2005, p. 183)

This reflected a discourse of cultural blame. These discourses also inform what the possible

remedies may be and what role white people may have in finding solutions to the

disadvantage. The other extract I used was as follows:

And when I'm working with non-Aboriginal staff I spend a lot of time trying to help

them understand different cultural perspectives. And in the city, in particular, most of

the staff don't know much about Aboriginal culture at all. (quoted in Green, 2005;

p.191)

These illustrative extracts were shown to the students as a way of highlighting the multiple

positions white people take up when they talk about Indigenous disadvantage. When asked

which position they felt was most reasonable, they said the one that recognises the history and

that educates 'ignorant white people'. From this position there are good white people and

those who need education. However, the Indigenous student responded to something else, the

student highlighted that the historical oppression mentioned by those participants are in fact

not realities of the past. The racism and racial violence of the past is a reality for her

community today. She said that an Aboriginal man that she knew was recently killed by a

group of young people of different backgrounds. She was very upset by this. One student

cautioned that we could not say it was racialised until we know the facts. The Indigenous

student pointed out that it has impacted on her community, people are feeling unsafe and they

are even reluctant to raise the Aboriginal flag because they fear attacks. I discussed the issue

highlighting the horrible impact the event has had on the community. However, I did not

know all the 'facts' either, but said that this might reflect the nature of institutionalised

racism.

What became very clear upon reflection was that the entire episode impacted the nature of the relationship between class members. The nature of different speaking positions and the way in which whiteness functions in these micro-settings was evident. Many of the non-Indigenous students, in particular two who in initially identified as white, were making a decision about whether the event was a racist attack, they were resisting. They were critically reflecting on the discourses that was presented earlier and then the actions of others from a position of being outside racism. They were not interrogating their own positioning and how this will shape the ways in which the actions of others are understood. For the Indigenous student there was no question, her experiences are always racialised. From a critical race theory perspective race and racism is taken for granted (Ladson-Billings, 2003), it is everyday. The context of race relations in Australia, and the silencing of Indigenous voices meant the Indigenous student took an enormous risk to speak about her experiences. She risked being dismissed, dismissed because it is hard for white people to know the experience of racism, even though they can know about it (Moreton-Robinson, 2003). But, for the Indigenous student the event and how she experienced and interpreted it demanded justification.

When the Indigenous student facilitated a session she offered two readings by Indigenous people. One she read out to the class. The author, Graham Ring (2004), turned the table and portrayed white culture as problematic and deficient and made a statement at end of the paper. He wrote: " …But I've been a bit rough. It's easy to lump whitefellas together and say 'they all do this', or 'they all do that'. In truth they are all individuals. So try to suspend your prejudices. Just take 'em as you find 'em." (Ring, 2004). The final point was missed by most because students focused on how the paper made them feel and accused the author of racism – and in effect accused the Aboriginal student of reverse racism. This was quite profound from my viewpoint. At one level, I could understand their reaction as resistance –

resistant to seeing the reality of racism from the vantage point of an Aboriginal person. At another, it seemed that the students were not prepared to deal with the Indigenous student having the power to turn the gaze and to name the horror of racialising practices. They did, however, feel that they had the power to dismiss her in a rather hostile manner. In fact, this illustrated the power of a monological viewpoint, a viewpoint where the other is an absent defined in relation to a centre (Rose, 2004). Rose states that a feature of this monological view is that:

> others never get to talk back on their own terms. Communication is all one
> way as the pole of power refuses to receive the feedback that would cause it
> to change itself, or to open itself to dialogue. Power lies in the ability not to
> hear what is being said, not to experience the consequences of one's actions,
> but rather to go one's own self-centric and insulated way. (p. 30)

The second related issue touched on silence and self-silencing. In the last class the issues resurfaced. I asked students to read an article that explores the complexities of Indigenous and non-indigenous engagement by Cowlishaw (2004). They all enjoyed it and pointed out the strategic nature of the article's placement. The crux of the questions related to self-censorship in the context of crossing boundaries. After some discussion I asked students why they felt they had to censor themselves. Many responded that it was because of fear, the fear of getting things wrong and feeling guilty about getting things wrong. For some there may have the desire to be seen as good white people. This, however, is risky because it returns the focus to managing individual feelings without necessarily recognising the way in which race is embedded in hegemonic everyday structures (Green, & Sonn, 2005; Riggs, 2004b; Thompson, 2003).

Others spoke about the affirmation of their own identities and deeper understanding of oppression. The student who said that she was a refugee from the former Yugoslavia said that

she felt that being in the class had given her voice; she no longer had the fear that stifled. For this student and a number of others there was an opportunity to engage with concepts and understandings that validated their lived experiences. They were not 'othered' by the literature because it speaks about their realities too. The same student asked the Indigenous student what she thought, and she chose not to speak because she felt that whatever she said would be resisted. Unfortunately, in my view this experience meant the Indigenous student was silenced. In fact, she wrote to me saying that she felt silenced because of the way her experiences were perceived and that she was not able to challenge others. And, as a few students pointed out pointed out, as individuals there may have been many positive learning outcomes, but as a group we failed – we failed to understand the power of our positions and its connections with Indigenous realities in Australia. To me, it felt like my efforts to explain the working of racism and that it was working in this very space was lost. Whiteness was at work; some gained a voice, some asserted their voice and at the same time the indigenous person felt silenced

**Shifting positions: wrestling with issues beyond the class**

Even though at that point it seemed we did not make progress, the student responses to the evaluation sheet for the class suggest some shifts in student subject positions. Two people seemed particularly interested because they noted that they would never think of research methodology in the same way again. This is, in my view is a considerable achievement because students connected race, research and politics, even if at a basic level. Furthermore, in response to the essay question many responded by writing about whiteness. For some the subject had been quite central to shifting their understanding of race and racism in our

context. Others focussed on the implications for psychological research and practice often commenting that they need to get this earlier – not at third or fourth year.

Importantly, the intersections of whiteness, 'migrantness' and indigeneity are quite important. The subject often works to give voice to ethnic minority group members while at the same time creating discomfort for those who are members of the dominant ethnic group. However, while giving voice it can undermine Indigenous realities by subsuming those realities under the heading of cultural diversity and multiculturalism. This may be a clear example of how whiteness is enacted differently upon indigenous people, and black and 'off-white' immigrants. It is essential, as Nicoll (2004) pointed out, to acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty because it is through this that we will be better placed to recognise and negotiate issues of belonging, power and identity. As Moreton-Robinson (2003) noted:

> Indigenous people's sense of home and place are configured differently to that of migrants. There is no other homeland that provides a point of origin, or place for multiple identities. Instead our rendering of place, home and country through our ontological relation to country is the basis for our ownership. (p. 37)

**Summary and conclusion**

In this paper I explored some of the issues associated with teaching about race, culture and ethnicity. These issues are part of a broader agenda of raising awareness about racialised oppression and exclusion and contributing to the development of ways of researching and practicing psychology that are transformative and culturally sensitive. Central to this project is the process of recognising that we are cultural beings and members of groups that are afforded power and privileges because of social, political and historical realities. In the Australian context we are afforded differential power because of group membership. It is vital

that we recognise the power that flows from these memberships because it impacts everyday relations. By critically engaging with the writing of Indigenous authors and authors from other ethnic minority groups, and the writing about whiteness we are able to challenge students to make visible their own group membership, privilege and networks of power, and begin the process of repositioning themselves in relation to racialised others. This process is not necessarily smooth and unproblematic, and while students do become aware of whiteness and the heterogeneity of whiteness, they also struggle to know its workings and often re-engage in oppressive relations. But, these struggles and dislocations are central to the processes of change and developing critical awareness about our own investments in systems that are racialised (Aveling, 2004 a, b; Sonn, 2004). Developing forms of pedagogy and practice that is reflexive and transformative of oppressive racial power relation requires that we engage in decentering ourselves. This is challenging but as many have noted essential for resisting racism and may require more than a single semester of reading and engagement. Students will need ongoing guidance, support and critical self-reflection as part of the process of developing their critical capacities, which are central to working against structures of domination (hooks, 1990).

Author's Biography

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