

**TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE:  
CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICE**

**Emma Stachowicz**

This thesis is presented for the Master of Education (Research)

Murdoch University

2012

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

.....

(Emma Stachowicz)

## **ABSTRACT**

### **TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICE**

Emma Stachowicz

In this action research study, I worked with a class of twenty-five students as a teacher-researcher to describe and document how the students' thoughts and learning changed over the course of an eleven-week Society and Environment program I developed entitled "Australian Immigration". Specifically, this study draws on student work samples and my own reflective journal writings to document if and how changes took place in their understanding of prejudice and stereotypes. This study was situated in a mono-cultural community and took place at a small independent College in Australia. The program was specifically designed to challenge the current held stereotypes and prejudices' that many students carry with them towards minority groups in Australian society.

The results of this study demonstrate that when students are challenged to question their own values and beliefs in context to the community in which they live, that changes can take place in their learning. It was a challenge as a teacher-researcher to engage students in a meaningful curriculum that asks them to use their lived experiences as the basis for

learning. As such, this study also documents the 'struggles' I faced as a practitioner in the twenty first century engaging students in a democratic curriculum that asked them to pose problems, collaborate and use critical thinking to connect with 'big picture' ideas related to social justice.

The data that was collected suggests, that as both teacher and researcher trying to implement and engage students in a democratic curriculum is hard. The students carried with them misconceptions about Australia's past and as a result had formed prejudice and stereotypes towards minority groups. The data also revealed that the community in which the students lived contributed towards the historical understanding they had. This understanding was one sided and biased. Although I struggled to connect with some students, who opted to take a more independent route to completing their work, I did have six students who successfully followed through with their group work and documentary tasks. Of the six that finished the assessment, they all made 'big picture' connections. Of the nineteen that opted to 'go it alone' there were only a few who were able to 'connect' with the ideas. The six students who worked in groups and the three independent students were my 'glimmers of hope'. The work they produced demonstrated how students' thoughts and learning changed over the duration of the eleven-week Society and Environment Program.

This study concludes that teacher designed curriculum based on the values of social justice, critical inquiry and social action is far more desirable and effective than teaching to the test to bring about social change.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>List of Appendices</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>List of Figures</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>List of Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Chapter I: Introduction</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>1.1 Aim</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>1.2 The problem</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>1.3 Research questions</b> .....	<b>19</b>
1.3.1 Overarching research question.....	19
1.3.2 Guiding research questions .....	19
<b>1.4 Theoretical orientation</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>1.5 Action research</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>1.6 The school context</b> .....	<b>25</b>
1.6.1 My role at the school.....	28
<b>1.7 Significance of the study</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>1.8 Limitations</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>1.9 Thesis structure</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>Chapter II: Context</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>2.2 The broader landscape</b> .....	<b>38</b>
2.2.1 National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).....	41

2.2.2 Australian Curriculum .....	41
2.2.3 My schools website .....	45
<b>2.3 Self-managing schools and devolution .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>2.4 Implications for teachers and students .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>2.5 Teaching for social justice .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>2.6 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Chapter III: Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>3.2 Democratic schooling.....</b>	<b>60</b>
3.2.1 Community as curricula .....	63
3.2.2 Negotiated Curriculum .....	67
3.2.3 Students as researchers .....	70
<b>3.3 Avenues to explore in order to begin to teach for social justice.....</b>	<b>73</b>
3.3.1 Teaching against the grain .....	74
3.3.2 Problem-posing education.....	77
3.3.3 Critical consciousness.....	81
3.3.4 Anti-racist /multicultural lens.....	87
<b>3.4 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Chapter IV: Methodology .....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>4.0 Introduction.....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>4.1 What is action research? .....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>4.2 Kinds of action research.....</b>	<b>98</b>
4.2.1 Technical .....	98
4.2.2 Practical .....	99
4.2.3 Emancipatory .....	99
<b>4.3 Doing action research .....</b>	<b>101</b>

<b>4.3.1 Participants</b> .....	<b>103</b>
4.3.2 Duration of the study.....	103
4.3.3 Ethical and credibility considerations.....	104
4.3.3.1 My positionality .....	105
4.3.4 Sources of data.....	107
4.3.4.1 Participant observation.....	107
4.3.4.2 Student work samples.....	108
4.3.4.3 Fieldwork observations/ Reflective Journal.....	109
<b>4.4. Thinking critically and theoretically</b> .....	<b>111</b>
<b>4.5 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>116</b>
<b>Chapter V: It Ain't Easy Doing Social Justice in the Classroom</b> .....	<b>117</b>
<b>5.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>117</b>
<b>5.2 My journey</b> .....	<b>117</b>
5.2.1 Why do students have misguided representations of the past?.....	119
5.2.1.1 Thinking critically .....	122
5.2.2 How can you challenge students when they only know what they are taught, or not taught? .....	127
5.2.2.1 Thinking critically .....	130
5.2.3 How can teachers provide students with the opportunity to voice their opinion and not feel threatened? .....	133
5.2.3.1 Thinking critically .....	138
5.2.4 Why do students find it hard to collaborate? .....	140
5.2.4.1 Thinking critically .....	142
5.2.5 What does it look like when students engage critically and work collaboratively?.....	146
5.2.5.1 Thinking critically .....	150
5.2.6 Why are teachers and students under pressure to 'get work done'? .....	154
5.2.6.1 Thinking critically .....	156

<b>5.3 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>Chapter VI: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>Future Directions in the Realm of Teaching For Social Justice - Implications for Teachers in the Twenty First Century .....</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>6.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>6.2 Transforming learning .....</b>	<b>163</b>
6.2.1 Transforming learning through critical pedagogy .....	163
6.2.2 Transforming learning through students' lived experiences .....	165
6.2.3 Transforming learning through multicultural education.....	168
<b>6.3 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>Appendix One: Curriculum Package .....</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>Appendix Two: Five Week Group Assessment Task.....</b>	<b>188</b>



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible to complete without the support of others.

I would like to acknowledge the students, past, present and future, who have taught me so much. Daily, they provide me with inspiration to continue to teach for social justice.

Many thanks to my supervisor, Professor Barry Down, City of Rockingham Chair of Education. His guidance throughout the duration of this degree and the numerous conversations we have had in relation to my research has provided me with the motivation to continue with this.

To all the educational scholars who write in the field of democratic teaching, social justice and critical multiculturalism, your words encourage me to work for change.

Many thanks to Mrs Jo Bednall who allows her staff the flexibility to undertake higher education whilst still teaching full time. And also, to my colleagues for their continued support.

Lastly, to my family, for enduring the last five and a half years whilst I have worked towards finishing this.

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix One: Curriculum Package	182
Appendix Two: Five Week Group Assessment Task	188

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure One: Overarching Design of Curriculum	23
Figure Two: Action – Reflection Cycle	97

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AISWA	Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia
ACARA	Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority
COW	Computer on Wheels
DETWA	Department of Education and Training Western Australia
EDWA	Education Department Western Australia
HTAA	History Teachers Association of Australia
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employments, Training and Youth Affairs
MSE	Moderated Standards in Education
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy
S&E LA	Society and Environment Learning Area
WALNA	Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Aim

In the tradition of “teaching for democracy” (Beane & Apple, 1999) this study examines how a program I developed, entitled “Australian Immigration”, can foster community engaged learning rather than produce empty vessels (Sleeter, 2005) who compete against one another in a highly economised society (Down, 1994). The principles of action research were applied in order to develop these ideas further and encourage my students to become critical researchers of their own community. Taking into account my students’ “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 2) the Society and Environment program focused on immigration in Australia from the introduction of the Immigration Restriction Act in 1901 to current day issues on refugees and asylum seekers. The development of the program was the result of five years of teaching experience at the same school where I noticed that students carried with them prejudice and stereotypes towards people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. The students were unaware of major policy shifts in Australia’s past, such as the Immigration Restriction Act (1901), that have shaped this nation into the multicultural country it is today. The aim of the program was to challenge the stereotypes and prejudice they held. My concern stemmed from the fact that the students would soon be adults faced with the challenge to accept and work with people from different cultural backgrounds. Ultimately, I wanted to help them develop democratic ideals of egalitarianism and equality so that they could participate as citizens in the dynamic global world in which they live.

When undertaking this action research project I considered two different curriculum pathways which would enable my students to become researchers of their own community. The first, involved an environmental approach, whereby the students would research current beliefs and values held by the community towards climate change. This is a currently occurring phenomenon, which will affect their (my students) future place in the world (EPA, 2013, section 1, para 1). The second, involved the students questioning their own values and beliefs in the context of their community, in relation to the notion of what it means to be a multicultural society. I believed the latter to be more socially significant to their lives, based on the community in which they lived. The community that the students live in and in which the school is situated consists predominantly of people from Anglo-Celtic descent (the demographics of the area are explored further in section 1.6). This in itself had an impact on the way the students perceived others. Dewey (cited in Smith, 2002, p.585) states that

...the great waste in school comes from his [sic] inability to utilise the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself... when the child gets into the schoolroom he has to put out of his mind a large part of the ideas, interests, and activities that predominate in his home and neighbourhood.

Using Dewey's words as inspiration, I designed a curriculum package that I believed would start from where the students are 'at' with a view to challenging the stereotypes and prejudices students at my school held towards minority groups, by using their lived experiences to engage them in their learning. From my perspective (using my professional judgement and experience at the school) the students had a very limited view of the world around them. I believed it was important for the students to critically analyse their own belief systems in context to their communities. By grounding the curriculum in an environment, of which they were familiar, I sought to introduce them to

a critical democratic curriculum. I wanted them to become problem-posers, critically conscious of the issues that affect their community by considering “other histories”, so that they might question such concepts as racism, stereotypes and prejudice. (For a complete guide to my Curriculum Program refer to Appendix One).

## **1.2 The problem**

This thesis tackles two interrelated problems. Firstly, it explores how students have been constrained through curricula design (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Often students are only subject to the dominant narratives within society, which neglect to cover the “multiple histories” that really exist (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 233). This situation has resulted in students being ‘shielded’ by privilege (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 230). Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) write in *Changing Multiculturalism* that

the surface harmony heralded by the media, the government and education is merely an image in the minds of those individuals who are shielded by privilege from the injustice experienced by dominated peoples. Such a pseudo-harmony idealises the future as it covers up the historical forces that have structured the present disharmony that it denies (p. 230).

This is not unlike the case in which I find the students who I teach, growing up in a “white” community, often unaware of what is going on in the world around them. This claim is supported by Kroll (2008) and Lea and Sims (2008a). Both claim that structures of power in society reinforce racial, class and gender discrimination, the teachers who strive to interrupt this according to Berlak (2008) are known as teachers who “interrupt the hegemony of whiteness” (p. 47). I believe that the curriculum my students have experienced has failed to address issues of race, class and gender discrimination based on my observations over the last five years at the school where I teach. This has resulted

in the students who I teach, being unaware of issues that are affecting people in the world and, as a result of this, they have been shielded by their privilege through a curriculum that has denied them the right to question it (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Berlak, 2008). As a consequence of this, the students who I teach have developed misguided representations of the past, as evidence in the work samples in Chapter Five. In a situation such as this, can the students be blamed for the prejudicial and stereotypical views they hold towards people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds? Especially considering that the curriculum has traditionally excluded the voices of the suppressed/oppressed (Derman-Sparks, 1998; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). My research focuses on how teachers can adapt and reinvent their curriculum in order to help their students find their voice.

The people who hold power in society are shirking their responsibilities; mainstream schooling “dwells on the surface, thus hiding the critical dimension, inner nature and lived experience” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 234). Only curriculum that is grounded “on rigorous historical scholarship,” argue Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997, p. 231), will give rise to the formation of curricula that can explore such concepts as race, class and gender and shackle the accepted narratives of the dominant ideologues (Kincheloe et al., 1992; McMahon & Portelli, 2005). This is why I believed it was important to change the curriculum at my school to one that asked the students to question the world in which they live, so they could act as agents of social change.

Secondly, this thesis takes into consideration how important it is for teachers to connect to students’ lives. Meier (2002) asserts that “for the vast majority of learners, it helps



when their learning works in concert with their home and community, not in conflict with them, and expand upon the learner's own universe, rather than denying or trying to forget a part of it" (p. 26). It is clear that when a teacher uses the learners "own universe" as a knowledge base for expanding their educational opportunities in the classroom, it creates and fosters a more meaningful learning environment (Meier, 2002; Moll et al., 1992). Consequently, this environment becomes one in which the child can thrive (Moll et al., 1992). Moll et al. (1992) undertook an investigation connecting the significance of designing curricula for students that incorporated their cultural background, heritage and home life. Moll et al. (1992) claim that by "capitalising on household and other community resources, we can organise classroom instruction that far exceeds in quality than rote-like instruction" (p.132). A child's past experience becomes the focal point for teachers to create meaningful curricula to students' lives (Moll et al., 1992). Moll et al. (1992) refer to a child's past experiences, as their "funds of knowledge". It is students' "funds of knowledge" that become an essential component for helping them succeed at school (Moll et al., 1992). Research into this aspect of student learning is essential when developing curricula that is of interest to the student, so that it stimulates their mind to learn and discover more about the world in which they live (Meier, 2002). Educators such Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) have used avenues through popular culture to "facilitate the development of academic skills and critical faculties" (p. 54). Driven by Paulo Freire's (1997; 2000) work (which is mentioned throughout this study) they developed units of work that centred on "dialogue, inquiry and the real exchange of ideas between teachers and students" (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 55).

Inspired by such people as Dewey (1910), Freire (1997; 2000), Duncan-Andrade (2008), Morrell (2004), Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) I sought to change the way I delivered the curriculum to my students. Working against the current educational environment in Australia, particularly with the emphasis on the development of the Australian Curriculum and testing regimes, such as the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), this study incorporates the philosophy of “teaching for social justice” in order to address the growing social and educational inequalities in Australian society.

The central problem of this research project is embedded in the racist and prejudicial views I have observed students at my school carry towards people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. I became increasingly concerned for the future of the kids that I teach, because by the time they had arrived at Year Ten, many of them had not heard of the “White Australia Policy”. How had they come so far in their schooling and not understood what this was? It became apparent to me, that if I did not attempt to challenge my teaching practices, how could the students I teach change and challenge themselves? So, the solution to my problem lay in the ability of a teacher to re-think how they engage students in the classroom, to re-think how students understand their world and what could be done to re-engage them with issues, such as racism and prejudice, that directly affect them, so that they could critique their world with an informed view they had gained through inquiry and critical thinking.

### **1.3 Research questions**

#### ***1.3.1 Overarching research question***

The overarching research question, which guides my action research study, is:

How can I adapt and reinvent my Year Ten Society and Environment Program in order to challenge the stereotypes and prejudice my students hold towards minority groups, so that they become critically aware of their community, the world and their place in it?

#### ***1.3.2 Guiding research questions***

More specifically the following sub-questions will be examined:

- Why do students have misguided representations of the past?
- Why is it hard for students to work together?
- How can teachers find the time and space necessary to implement a critical democratic curriculum?
- How can teachers challenge student stereotypes and prejudice?
- What are the challenges and possibilities in creating a socially just curriculum?

### **1.4 Theoretical orientation**

It is becoming imperative that teachers learn to better understand their students in order to help them participate in a democratic world and use their “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 2) to help them build their own constructive knowledge base, to better “negotiate their place... in the world” (Butler, 1998, p. 10). Over the last five years, with the development and implementation of this project, I sought to help my students better

negotiate their place in the world. I did this by designing the curriculum package “Australian Immigration.” It required the students to critique the world in which they live and question the stereotypes and prejudice they held towards people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. This required students to pose-problems, work with their peers, survey their community and critically assess how perspectives have changed over time.

Immigration has become a socially significant issue as Australian society has diversified and pursued multicultural policies over the last sixty years. I embedded a research project into the curriculum package for the students and this is where I have taken student work samples from, focusing on the question of how students understand the stereotypes and prejudices’ held by people within their community towards people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. At the time this study took place the inquiry method formed an essential element within the Society and Environment Learning Area, and was clearly noted under “Essential Knowledge” in the West Australian *Curriculum Framework* (Curriculum Council, 1998). But, as Western Australia transitions from a state based education system to a national curriculum, the opportunity for using such methods as “co-researchers” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997) becomes increasingly blurred by the pressure to teach content, as opposed to teaching for democracy (Beane & Apple, 1999).

The idea of nurturing critical forms of democracy into curriculum design provides a conceptual foundation to create an alternative to ‘teaching to the test’ (Lund & Carr, 2008). Research into nurturing critical forms of democracy into curriculum design

demonstrate how teachers can expose students to creative ways of thinking about social justice (Lund & Carr, 2008). Results for preparing future teachers to engage youth in this kind of curriculum has “proven to be rewarding work” (Lund & Carr, 2008, p. 7). Another avenue teachers can explore to help them design curricula which gives students a voice in the classroom relates to more community orientated foundations of curriculum design (Theobold & Curtiss, 2000). Theobold and Curtiss (2000) noted how students who participate in democratic and community orientated forms of education “can improve” and critically engage with the curriculum (Theobold & Curtis, 2000, p. 106). Furthermore, students need to be in a position where they can view their schooling experience as a worthwhile endeavour that will help them in the future. Theobold and Curtiss (2000) explain, that such an approach (community orientated) by teachers towards curriculum design will help them in two ways,

1. To acquire concepts for future academic learning; and
2. It provides the actual content of social and character education (p. 107).

Theobold and Curtiss (2000) further explain, that if teachers involve themselves and their students in the community, incorporating it into their curriculum design, that the students are just as likely to perform well, if not better, than those who are being taught through a canonical (traditional) system. This further proves that “... a constructivist approach [towards education] can meet any reasonable standards” (Theobold & Curtis, 2007, p. 109).

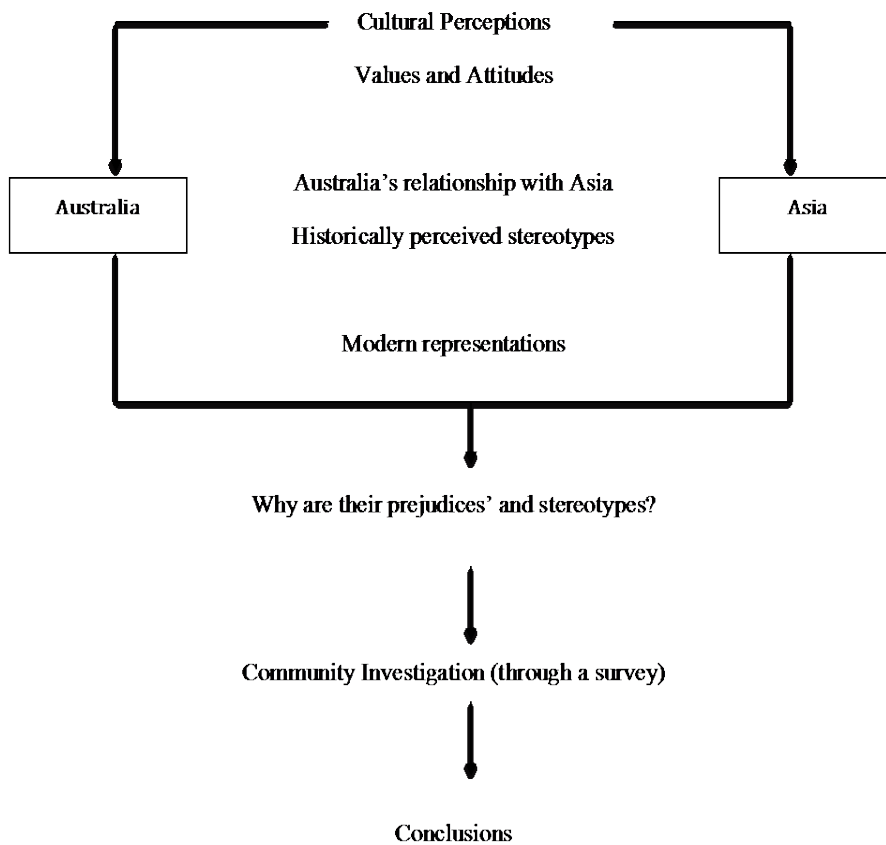
McMahon and Portelli’s (2004) notion of “critical-democratic engagement,” whereby the student and the teacher co-create the curriculum, where the curriculum is built around their life, is important to the ideas raised in this study and it links well with

Shor's (1992) ideas on empowering education. Shor (1992) argues that in order to make education empowering for students the subject matter and learning processes need to be relevant to their everyday life by examining "daily themes, social issues and academic lore" (p. 44). McMahon and Portelli (2004) contend,

engagement is realized in the process and relationships within which learning for democratic reconstruction transpires. As a multi-faceted phenomenon, engagement is present in the iterations that emerge as a result of the dialectical process between teachers and students and the differing patterns that evolve out of the transformational actions and interactions (p. 70).

I believed that by introducing my students to "big picture" ideas, such as stereotypes and prejudice that they would become "engaged" with the curriculum, and in the words of Shor (1992) "empower them". Through attempting to create a critical democratic curriculum I sought to teach for social justice by empowering my students to become active citizens within their community. I sought to create a curriculum that revolved around dialogue, inquiry and interaction between my students and myself (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). The purpose of this study was to introduce students to these concepts through an examination of their nation's immigration history, and how today, the media has come to exacerbate immigration issues through the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees, or, what the media refers to as "Boat People".

The figure below depicts the nature of the curriculum package my research project is modeled on.



**Figure 1: Overarching design of curriculum**

Previous to conducting this study I reflected on my own teaching. I asked some troubling questions about my own position as a practitioner in the classroom, among them:

- Do I reinforce stereotypes and prejudice in my approach to curriculum?
- How does this happen and why?
- Where do my ideas and practices come from?
- How might I change?
- How can I better acknowledge student experience in my classroom?

Figure 1 above outlines the conceptual process I went through in order to design the curriculum package “Australian Immigration.” I thought about the most troubling issue I had experienced throughout my teaching career in relation to Society and Environment. I pinpointed student stereotypes and prejudice, as the issue that troubled me, when it came to helping students understand and navigate the world around them. Using the framework presented in Figure 1, I decided that an action research project was the best way to investigate the problem in order to improve as a practitioner (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). Focusing on students as ethnographic researchers of their own communities I designed a curriculum program that utilised the students’ own ‘universe’ as the basis for their learning. Taking action for personal and social improvement I wanted to foster democratic values in my students’ education, with the underlying objective of challenging current educational orthodoxy in order to reclaim teaching for the purpose of creating a more socially just future for all (Kincheloe et al., 1992; Gruenwald, 2003). This thesis works from a foundation of social constructivism, and borrows from critical social constructivism in order to encourage students to make meaning for themselves and redistribute power through information sharing activities (Lincoln, 2001, p. 125).

### **1.5 Action research**

In this action research study, I worked with a class of twenty-five Year Ten students in a Uniting Church school, apart of the Association of Independent School of Western Australia (AISWA). In this school, Year Ten forms a part of the Senior School and students in this year level have previously experienced three years of Middle Schooling. The project ran for eleven weeks and documented the changes that occurred or did not occur in students’ thinking as they progressed through the curriculum I designed. Both



summative and formative assessment tasks were used to inform this study; primarily focusing on student work samples from a five-week group assessment task that students completed and student learning journals that incorporated weekly reflections written by the students about what they had learnt. One of the other major forms of data informing this study is my personal experience through participant observation that was recorded in my journal as teacher-researcher. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) note, “the researcher has several methods for collecting empirical materials... they range from direct observation, the analysis of artifacts, documents, and cultural records, and the use of visual material and personal experience” (p. 23). Both components of the study required the students and myself to be critical of the content under examination and the experiences they had. The inquiry component of the student assessment task, required students to work in groups of 3-4 in order to produce a documentary that critiqued Australia’s immigration history from the end of the Second World War to the modern day. From the student work samples and my own reflective writings, I have drawn implications and recommendations for curriculum change based around the premise of “reclaiming teaching” (Kincheloe et al., 1992); a proposition which is examined in more detail in Chapter Three and Six of this study.

### **1.6 The school context**

The study took place in an independent College, which caters for students from Kindergarten to Year Twelve. It is a low-fee paying school situated in a new development area in Perth, which attracts young family-orientated people. In 2010 when this study was conducted, there was a total enrolment of 981 students, 513 of whom were girls, and 468 boys (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2012). Of this total, the *My School* website notes that 1 percent of this total enrolment

had an Indigenous background, with 3 percent having a language background other than English (ACARA, 2012). These statistics clearly indicate the Anglo-Celtic nature of the community in which the students live. The community is predominantly Anglo-Celtic; and a small number of students enroll in the College from different cultural backgrounds. To further support this claim, in April 2012, statistics from the school database acknowledge that of the 1094 students at the College, 790 of them came from an Australian background, 179 came from an English background, 41 from South Africa, 10 from New Zealand and the rest was made up from a myriad of other non-European countries (Bednall & Buonocore, 2012). Although the school has grown in size over the two years, the data reveals the “whiteness” of the College, in the form of the students who have Australian and English backgrounds, supporting the notion that the majority of students in the school are Anglo-Celtic.

The “whiteness” of the school is further reinforced through data from the 2006 Census in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2012). Of the 5952 people living in the area, 0.8% came from an Indigenous background (ABS, 2012). In the 2006 Census, 65.2% of persons that usually reside in the area stated they were born in Australia. The other major resident backgrounds were: English 16.0%, New Zealanders 2.2%, Scottish 2.0%, and South Africans making up 1.0% of the population (ABS, 2012). The area in which this study took place had a weekly average income (for a household) of \$1508, as compared to the median price in Australia of \$1027 (ABS, 2012). People living in this area were mainly employed in Technical and Trade positions (22%), clerical and administrative workers (16%) and as professionals (15%) (ABS, 2012). One explanation of the above average weekly income in the area is due to the large number of ‘fly in, fly out’ workers employed in the mining industry. It can be assumed from this data, that

students living in this region come from a largely working class aspirational background.

As part of the schools vision, developed collaboratively by teaching and administration staff, led by John Edwards through the Teacher Designed Schools Network in 2006, an emphasis is placed on relationships, flexibility, partnerships and collaboration between the students, staff and the community (J. Bednall, personal communication, 23 May 2013). Based on my observations and experience I have found through working at the school over the past five years, that many of the students I work with are predominantly, as the title of Pope's (2001) book suggests, *...stressed out, materialistic and miseducated*. I noticed that the students were concerned with their appearance, the clothes they wore and the electronic devices they had, making them competitive beings amongst their social group. Taking the above points into consideration, the school context and vision and the nature of the teenagers I taught, I pondered whether or not the curriculum project I implemented, would challenge my students' place in the school and community. I hoped to make them more connected, not only with their community, but the wider world. The students' past experiences and background were crucial to the desired outcomes of the project. That is, in order to challenge the stereotypes and prejudices' they held, there needed to be a legitimate reason for me to do so. The Anglo-Celtic nature of the community and lack of exposure to different histories, paved the way for this research project.

### ***1.6.1 My role at the school***

I have played a role in the development of curriculum programs at the College over the last five years, especially within the Society and Environment Learning Area (S&E LA). There is an expectation that all assessment tasks should be the same, or common, for all students in each year. This is an expectation that I believe inhibits the creativity of teachers, in terms of the work that they can do within the set time frame. The expectation to prepare and administer common assessment tasks for teachers is driven partly by school policy and partly by government policy. The Department of Education and Training of Western Australia (DETWA) has defined the expected Achievement Targets for students in years seven and nine in the S&E LA for the outcome Investigation, Communication and Participation (DETWA, 2007). Targets have been set for all Learning Areas and are tested through the Moderated Standards in Education Test (MSE) administered in schools. Since I began this project in 2007, MSE testing has become apart of a national testing regime, now known as National Assessment Program in Numeracy and Literacy (NAPLAN).

In a traditional teaching environment NAPLAN would act as interference for teachers wanting to move from a “zero paradigm” to a “critical paradigm” (Shor, 1996). In “zero paradigms,” teachers “function as delivery systems to transfer knowledge” (p. 200). This has placed pressure on schools to perform, and it is one of the reasons why I decided to embark on this project (Shor, 1996; Beane, 2005). Beane (2005) writes,

the fact of the matter is that most teachers do not have the luxury of a completely open agenda. They are hired to teach a particular subject or course whose content and resources have often been decided on by some school or district curriculum committee that is in turn responding to pressure from state standards and assessment (p. 20).

As Beane (2005) argues, governments put pressure on schools and schools place pressure on teachers to perform to set standards and prescribed curricula.

Rather than focus my attention on achievement targets and standards, I pursued an avenue that I hoped would drive curriculum change in the future. Using Shor's (1992) "critical paradigm," which empowers teachers to create "egalitarian, interactive and mutual" classrooms (p. 201), I designed a curriculum I hoped would foster culture change. That is, a pathway whereby teachers and students become ethnographic researchers of their own community (Gonzales & Moll, 2002, p.625). When this research project was being completed the West Australian *Curriculum Framework* was the guiding document used to create the "Australian Immigration" curriculum package, however, Western Australia, along with other Australian states are currently transitioning into a national curriculum. *The Australian Curriculum: History* (2011) document was not used to develop this package. The S&E LA is fuelled by inquiry based learning, and the West Australian *Curriculum Framework* comments that the opportunity to learn and learning experiences should be relevant, values orientated and action intending, and that the opportunity to learn will be enhanced by community involvement (Curriculum Council, 1998, p.279).

### **1.7 Significance of the study**

Research of this nature is appropriate due to the increasing commodification of education (Gale & Densmore, 2003). This commodification of education has created policy that denies values such as social justice and the experience of a democratic

education to our students (Gale & Densmore, 2003). It has caused dilemmas for teachers such as myself (Gale & Densmore, 2003). Research into this area of education is necessary in order to highlight the inequalities many of our students face in Australia today (Smyth, 1994). There is a need for teachers to confront this issue, they must become, what Prunty (1985) terms “active producers” rather than “silent passive consumers” in the arena of education policy. Teachers must begin to participate in the policy making process before ‘real changes’ can occur (Prunty, 1985). Reform must be implemented from the “bottom-up” (Meier, 2002). By involving my students in their own community as ethnographic researchers, I hope to highlight the idea that reform starts in the classroom.

There are different ways to “teach” children; more so, encourage students to learn, rather than just “banking” information to get results (Freire, 2000). As a result of their involvement in the eleven week Society and Environment Program, it is hoped that my students will be able to look at their community critically and question whether their community holds stereotypical and prejudicial views towards people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. By examining and comparing community values and beliefs I hope that my students will demonstrate that teaching to the test is not needed to “achieve” excellent results. In fact, I hope that this type of curriculum demonstrates that if teachers challenge students and provide them with the spaces necessary for them to complete this type of work, that their learning will “far exceed” rote type instruction, performing just as well, or even better, than students who are “taught to the test” (Moll et al., 1992, p.137).

Fletcher (2004) argues that there are two main elements that teachers are neglecting to cover through their curriculum. Firstly, in order to develop an interesting curriculum it is important for teachers to understand their audience and secondly, teachers must engage their audience in a meaningful curriculum (Dewey, cited in Smith, 2002). By engaging students in the local community and making learning relevant to their everyday lives, teachers can transcend the traditional learning environments where students are taught to “bank” information (Freire, 2000). That is, when students collaborate and teachers listen and hear their voices, environments that stimulate their learning can be achieved (Shor, 1996; Bulter, 1998; Meier, 2002).

### **1.8 Limitations**

There are points of concern that place limitations on the phenomena under study. The curriculum package, designed to incorporate students’ values and beliefs in context to the theme of the curriculum program “Australian Immigration,” creates implications for this study. The time frame of the curriculum project, the dilemma I faced as a teacher-researcher undertaking an action research project, the context of the school and the community in which this research project took place, and the chosen theoretical framework which underpins this study were also sources of limitations for this study.

Firstly, this is an action research study, and this poses limitations to this study. It has been considered by some academics and project sponsors to be “suspect” and undisciplined (Tripp, 1995). However, as practitioner work has emerged from the “swampy lowlands,” action research has come to be a valued research methodology in the realm of qualitative inquiry (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006, p. 17). One of the

dilemmas of action research methodology is the fact that I will be both teacher and researcher, and the ethical position this places me in, must be accounted for. Elden and Levin (1991) refer to this dilemma as “model monopoly”. Elden and Levin (1991) establish the “outsider” (being the researcher) as a more powerful and dominant figurehead than the ‘insider’ (being the teacher). The threat of dominance, from being a researcher “must always be considered, and planning and action must be reviewed against this challenge” (Elden & Levin 1999, p. 135). Habermas (cited in Elden & Levin, 1999, p. 135-136) proposes that the “degree of democracy” must be assessed in context to the phenomena under study. He developed nine criteria, they are:

1. The dialogue is a process of exchange: points and arguments move to and fro between the participants.
2. All concerned must have the possibility to participate.
3. Possibilities for participation are, however, not enough. Everybody should also be active in the discourse.
4. As a point of departure, all participants are equal.
5. Work experience is the foundation for all participation.
6. At least some of the experience which each participant has when he or she enters the dialogue must be considered legitimate.
7. It must be possible for everybody to develop an understanding of the issue at stake.
8. All arguments which pertain to issues under discussion are – as a point of departure – legitimate.
9. The dialogue must continually produce agreements which can provide a platform for investigation and practical action. (Habermas, cited in Elden & Levin, 1999, pp. 135-136)

Student voice through the use of student work samples, is a crucial component of this study and respect for their accounts and experiences are a vital component of this research, and the nine criteria as suggested by Habermas, will guarantee them that right, the right for their voice to be heard. However, it is important to note that this is a self-study of my teaching practices, and whilst the voices of the students are important, they are not the central component under investigation.



Secondly, this project was based around an eleven-week time frame, and this brings its own limitations too. The constraints imposed on teachers, by both state standards and schools to complete units of work within a limited time frame, with relatively little choice, is a limitation of this study. Consequently, the pressure placed on teachers, to teach content, as well as to incorporate “funds of knowledge” within the classroom context (Moll et al., 1992, p. 2), poses a serious issue that must be considered when reading this study.

Thirdly, the context of the school and community in which this project took place ought to be acknowledged as a limitation of this study, especially in context to the desired outcomes of the curriculum package. The school which the students attend is located within a predominantly Anglo-Celtic community and thus, the values and beliefs of the students largely reflect this. Also, it is important to note that the school is located within a low socio-economic area, although a private independent school, there is still the potential for students to be affected by this classification, in terms of access to materials and technology.

Fourthly, there are implications, which derive from the chosen theoretical framework – social constructivism. Social constructivism is a paradigm, which asserts that each child brings with them previous learning experiences that have been socially and culturally shaped (McInerney & McInerney, 2002). This belief in intellectual development is an important educational learning theory for this research project and stems from the traditions of Piaget (as cited in McInerney & McInerney, 2002) and Vygotsky (as cited in McInerney & McInerney, 2002). Piaget’s (as cited in McInerney & McInerney, 2002)

belief that intellectual development occurs through a series of stages characterised by discreet structures is an important educational learning theory for this research project. However, it needs to be stressed that Piagetian theory focuses on the individual, where teacher involvement can inhibit the learning process (McInerney & McInerney, 2002). Whilst this core problem goes against the very essence of the research project, there are still, core principles in Piaget's theory that are crucial in understanding the cognitive development of children.

With the onset of theorists widening the focus to include an individual's construction of knowledge in context with their social environment, changes have taken place in this theory (McInerney & McInerney, 2002). The Vygotskian approach to learning is also central to my research project, in that, I am trying to challenge my students' constructions of reality, by facilitating learning and engaging them with their community, rather than transmitting knowledge and expertise through lecturing and recitation. They will be making meaningful connections between prior knowledge and new knowledge throughout the learning process. Social constructivism does not take into account individual knowledge; knowledge becomes collective through social interaction. Tools such as scaffolding and guided discovery are important in facilitating learning in this context.

Finally, the phenomenon under study, the Year Ten Society and Environment class, creates implications for the research project in several ways. Firstly, the fact that this study is taking place in a small independent school and is culturally embedded within society, creates two primary issues of concern that need to be considered:

1. For teachers: The fact that the views of reality are socially constructed and culturally embedded means that the dominant view, as Patton (2002) argues, “at any time and place will serve the interests and perspectives of those who exercise the most power in a particular culture” (p. 100). Overcoming power structures in society to teach meaningful curriculum that is relevant to students, according to requires persistence and hard work.
2. For students: They live in a very Anglo-Celtic community, overcoming the dominant culture to reconstruct their own concept of their community was an obstacle in itself for them as learners.

Secondly, data derived from this study is only significant, and can only be applied in direct context to Year Tens as an age group in a research study. This means that generalisations cannot be applied to other contexts. However, it is hoped that the study will provide a path for teachers to engage in dialogue to challenge current educational pedagogy, to reconnect their students with their “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 2) in order to create meaningful curriculum that they can apply to the everyday world where learning will become a transformational experience, rather than a transmission of knowledge. In the words of McInerney and McInerney (2002) “education must be holistic; it must be situated in a social context that mediates the learning; and it must allow for change and development in the child...to facilitate the development of learning embedded in the everyday world, teachers, students and peers must interact, share ideas and experiences, solve problems and be interdependent” (p. 46). Teachers need to rethink if they want to change the way schooling operates.

## **1.9 Thesis structure**

There are six chapters in this thesis. Following this introductory chapter there is a review of literature (Chapter Two) that is focused on the current climate of education in Australia, and how economic rationalism has influenced policy change and curriculum in Australia. The recent introduction of the Australian Curriculum is considered with a review of the implications this poses for teachers who strive to teach for social justice.

Chapter Three focuses on empowering teachers to change policy that has been implemented at a national level, and as such, is impacting on the way they deliver curriculum to students. “Teaching for democracy” becomes the central theme of this chapter with a view to creating a more emancipatory curriculum that is relevant to students’ lives, and ultimately empowering them to change it. Emancipatory education, or what Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) refer to as “critical multiculturalism”, becomes the pedagogy under which the analysis of this project is based. Changing the way students and teachers view and see the world is important in order for them to shape the power structures that exist in society so that every student can experience a socially just education.

Chapter Four and Five focus on two aspects of the study. Firstly, Chapter Four considers the methodology used in this research and Chapter Five, analyses the data gathered from the action research study through student work samples and my own reflective writings. Based on this work I examine the implications raised from the research and the implications for teachers and how they can adapt and reinvent their curriculum to teach for social justice.

Finally, Chapter Six considers the future directions of the study in relation to the notion of “reclaiming teaching.” It highlights the implications of this study and raises awareness of how teachers can strive to create learning environments that stimulate students to learn more about their world and the community in which they live. In the case of this study, the central idea focused on connecting students with their community in order to challenge the stereotypes and prejudices they held towards minority groups. The aim of doing this is to challenge the current climate in which teachers find themselves (the broader landscape), so that education can be made relevant to the lives of their students. The social-constructivist theoretical framework that underpins this action research project will create many avenues in which this issue can be examined. It will contribute to the struggles experienced by teachers to overcome policy in order to make positive change to students’ lives, and henceforth, providing them with a socially just education and greater equality of educational opportunity.

## CHAPTER II: CONTEXT

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the implications the Australian Curriculum for teachers who strive to teach for social justice. It considers how testing regimes in Australia create a high stakes testing environment in schools. It is followed by a discussion of the role that the *My Schools* website plays within this context. It is clear that if policy makers do not listen to the voices of teachers and the communities in which schools are located, then the education system in Australia will create even more obstacles and interferences for students and, teachers attempting to “teach against the grain” (Kincheloe et al., 1992, p. 34). This discussion ends with a focus on what can be done for students to safeguard their future and achieve equality of educational opportunity and social justice for all students.

### 2.2 The broader landscape

Equality of educational opportunity was considered an important goal in Australia for three decades following the aftermath of World War Two (Welch, 1996). However, when Australia’s education system underwent significant change in the 1970s, these reforms blurred concepts such as social justice and equality of opportunity (Smyth, 1994). They were replaced by such catch phrases as “efficiency” and “choice” (Smyth, 1994). These concepts underpin the paradigm of economic rationalism, which has come to dominate the Australian educational arena (Down, 1994; Welch, 1996). The most significant consequence of this policy reform has been the creation of a competitive

nation over one concerned for the welfare of individuals. Bean and Apple (1999) claim that this era of education is dominated by the needs of business and industry.

With the introduction of ‘new managerialism’ into the world of education (Thrupp & Wilmott, 2003), schools have essentially begun to operate and function like small businesses. They are in competition against one another for the consumer, and that consumer is the student and their family. Smyth (1994) argues in *Schooling for Democracy in Economic Rationalist Times*:

Gone will be the universal, equitably resourced, quality public education, and in its place will be a variety of franchised stand alone institutions, competing against one another for students and shrinking resources. What the so-called “consumers” of education will get, will depend even more than in the past, on a capacity to pay (p. 2).

As long as there are social and economic inequalities in our world, economic rationalism within education will only exacerbate them. This system is simply highlighting the positioning of people within the “education market” (Lauder & Hughes, 1999). This is not the fault of the school (Down, 1994) as the problems are created by policy mandated by governments, by which the role of the teacher has been “ridiculed and downgraded” (Gunter, 1997, p. 9). Teachers have become beneficiaries of ideologies imposed upon them, determined by the business hordes that now fund educational authorities (Gunter, 1997). The neo-liberal model of education forces a “corporate, business agenda into the curriculum” (Lund & Carr, 2008, p. 8). Lund and Carr (2008) claim that this agenda has created a “mild, somewhat superficial, and thin exposure to critical democracy and engagement, especially in relation to social justice” (p. 8). To further explain this term, Lund and Carr (2008) note the following,

the neo-liberal model of education involves a range of free-market principles – radicalization and cost cutting, declining investments, a limited selection of curricula options, privatization, the specter of school choice... a major focus of neo-liberal education is the unwavering devotion to standardised testing, standards and (supposedly) accountability, all of which isolate and diminish the place of democracy and social justice in education. (p. 8)

Economic rationalism has produced a “culture of blame” (Rea & Weiner, 1998, p. 22). Individual schools are blamed for below-average performance and resources are ultimately awarded to the schools that perform better in high stakes testing (Rea & Weiner, 1998). This has led to the introduction of league tables and other signifiers of productivity that place performance at the center of schooling success (Morely & Rassool, 1999). It seems as though the measure of the ‘educated person’ is based upon human capital and economic productivity (Down, 2009).

The result of economic rationalist policies has been a shift in blame, from the policy creators, to the policy implementers (Rea & Weiner, 1998). This transfer in power, from state control to site control (self-managing school) is known as devolution. Blackmore (1994) notes that there has been a “naïve and misplaced assumption” (p. 159) by schools, that “governments [under this system] will make equity a priority in their allocation of funds” (p. 159). She goes further to argue, that it is the interests of the policy makers that are being served, not the student, school or community (Blackmore, 1994).



### ***2.2.1 National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)***

In a time when ‘teaching to the test’ has become a contested point of schooling, one has to question the role of the teacher and their delivery of the curriculum. Torrance (1997) remarks, “the government’s basic position seems to be improving educational standards [and this] is of paramount importance in improving economic competitiveness within an increasingly global economy” (p. 320). In accordance with Torrance (1997), the West Australian governments focus on “improving standards” is centred around setting expected Achievement Targets for students in years seven and nine; monitored and ‘policed’ through the Moderated Standards in Education Test (MSE), which all schools administer (Curriculum Corporation, 2007). From 2008, the West Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) and Moderated Standards in Education (MSE) testing changed to become the National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) administered by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). This is a shift from state based literacy and numeracy testing to national based testing (MCEETYA, 2009). This poses a threat to teachers working for change.

### ***2.2.2 Australian Curriculum***

The Australian Curriculum has been a highly debated development in recent years, especially with the release of Phase One in December 2010. In a recent document titled *Rethinking National Curriculum Collaboration: Towards an Australian Curriculum* Professor Alan Reid (2005) highlighted the need for Australia to develop a national curriculum in order to ‘cope’ with future complexities of “globalisation, the speed of knowledge production, and the challenges of diversity... to fully develop... the

capabilities of all citizens” (p. 9). Reid (2005) is critical of the development of a national curriculum in one sense, claiming that it cannot work without the collaboration and participation of key stakeholders (teachers, community, schools), and it cannot be formulated “behind closed doors” (p. 67). In order to avoid what Welch (1996) refers to as “competitive success” (p. 11) where a schools success is tied closely with performance indicators that “measure conformity with pre-established program goals set from the centre,” (p. 11) schools will need to be involved in the development of a national curriculum policy in order for it to be successful and work.

The History Teachers Association of Australia (HTAA) made an important point in 2007 when told that the Federal Government planned on creating a national Australian history curriculum. HTAA claimed that teachers should not be ‘shut-out’ of the debate (Topsfield, 2007). They must be included in order for the proposed curriculum to be successful (Topsfield, 2007). This argument is further highlighted by Hayes (2007) former President of the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English:

What we do know is that, whatever the deliberations of the politicians, the English teaching community is ready to engage in the national curriculum agenda. One hopes that engagement will be at the conceptual rather than the consultative stages of the process... However, given the early muttering of both Government and Labor I wouldn't count on it. The conservatives, as we know, prefer to handpick “expert” teachers for boards and inquiries. Labor puts its trust in the state educational bureaucracies and corporate research bodies such as ACER and Curriculum Corporation. (p. 24)

The implications for the Australian nation of placing efficiency over social justice will mean the replacement of the “welfare state” with that of the “competitive state” (Welch, 1996, p. 5). One has to wonder through the analysis and examples presented above

‘whose interests’ are being served and ‘for whose purpose’? In the context of this study, it is an important issue to consider. If teachers cannot cater for the increasingly diverse needs of students by making learning relevant to their lives by incorporating their “funds of knowledge” into curriculum design, then, in what direction is the education system heading in Australia?

Torrance (1997) claims that assessments have become the fundamental determinant in the monitoring and measurement of school success. This has resulted in policy change towards assessment, from one used to “sort and select” a student to one that measures the achievement of the school, and this has come to be known as “standards” (Torrance, 1997, p. 320). Standards have become an increasingly important issue in the Australian political arena. Julie Bishop, former Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training and now Deputy Leader of the Federal Opposition, recently questioned the standards in Australian schools. Topsfield and Rood (2006) quoted her, “we have gone from teaching Latin in year 12 to teaching remedial English in first-year university” (para 3). This statement made by Bishop suggests that the Australian Government believes standards throughout our schools are falling. This reaffirms an argument made by Torrance (1997) that “the governments basic position seems to be improving educational standards is of paramount importance in improving economic competitiveness within an increasingly global economy” (p. 320). Julie Bishop and Julia Gillard, current Australian Prime Minister, believe that this can be achieved by the introduction of a national curriculum in Australia, “...we need to take control of the school curriculum out of the hands of the ideologues in the state and territory education bureaucracies and give it to a national board of studies” (Bishop as cited in Topsfield & Rood, 2006, para 4).

In the context of this study the Australian Curriculum poses a dilemma for teachers. A standards based curriculum, where teachers “teach to the test” leaves no room for “interpretation and creativity” (Aronowitz, 2008, p. xiii). Aronowitz (2008) believes society has lowered its expectation of “our children” (p. xiii). According to Gale and Densmore (2003), many teachers regard education policy as a “fait accompli” (p. 36). They assert, that for teachers who “value a socially just and democratic education for their students, policies that propose otherwise pose such a dilemma” (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p. 36). It has come to the point where many believe that (policy) is “also interested in making teachers accountable to the interests of business and deflecting public criticism from the government” (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p. 36). This is supported through Aronowitz’s (2008) interpretation of the No Child Left Behind Policy in the United States. He claims,

As the student becomes an adult, she is expected to lead a more privatized existence, raising children, worrying about personal health and bills, with her participation confined to commodity consumption. Reading as a form of pleasure and writing as a form of self-expression or analytical communication are increasingly reserved for an ever-diminishing coterie of “accidental” intellectuals – accidental because there is little either in the curriculum or in the pedagogy of public education that encourages what was once termed the “general” reader, a person who, whatever her occupation or profession, remains curious about the larger world, cares about politics, and tries to stay current with events and new ideas. Now, we have lowered our expectations of our children-and their expectations as well-and, in our anxiety for their economic fate, lowered our own: We no longer strive to help them fulfill the ancient liberal hope that the next generation will help shape a better world... (2008, p. xiii)

This quote resonates with the intentions of this study. Challenging my students’ stereotypes and prejudice, getting them involved in their community by critically questioning it, I hoped, aspirational as it is, to “help shape a better world” (Aronowitz, 2008). To demonstrate that teachers, in a climate such as the one the Australian

education system is transitioning into, can help students be successful thinkers in the twenty-first century.

### ***2.2.3 My schools website***

In 2010, the Australian Federal Government launched the *My Schools* website. The website is designed to give parents access to important school information. Detailed in a media release, released by then Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard (2010), noted the following about the *My Schools* website:

My School contains important information about each of Australia's 10 000 schools including the number of students at the school, the number of teachers at the school and how the school is performing in national literacy and numeracy testing.

The significance of the *My Schools* website lies in the ability for parents to be able to compare each school's NAPLAN results. From being able to compare NAPLAN results it will certainly be clear to both parents and the government, which schools are doing well, and on the other hand, which ones are not doing so well. When analysing school based results on the *My Schools* website, one needs to be aware of what is NAPLAN. A fact sheet, available on the *My Schools* website, and released by ACARA in February 2011, details this information. NAPLAN assesses Australian students' ability in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy. The fact sheet remarks, "the types of test formats are chosen so that they are familiar to teachers and students across Australia," and that "experts in assessment and measurement provide technical advice on the development of the tests" (ACARA, 2011b). The operation of NAPLAN by ACARA has already begun the ranking of students in Australia, based on what "experts"

in the field of assessment and measurement believe are typical of students within specified year groups. Policy change has been taken out of the hands of the teachers and placed in the hands of “experts”. The standardisation of education in Australia has the potential to have adverse affects on students and the future of education, if teachers do not begin to question the methods used by the government.

The fact sheet clearly outlines, that, for the first time in 2010 “the national report will include... information on student gain” (ACARA, 2011b). The purpose of including “student gain” into the website data will enable “parents, educators and members of the community to track school performance over time and focus on what those schools are doing that have been successful in achieving significant gains for students” (ACARA 2011b). With this component added into the *My Schools* website is their cause for concern about the future direction of the Australian education system? Has the government set the tone? Tests promote competitiveness in students (Cox, 1995), that is, they are marked and ranked, and become simply a statistic to the state, a statistic on which they base the success of the education system (Smyth, 1994). Does this mean that the Australian education system is heading in the same direction as the United Kingdom with the release of Phase One of the Australian National Curriculum? Cox (1995) emphasises that “competitiveness against each other leaves little space for reciprocity and the growth of social capital” (p. 19). Social capital, she asserts, is the foundation on which a “truly civil” society is built. In this situation, a narrowly conceived instrumentalist and economic approach to education is undermining democracy, civic capabilities and public good (Cox, 1995). If teachers want to establish the values of democracy in students then “teaching to the test” is not the way to go. Alternative solutions should be sought.

As teacher-researcher trying to implement a democratic curriculum in an environment where competition and individualism is encouraged I felt that I was presented with a number of challenges. I found it very hard to encourage students to collaborate and consider “big picture” ideas that would help them understand the world in which they live, as they would soon be old enough to vote in a democracy. However, I was encouraged by the enthusiasm of the students to try out new ways of learning, which became the central focus of my approach to teaching and learning, and these issues are explored in more detail in Chapter Five.

### **2.3 Self-managing schools and devolution**

Increased pressure to perform well on tests is placed on schools by the government to statistically rank and classify student (Shor, 1996; Beane, 2005). Thrupp and Willmott (2003) assert that schools will be encouraged to recruit “bright, middle-class able students and avoid taking on expensive special educational needs and excluded students wherever possible” (p. 43). This reinforces the concept, that with the introduction of league-tables and other measurements of performance, the so-called citizen has become more like a consumer (Morley & Rassool, 1999; Aronowitz, 2008). Students are seen as a commodity, a commodity to be used in order to enhance the schools performance on league-tables (Aronowitz, 2008). Morley and Rassool (1999) contend that the marketisation of education has increased the social reproduction of education, perpetuating the circumstances experienced by disadvantaged students. It can, therefore, be assumed that,

new managerialism, with its taxonomies and success criteria appears to enhance school effectiveness and efficiency. However, the chaos it purports to regulate is simply being sent underground in the form of failing schools, teacher stress and disaffection, and further social exclusion (Morley & Rassool, 1999, p. 73)

The examination presented above reflects the current atmosphere surrounding schools in the United Kingdom and the United States, which is examined in more detail in section 2.4. As Australian schools transition into a National Curriculum, will they face the same pressures? One can only assume that with the introduction of a national curriculum, the inequalities already experienced by many Australians will be further exacerbated.

The notion of standards as a measurement of school success has previously been discussed in relation to the management of Australian schools and the inequalities experienced by many Australians. In the case of devolution, schools have become accountable to the community, in the sense of the “progress” that it has made and the “achievement” its students have had (Blackmore, 1994). There have been claims by various policy producers and educational theorists (Caldwell and Spinks, cited in Blackmore, 1994) that devolution is beneficial. One example of a policy document claiming to be of this nature is that of the Victorian Governments *Schools of the Future*.

It suggests that through devolution the following could be achieved:

- Parents would be able to participate in their child’s education.
- Teachers would be recognised as true professionals and leaders.
- Schools would be accountable to the community and their destiny by the community.
- The development of curriculum programs to meet student needs could be implemented (Blackmore, 1994, p. 145).



However, Blackmore (1994) contends that the move towards devolution is both “disruptive” to social relationships within education and between individuals, communities and the state (p. 148). Aplet and Lingard (1993) point out that,

this nation-wide policy shift towards increased local control in the provision of a public education on the one hand, and towards national policy developments on the other... is implicated in, larger scale, nationwide, public sector administrative reform. (p. 59)

Aplet and Lingard (1993) contend that these reforms are driven by a managerialist agenda whose main interests are that of controlling public bureaucracies and the ministers that control them. This view of devolution aligns with that of Blackmore (1994), in the sense that it is being controlled through a top-down approach and the interests of the policy makers are the ones that are being served. This is further highlighted through Watt’s (cited in Aplet & Lingard, 1993) argument, that self-managing schools will simply serve to perpetuate inequalities experienced by many students. His concerns are that:

- Affluent parents will select better schools for their child,
- Curriculum planning and implementation will not take into account the “whole society”,
- Curriculum diversification will disadvantage poor children, and
- Parent representation will advantage the affluent. (Aplet & Lingard, 1993, p. 59)

Thus confirming that the existing disadvantages in society will become even more entrenched.

A policy document compiled by the Department of Education in Western Australia (EDWA) entitled *Local Management of Schools*, draws attention to the need for schools to become locally managed institutions (EDWA, 1999). The document explicitly states,

“local management of schools shifts the associated responsibility, accountability and authority for decision making to the school” (EDWA, 1999, p. 8). In the eyes of Watt (cited in Aplet & Lingard, 1993) and Blackmore (1994) this document was doomed to create an atmosphere that exacerbated inequalities already experienced within education. Although the attempts of the document are aimed at enhancing the opportunities for both schools and students in many areas, it also has the ability to deny a socially just experience for children in the community as pointed out in the above discussion.

These ideas pose implications for teachers such as myself who are trying to implement a curriculum that encourages students to question the world and use their lived experiences as the basis for their learning. At the time this research project was developed, I had no line manager, and I had approval from the principal to complete this study. However, two years after developing this project and being given permission by the Ethics Department at Murdoch University to conduct the study, the school had grown considerably, and Heads of Learning Area were introduced. Society and Environment was the last Learning Area to transition into this structure, and the year this project was carried out, I had a Head of Learning Area. Essentially this project was conducted alone. I faced resistance from other teachers in Year Ten when it came to implementing this curriculum, as many of the concepts, such as group work were not a favoured method of assessments for them, particularly the development of a documentary. This idea of teachers being resistant to change is explored further in section 5.2.6.

## **2.4 Implications for teachers and students**

Watkins (1999) has analysed the National Curriculum in the United Kingdom over the last ten years, unearthing ramifications that have resulted since its introduction in 1988. Although there were parts of the document that stressed the flexibility teachers could have in the development of education programs in areas such as personal-social education, features like this were largely ignored in the interpretation and implementation of other sections of the Act (Watkins, 1999). The Act was defined by its attainment targets, programmes of study and assessment arrangements, and, with the introduction of national testing, teachers began to teach to the test, ultimately burying the possibility of enhancing programs of focus in the field of personal-social education (Watkins, 1999). So, ultimately the argument being made by Watkins (1999) is that the interpretation of the Act by individuals other than the creators had a different outcome to the one intended, resulting in what he has termed the ‘survival’ of the schools and teachers in relation to league tables and high stakes testing. Watkins (1999) argues that the “the National Curriculum has had an effect on the psychological climate of schools, the view of schools as organisations and the view of teachers’ roles” (p. 74). The question becomes, then, what are the perceived benefits of a shift to a National Curriculum in the UK and elsewhere? Has there been any achievements within education in the United Kingdom’ since the implementation of a National Curriculum?

Watkins (1999) suggests that “achievement is not rising for the very groups who need it most; pupils legal entitlement and personal-social needs are not being met; the curriculum offers poor preparation for real life, even poorer for the future” (p. 79). This further highlights the arguments raised earlier about Australia transitioning into a national curriculum. A national curriculum can have devastating effects on exacerbating

the inequalities within society, just like the concepts of devolution and managerialism. These concepts are already in operation in the Australian education arena. Based on the evidence presented by Watkins (1999) regarding the implications of a national curriculum in the United Kingdom, the Australian Curriculum has the potential to broaden the already socially unjust education experienced by so many disadvantaged children, where social class, ethnicity, gender and race play a huge role in determining the experience they receive.

So, why then would the Australian government want to implement a national curriculum into an education system that is already wrought with problems and one in which there is no evidence to suggest that a national curriculum is beneficial to the majority of Australians, based on the experiences in the United Kingdom? Schools in the United Kingdom have already experienced a national curriculum, and that experience according to Watkins (1999) has had negative and divisive impacts, where young people are not benefiting from school and community connections. Watkins (1999) openly remarks, “schools have a performance orientation rather than a learning orientation” (p. 76).

In terms of a national curriculum in Australia, it is important to consider Reid’s (2005) criteria required for education in a deliberate democracy, where there is consensus in decision-making and majority rule:

1. Education is a human right,
2. All young people have an equal entitlement to appropriate educational provision, and
3. All young people are entitled to an education that develops their democratic capabilities to the fullest extent possible (p. 41).

Drawing on Reid's (2005) criteria Australian education has not focused on questions of human rights, equal entitlement and democracy. Rather, it has focused on "developing particular capabilities unevenly related to particular roles in life" (Reid, 2005, p. 44). This fits in with what Down (1994) has identified as two classes of disadvantaged students: they are the early leavers and the non-academic students. He argues that the Pathways program in Western Australia, for example, has sorted and selected many poor students into a "narrow skill base suited to their 'proper' station in life," (Down, 1994, p. 50) and focused on the short term needs of the labour market (Down, 1994). This accentuates the growing divide between people of different social backgrounds.

Reid (2005) argues the need to reform the "grammars of the dominant curriculum" (p. 44). He suggests the following approach:

- Purpose – Education is the process of human development through experience, it must involve the continuing experience of individuals and facilitate growth and development, and the curriculum is the medium through which this is achieved. There is a need to identify capabilities.
- Knowledge – Knowledge is hypothetical and therefore subject to change, modification and evolution.
- Curriculum and Organisation – The curriculum must be a process and development; it must consider the capabilities needed to become autonomous, responsible and productive members of democratic societies.
- Students as Teachers – Children acquire experiences and they can use these as their basis for learning, to explain and control the environment in which they live. (p. 44)

Developing student understanding of concepts and ideas through transformational learning, rather than transmitting predetermined knowledge, Reid (2005) argues, is key to implementing a successful national curriculum in Australia. An emphasis should be placed on the personal capabilities of the student, which becomes the core learning experience more so than the content. Reid's (2005) argument links well with the literature already reviewed. If teachers are willing to consider students' "personal

capabilities” and incorporate them into curriculum design, then student learning is more likely to be transformed.

Drawing on the core ideas of human rights, capabilities and democracy, the curriculum package, “Australian Immigration” attempted to incorporate the community that the students lived in, the fact that knowledge should be dynamic and not ‘prescribed’ and, over several years use this to build a curriculum so that my students can use their lived experiences to engage with the curriculum and ask more penetrating questions about society.

## **2.5 Teaching for social justice**

This process is something that will not ‘just happen’, it will take time and collaboration between key stakeholders, such as the government, the schools, the principals, the teachers, the students, their parents and the wider community (Gale & Densmore, 2003). As we have witnessed and seen, neo-liberal policies have changed the face of education in Australia (Down, 1994; Lauder & Hughes, 1999). The introduction of these policies that catered to the needs of the globalised economy over the needs of the individual has had dramatic effects on the educational experiences of teachers and students (Aronowitz, 2008). The experiences have “transformed” teachers work, and denied them the right to consider the values of schooling, a right teachers are entitled to under a democratic system of government (Gale & Densmore, 2003). This study has attempted to highlight the important role that teachers play in the development of curricula design, specifically recognising that students’ backgrounds and voices are critical establishing a democratic curriculum (Fidyk, 2008).

If Australia is to shake-free from a system dominated by the demands of the market and private business then the key stakeholders must make their claim (Gale & Densmore 2003; Aronowitz, 2008). They must involve themselves in the creation of education policy that places democratic values first, so that every Australian has access to an education, an education not determined by their social class, their gender, their race, their ethnic background, but one that is determined by the capabilities and experiences they have, to help guide their understanding in this highly globalised world (Reid, 2005). The implementation of the Australian Curriculum has already begun to take shape. The curriculum community must consult, must stake their claim in the development of it, rather than just leave it in the hands of policy makers who are often ignorant of the needs of young people themselves (Aronowitz, 2008).

Critical educational policy analysis must take centre stage in order to redress social injustice and bring about change (Prunty, 1985). Smyth (1994) argues that schools need to challenge themselves and reinvent themselves to address social injustice. He argues, “teachers are central to improving the circumstances of disadvantage” (Smyth, 2004. p. 22). If teacher’s work toward this goal, he believes that, “issues of power are interrupted” (Smyth, 2004, p. 23). Smyth’s (2004) words resonate with the aim of this study; that curriculum design should start from where the students are ‘at’, that is, using their lived experience and community to build curriculum.

Smyth’s (2004) ethnographic study of a primary school describes how one school set about the task of interrupting “the hierarchies of advantage,” (p. 23) by using an

“ensemble of progressive pedagogies” (p. 31). Smyth (2004) has “thematized and presented the data as ethnographic extracts” (p. 23), using the following categories to capture the story:

1. Whole School Commitment
2. Relationships (social learning, valuing students and “hanging in”)
3. Curriculum (success, fostering optimism and broadening opportunities).

What the study revealed was, that teachers and schools who work to disrupt “the hierarchies of advantage” will need time and space to complete this work (Smyth, 2004).

He asserts that whilst the results are not

disparaging of the considerable efforts made by the teachers and the school, this highlights the more sobering realization that as researchers we are still only in the early exploratory stages of what notions of teacher-based social capital might look like, its features and identifying characteristics, en route to exploring possible relationships it might have to social capital more generally and, indeed what contributions (if any) it might make to redressing social disadvantage through motions like the socially just school (Smyth, 2004, p. 31).

Smyth’s (2004) insight’s into this form of educational research is important to consider in context to the central argument of this study. Through my curriculum package “Australian Immigration”, I attempted to engage students with “big picture” ideas (such as stereotypes, racism and prejudice) so that they could pose-problems, collaborate with other students and investigate and critically question the world around them.

Students need to have learning experiences related to their own constructions of reality, so they can understand the world in which they live (Shor, 1996; Butler, 1998; Gonzales & Moll, 2002; Fletcher, 2004), as opposed to banking information that is not relevant to them (Freire, 2000). Once this is realised teachers can begin to create opportunities for all students, no matter what their background. These opportunities, according to Cox (1995) fit “models for democratic egalitarian web-like structures... [these] experiences



provide a comfort zone for recognising our commonalities and choosing to look for collective rather than individual benefits” (p. 22). It is time for teachers to become active participants in the policymaking process and start asking critical questions about “whose interests” are being served through current educational policy (Ball, 1998; Thompson, 2002).

Shultz (2008) encountered this problem, students who were receptors of transmitted knowledge, when he became a teacher at Carr Community Academy. Although taking the teaching position on the premise that he could use “creativity” to structure and create curriculum, he soon discovered that it “was far from the nurturing outlet advertised”, in fact, the “creative goals” wanted by the school were based on test scores (Shultz, 2008, p. 14). In Shultz’s (2008) words, he “struggled” with ways of engaging his students, whilst trying to meet the needs of his position. Shultz’s (2008) teaching philosophy was developed from learning experiences he had had from his own education. “Our understanding was evaluated by how well we understood problems and ultimately through our results in solving them... these sorts of interdisciplinary curricular initiatives had a lasting effect on me and would inevitably resurface in my own classroom” (Shultz, 2008, p. 17). Through “trial and error” Shultz (2008) incorporated democratic ideas of education into his teaching and learning style, in order to create a student-centred classroom. This is relevant to this study for the purpose of highlighting how one teacher struggled with issues I had faced in my teaching, issues which led me to question the validity of my teaching practice.

Shultz (2008) initiated a hands-on learning environment, with his students' lived experiences as the basis for the development of the curriculum, and, by doing so, challenged the position often imposed on teachers by governments to "teach to the test." He felt that if students' had a real "authentic" audience interested in their work that they were just as capable of meeting the outcomes, and adding to this, as well as giving students a voice (Shultz, 2008). It helped them realise their abilities and transcend traditional learning environments.

With the onset of economic rationalism, schools and teachers voices in the area of policy production have been silenced and suppressed (Bowe, 1992; Smyth, 1994; Gale & Densmore, 2003). Through a process of devolution governments have managed to shift blame away from themselves and towards the educational institutions themselves, although still driving the production of education policy (Welch, 1996). The challenge to create a more socially just, equitable environment and curriculum within education lies in the governments ability to consult educational stakeholders in the process of policy production (Reid, 2005). It will also come in the ability of the stakeholders to raise their silenced voices and become more active participants in the formulation of policy that affects their work, if they want to avoid being 'short-changed' and 'out-positioned' (Gale & Densmore, 2003).

## **2.6 Conclusion**

Government's have begun a process whereby they are encouraging schools to manage "themselves" (Smyth, 1994). This process of devolution has created a situation that has shielded governments from blame (Smyth, 1994). With the introduction of the

Australian Curriculum into schools, there is a need for teachers to be increasingly aware of the concerns that have emerged from other countries that already use a national curriculum, such as the United Kingdom (Welch, 1996). Like devolution, this has the potential to cause even greater social division within society, and further disadvantage those students already in need (Blackmore, 1994). This discussion has suggested that if teachers interrupt the “issues of power,” then students of disadvantage can achieve success (Smyth, 2004). In relation to this study, the broader landscape of education is of paramount importance. I tried to implement a curriculum that asked students to critically question the world in which they live by considering the prejudices and stereotypes people hold towards minority groups. As a teacher-researcher “teaching against the grain” of the current educational climate, I struggled to engage my students in a more democratic curriculum. Ultimately, it is through the dedication of teachers and consultation with the community that teachers will be able to transform educational learning experiences of students (Beane, 2005). And, in the tradition of such people as Shultz (2008), incorporate democratic ideals and a student-centred approach to curriculum design, so that the “authentic” voices of students can be heard.

## **CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Since the 1980s Australian schools have been dominated by neo-liberal policies (Down, 2009). It has created an environment that fosters competitiveness and standardisation (Welch, 1996). This context, established in Chapter Two, makes it difficult for teachers who strive to teach for social justice. This chapter highlights three areas of democratic schooling - using the community as a base for designing curriculum, negotiating the curriculum with students and students as researchers - that teachers can use to help them change the learning culture in their classrooms. The chapter then explores how teachers can change their pedagogy to become empowering educational leaders and agents of change (Shor, 1992). The chapter argues that if teachers work towards a democratic curriculum through the incorporation of such ideas as “critical consciousness”, problem-posing education and the adoption of a critical multicultural/anti-racist lens, that it is possible to develop authentic learning based around teacher’s pedagogy that has a greater chance of challenging student stereotypes and prejudice (Morrell, 2004).

### **3.2 Democratic schooling**

Teachers can use avenues such as those created through a critical democratic curriculum to help students pose problems and question the world in which they live. Connecting students with the curriculum can be challenging for teachers (Sleeter, 2005, p. 105). Once this task has been achieved, however, the sensational feeling as described by Schweitzer (1968) can be appreciated.

We wander through this life together in a semi-darkness in which none of us can distinguish exactly the features of his neighbour. Only from time to time, through some experience that we have of our companion, or through some remark that he passes, he stands for a moment close to us, as though illuminated by a flash of lightning. Then we see him as he really is. (p. 5-6)

That is, connecting students with the curriculum is like illuminating a “flash of lightning” (Schweitzer, 1968, pp. 5-6); when we share experiences together, it is an exhilarating ride; the students see the meaning of the curriculum through their experiences and knowledge (Gonzales & Moll, 2002). The current educational climate stresses that school must perform to the expected outcomes mandated through policy rather than challenge our learners to become “practitioners” (Greene, 1995, p. 34). Students and communities form an essential part of the curriculum. By making the experience of learning relevant to the individual and catering to their needs, we are enabling our students to participate in a democratic curriculum (Beane, & Apple, 1999; Greene, 2005, p. 33). When students become researchers of their communities new possibilities can be opened. This enables the teacher and student to be co-researchers in the development of their own curriculum around socially significant issues such as racism (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997).

There are social and economic inequalities in societies. Beane and Apple (1999) contend that national standards, curriculum and testing have helped contribute towards these inequalities, especially within education. Goodman and Kuzmic (1997) explain that “during the last decade... schools have adopted the use of pre-packaged instructional programs... [that] are designed to raise pupils scores on standardised tests” (p. 82). As argued in Chapter Two, if schools are going to dispel the social and economic

inequalities in our world then we need to start with the education that our students are receiving. Teaching a student-centred curriculum rather than teaching to a syllabus is one of the main steps in creating a democratic school (Shor, 1996).

During their research on democratically orientated schooling Goodman and Kuzmic (1997) referred to Harmony School and Education Centre in Indiana as having developed a “connectionist pedagogy” (students are able to see and “connect” with the reasons why they are at school). They argue that by “strengthening the social bonds between administrators, teachers, students, and parents; empowering teachers to generate worthwhile curricular content and experiences; utilising the curriculum to help students read the world,” (Goodman & Kuzmic, 1997, p. 85) then schools can work towards changing their curriculum and ultimately their culture. Through the development of a meaningful curriculum a school will be able to recognise the importance of strengthening social bonds, empowering teachers, and using the curriculum to foster change (Goodman & Kuzmic, 1997). Although the example is drawn from of the United States, it has relevance to this research project. My primary research question asked how I, as a teacher-researcher, could adapt and reinvent my curriculum programs in order to challenge students’ stereotypes and prejudice. Goodman and Kuzmic’s (1997) work prompted me to reflect on and consider whether or not the curriculum I had previously been teaching allowed me to establish a “connectionist pedagogy” with my students and directed me to strengthening relationships with my students in order to do this.

Meier (2002) takes this philosophy one step further, she created a pilot school where the goal was “to change the nature of the company kids and teachers keep, to build a trusting and trustworthy community” (p. 27-28). It was hoped that from this teachers would strengthen the relationships they developed with their students in order to create a “sense of belonging” (Meier, 2002, p. 30). The ideas on which democratic schooling is based, are central to the development of the ideas that stem from this research. In order to challenge my students’ stereotypes and prejudices’ I needed to foster strong, trustworthy relationships with the students, before introducing them to new concepts and ideas.

### ***3.2.1 Community as curricula***

In light of the ideas raised above on democratic schooling, there are two concepts are at the heart of creating a democratic school culture. “Communities as curricula” (Theobald and Curtiss, 2000) is the first idea that is relevant to this research project; it places the community at the centre of curriculum design. Mission Hill, a Boston public school, operates against the grain of the traditional American school system, challenging its students to “belong” to the community by going beyond the classroom (Meier, 2002, p. 34). School students are encouraged to carry out community service. By performing this task it was noted through interviews, that the students had built “at least one relationship with an adult that helped get them into college” (Meier, 2002, p. 35). Meier (2002) demonstrated that by utilising the community as a source for curriculum design and incorporating students’ lived experiences into the curriculum, it had positive effects on student learning, to the extent that they established trusting relationships with an adult that helped them get into College. Mission Hill is an example of a democratic school,

built from the foundations of the philosophy of “trustworthiness”, in which educational learning experiences were developed for its students based around community capacity building. Cox (1995) states, “interactions create social capital” (p. 17). By interacting with the community the Mission Hill students were actively participating in a democratic process and building social capital. Rather than focus their goals around standardised testing and school achievement, where it is said an individualistic competitive approach emerges in students (Meier, 2002; Theobold & Curtiss, 2000) Mission Hill opted instead for a goal whereby the community became apart of the curriculum (Meier, 2002).

Theobold and Curtiss (2000) further facilitate the argument that school students can perform just as well as, if not better, than students who are taught through a syllabus that centres on standardised testing. They state, “students educated in a caring democratic community using a constructivist approach can meet any reasonable standards” (Theobold & Curtiss, 2000, p. 109). A constructivist approach towards education is an “involvement and immersion” in the community (Theobold & Curtiss, 2000, p.107). Moll et al. (1992) conducted research into Mexican household and classroom practices in Tuscon, Arizona. They argued that by incorporating household and community resources into their teaching pedagogy, that teacher instruction “far outceeds” the rote experience these children were receiving in mainstream schooling (Moll et al., 1992, p. 132). Students have skills and knowledge that is learnt outside of the classroom. Moll et al. (1992) refer to this as a child’s “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 134). If this is used in the classroom it creates a “context in which learning can occur” (p. 134). This reinforces the argument, that through the adoption of “place-based education” in schools, student success can be achieved (Greunewald, 2003; McInerney et al., 2011).



Here, good practice is based on students' lived experiences in which "teachers are pushing the boundaries of their pedagogical practices" (Gonzales & Moll, 2002, p. 638) and focusing attention away from a narrow national curriculum towards a more democratically orientated and socially just education.

Benjamin Franklin (cited in Bruner, 2000), one of the founding fathers of the United States and key players in the American Enlightenment, was once quoted as saying "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn" (section 2, para 3).

Gruenewald (2003) argues that

extended, pedagogy becomes more relevant to the lived experiences of students and teachers, and accountability is reconceptualised so that places matter to educators, students and citizens in tangible ways. Place conscious education... aims to work against the isolation of schooling's discourses and practices from the living world outside the increasingly placeless institution of schooling. (p. 646)

Place-based education offers teachers an alternative way to engage students in the curriculum. This form of schooling addresses the social injustices that are exacerbated through neo-liberal policy. Teachers need to think critically about how to engage students in curriculum design, so that place-based education becomes the means by which to cater to students in the twenty-first century.

"Place-based education is not a new phenomenon," (Smith, 2002, p. 586), in fact, academics such as Dewey, have been espousing this idea for decades. Smith (2002) believes that cultural studies can have a positive effect on the way students learn. When students study their family and community histories they become engaged (Smith,

2002). Smith (2002) notes about a group of students in West Virginia, that when asked by their teacher to build a journal that documented their parents and grandparents' experiences in the mining industry, it was very successful (Smith, 2002). Smith (2002) writes that when teachers connect students with phenomena that is directly related to their world, "what they learn is closely tied to their own experience, connecting them more directly to their place" (p. 587). Cultural studies is one approach to place based education that Smith (2002) argues has the ability to change education. He also references nature studies, real-world problem solving, internships and entrepreneurial opportunities and an induction into the community, as ways that educations can offer place-based educational experiences to their students (Smith, 2002). A transformation agenda is the result of this kind of practitioner work; it has the ability to "overcome the disjunction between school and children's lives that is found in too many classrooms" (Smith, 2002, p. 591).

Place-based education should be given more consideration by the policy creators. Smith's (2002) words clearly denote the transformatory effect that place-based education can have,

educators who ground their curriculum in place are now offering alternative approaches to schooling... and engage a wide range of students in demands and opportunities of learning... [teachers] are inventing a wide range of experiences that allow students to connect what they are learning to their own lives, communities, and regions (p. 585).

To link this argument back to the wider discussion on democratic schooling, teachers, policy creators and governments are going to need to rethink schooling, to create the

time necessary in order to discuss the future direction of Australia's education system (Brennan, 2001).

This research project uses the concepts of “communities as curricula” and “place-based education” to connect students with phenomena that are directly related to their world. In light of this, I hoped that students would link their own experiences, to those of the wider world. The approach of introducing students to the struggles that immigrants have faced in Australia, I believe can combine well with their background and challenge their own stereotypes and prejudice toward people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Challenging them to consider the affect that such beliefs could have on other people was an important first step to changing the culture of learning they had experienced in the past.

### ***3.2.2 Negotiated Curriculum***

Shor (1996) believes that to democratise discourse it is important to share power in a classroom context. Three correlations can be drawn between the work of Shor (1996), whose research focus is College students, and Butler (1998) who conducted research on second-graders in the United States. The correlations are:

1. Collaboration is the key to building strong relationships with their students.
2. Listening and hearing their voices is necessary in order to shape the curriculum to meet their needs.
3. The curriculum can be negotiated based on their histories.

These three factors all contribute to building a democratic curriculum in which place-based education is at the forefront of teaching pedagogy. Researchers in this area argue for teachers to be increasingly aware of their students' stories, experiences and histories in order to construct meaningful curriculum that will engage their audience (Shor, 1996; Butler, 1998; Fletcher, 2004).

Democratic teaching involves looking for different opinions from a variety of sources in order to create a curriculum that is student centred (Beane, 2005). Gonzales and Moll (2002) made this very clear in their research into the use of students' 'funds of knowledge' in the classroom, "teachers as learners, parents as learners, and students as learners can come together within communities in which learning is mutually educative, co-constructed and jointly negotiated" (p. 631). Negotiating the curriculum with students and allowing them to step out of the classroom, into the community, where they can use their funds of knowledge, creates an enhanced learning environment beneficial to all (Gonzales & Moll, 2002). Gonzales and Moll (2002) refer to this as "engaging life" (p. 625). If teachers can "engage the life" of their students, then they are on track towards involving them in a democratic world. By designing a curriculum package that used students' funds of knowledge I hoped to engage them in the curriculum.

Fletcher (2004) notes that there are two main elements that teachers are neglecting to cover through their curriculum. Firstly, in order to develop an interesting curriculum it is important for teachers to understand their audience and, secondly, they must engage their audience in a meaningful curriculum. To do this, he suggests:

1. Teachers and students work together in group activities, jointly creating an idea or a product.
2. Language and literacy skills and strategies are developed in all subject areas across the curriculum.
3. Teachers connect lessons to students' lives, including their experiences at home, in the community and at school.
4. Engage students with challenging lessons that will maintain high standards for student performance, activities are designed to advance students' understanding to more complex levels.
5. Teachers emphasise teacher-student dialogue over lectures - academic, goal-directed, small-group conversations. (Fletcher, 2004, p. 22)

These five recommendations by Fletcher (2004) are at the heart of a negotiated curriculum. If teachers adhere to these principles then they are helping students speak in their “authentic voices” (Ellsworth, 1989; Morrell, 2004).

Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) wrote in the *Harvard Educational Review* that teachers who seek to help students speak in their “authentic voices” are seen to “make themselves visible and define themselves as authors of their own world. Such self-definition presumably gives students an identity and political position from which to act as agents of social change” (p. 309). Students involved in the creation of curriculum will feel empowered to use their voices and act as agents of social change (Ellsworth, 1989), as opposed to being “empty-vessels” in the classroom (Freire, 2000). Curriculum negotiation is only one way that teachers can work with students in their classroom to deconstruct the oppressive order (Ellsworth, 1989). Ellsworth (1989) states, “if you can talk to me in ways that show you understand that your knowledge of me, the world, and the ‘Right thing to do’ will always be partial, interested, and potentially oppressive to others, and if I can do the same, then we can work together in shaping and reshaping alliances for constructing circumstances in which students of difference can thrive” (p. 324). This, she argues, is the way to empowering students (Ellsworth, 1989).

Recognition by teachers that there are students in the classroom with multiple ways of learning and seeing the world is a step in the right direction. Negotiated curriculum offers this to teachers as a way to empower students to learn. Ellsworth's (1989) argument summarises a negotiated curriculum: there may not be a right way for every student, but if teachers talk to and understand their students, if they work together to co-create new material, then it is a step in the democratic direction (Ellsworth, 1989).

The research presented above argues that incorporating students' stories into the curriculum can help engage them. The aim of this project was to use the place where the students live and help them critically analyse and reflect on their community's story, in context to that experienced by others (in this case minority groups). Engaging the life of the learners in my classroom was central to the success of this curriculum package. It was important for me to realise, in light of Ellsworth's (1989) work, that all students have a different story, a different background. Acknowledgement of this was empowering to me as a teacher. I realised that in order to help connect all students in my classroom with the curriculum package it would take different learning activities to engage them, using their community as a context for their inquiry projects.

### ***3.2.3 Students as researchers***

"Students as researchers" (Butler, 1998) is a concept that is strongly connected with using the community as a source for curriculum building. However, it is the students actively researching and engaging in the community through their interests that motivate them to learn (Butler, 1998). Primarily using the students' knowledge of the community

to develop the curriculum (Butler, 1998). Butler (1998) explains that it is important for students' knowledge's to be understood, that "the way students understand their own lives is significant" (p. 108). If teachers have a solid understanding of their student cohort, if they know their students' histories, they will understand how to stimulate their students' minds through the curriculum (Ellsworth, 1989). Or, alternatively, negotiate the curriculum with their students in order empower them to learn more about the world in which they live (Gonzales & Moll, 2002)

Westheimer and Kahne's (1998) example of students at C. Wright Mills Academic Middle School demonstrates how, when students use their community as a source of learning, that they can develop a "spirit of service and civic skills needed for effective civic action" (p. 10). They further argue that such opportunities for students in traditional classrooms (where academic performance of individuals is the focus) are rare (Westheimer & Kahne, 1998). In 1984, C. Wright Mills closed and, re-opened under a "court-ordered consent decree", and, a new staff was employed (Westheimer & Kahne, 1998, p. 6). The school underwent a transformation, from one of the "poorest performing schools in the district," to one of "high attendance rates, [and] high performance on standardised tests" (p. 6). This is attributed to the creation of a series of mission statements and learning objectives (Westheimer & Kahne). The school actively sought to consider the "whole child academically, socially and emotionally" (Westheimer & Kahne, 1998, p. 6), and focusing on transdisciplinary projects, where social studies curricula became the central focus of their "Learning Challenges" (p. 7). Here, students focused on issues that directly affected their lives, one such example stems from a Learning Challenge called "The Garden Against Hunger" (Westheimer & Kahne, 1998, p. 10). Students were asked to produce a brochure "showing sites of

soupkitchens in their neighbourhood” (p. 10). Student then wrote to parents, asking them to attend fundraisers, they published newsletters, all the time creating connections with the community. This example demonstrates that “cooperation and reciprocity are more effective than competition” (Cox, 1995, p. 20). This follows the links that Cox (1995), made to Putnam’s work. In *A Truly Civil Society* Cox (1995) states, “Putnam claims that the interactions which create social capital are most likely to occur in egalitarian communities where people voluntarily contribute time and effort” (Putnam, cited in Cox, 1995, p. 17). The teachers at C. Wright Mills Academic Middle School have demonstrated that teachers can engage the life students by encouraging them to become researchers of their community and building social capital.

A quote from Butler’s (1998) work further highlights the importance of students as researchers of their own communities. She notes,

The way students understand their own lives is significant. It is the way they come to know their own identities in relation to others and the world... Too often the school is a place where these knowledges are ignored and/or intentionally shut out...we need to find ways to make student knowledge the basis of school direction and curricula. The pedagogical space of the classroom provides a safe location where agencies can be exercised in relation to an emancipatory project. If we care about larger issues of justice and liberation, we must listen to our students. They have the voices of possibility and hope (Butler, 1998, p. 108).

This ideal, helped me think of ways I could engage the life of my students, helping them make connections to their community by engaging them in discourse and research. This centred on students writing surveys and interviewing people from their local community about the beliefs people in their community held towards people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. By analysing and researching the stereotypes and



prejudice that people in the community held towards minority groups, I hoped to empower the students to learn more about the world in which they live and participate as citizens of a democratic nation. As they soon would be adults faced with the challenge of negotiating their place in the world.

### **3.3 Avenues to explore in order to begin to teach for social justice**

From the discussion above, it is clear that a child's cultural background, their social identity and their community is important to their education. However, standardised testing and national curriculums, act as barriers for student's to become active participants in a democratic nation (Blackmore, 1994). Shor (1992) asserts, "the empowering teacher who denies universal status to the dominant culture also denies emptiness in students" (p. 32). Students, who are faced with a climate as the one described above, either become complacent "empty vessels" or resistant through non-engagement (McMahon & Portelli, 2004). The students who are resistant, are often the ones deemed to need a "behavioural modification" program (McMahon & Portelli, 2004). However, Bahruth and Steiner (1998) note that "student non-engagement is most often the conscious or unconscious rejection by learners from the dominant culture to discovering their own voices, to critical thinking, and to the subjectification of their learning" (p. 132). To change this "dominant culture" within education, to create an environment where the "teachers, [are] no longer the dominant voice in the classroom," one where teachers "invite students to become... active learners and critical thinkers... [where] their voices are respected," (Bahruth & Steiner, 1998, p. 129) this discussion suggests that there needs to be:

1. A change in perspective and praxis by teachers: it is suggested that teachers can help foster a “critical consciousness” within their students, allowing them to participate as active citizens in a democratic world.
2. Students questioning the world in which they live: teachers need to pose problems to students and encourage them to ask: why;
3. Curriculum negotiation: involving students in the curriculum making process will lead to a more emancipatory framework for teachers.
4. Further to this discussion, is the notion that if teachers reject the dominant culture and adopt a more “critical multicultural” stance, the barriers that obstruct student self-actualisation can be dismantled and a democratically empowering education can be achieved (Shor, 1996).

These avenues are central to this study in terms of challenging student stereotypes and prejudice. The following discussion lends itself to an exploration of these four concepts, and investigates how teachers can use them in order to begin to build a socially just curriculum for all.

### ***3.3.1 Teaching against the grain***

Democratising the classroom, so that “backloaded” (Beane, 2005, p. 48) teaching becomes the focus as opposed to “frontloaded” teaching, is a process that takes time (Shor, 1996, p. 60). Not only does it require “tremendous teacher presence” as noted by Beane (2005, p. 47) it takes other skills too. A curriculum that is driven by standards and testing can be compared to what Schweitzer (1968) called “wandering through this life in a semi-darkness” (pp. 5-6). The essential question teachers can ask themselves in this context is, do they want their students wandering through their life in a semi-darkness?

If this is not the case, then teachers can break free of the accepted, “dominant” narratives (Kincheloe et al., 1992). Cox (1995) describes participation, trust and interaction as being the foundation on which a civil society is built. Education said to be ‘democratic’ consists of “nurturing socially responsible individuals” (Goodman & Kuzmic, 1997, p. 85). Teachers need to make the ‘flash o light’ that Schweitzer describes become a beacon, a beacon that does not stop shining in order to promote democratic schooling; a light that will transform their students’ into citizens of this world; citizens that will stimulate social and economic change (Ellsworth, 1989).

It will become a challenge to teachers in the present and future to tackle the problems faced with educational reform. To change current educational practices teachers will need to challenge the current education curriculum. To engage students and teachers and create what Smyth (et al., 2008) refer to as “critically engaged learners and socially critical educators”, we must “actively step... outside of the language and deficit practices that subordinate and devalue communities” (p. 33). Schools are institutionalised and the mentality of schooling today is grounded in 19<sup>th</sup> century traditions (Kincheloe et al., 1992; Smyth et al., 2008). Relationships need to be “de-institutionalised” (Smyth et al., 2008), and voices raised (Kincheloe et al., 1992) so that the shackles that keep teachers and students bound, are broken; no longer should their voices be silenced.

Teachers’ work is historically and contextually situated, with associated metaphors that have defined the way they practice their work (Kincheloe et al., 1992). Giroux (cited in

Kincheloe et al., 1992) suggests that new metaphors are needed to define teacher practice, that

...we should see them as engaged and transformative intellectuals –professionals who reflect the pedagogical principles that inform their practice, connect pedagogical theory and practice to wider social issues, and work together to share ideas, exercise power over the conditions of their labor, and embody in their teaching a vision of a better and more humane life. (pp. 34-35)

Through this lens, teachers become what Kincheloe et al. (1992) refer to as “knowledge makers, knowledge users, theory generators, theory translators, researchers and reformers” (p. 34).

The optimism espoused through the work of Shultz (2008) in *Spectacular Things Happen Along the Way* asks essential questions about the future of education. These questions cannot yet be yielded, but he does, however, provide an encouraging reference for teachers, that inspire them to take risks and change the dominant pedagogues (Shultz, 2008). The following passage demonstrates this optimism,

Realising classroom democratic ideals may raise more questions than answers...I would like to believe that all students should have space to be thinkers, doers, designers, and builders, challenging the ideological dominance of standardisation, accountability and high-stakes measures. I want to believe that if enough teachers look to their students for what is worthwhile, society as a whole can begin to make our world a better place. I strongly believe that teachers, along with their students, can construct meaningful curricula to challenge inequalities and provide opportunities. Much can be gained through individual experimentation with democratic and justice-orientated teaching, and great reflection, change and transformation can result (Shultz, 2008, p. 155).

This study resonates with my experiences. It is hard for teachers in the current education climate in Australia, to challenge the dominant power structures that exacerbate the

inequalities of the 'status quo'. However, it is important for me to mention that I believe that the work I completed with my class over the eleven-week period, given the struggles I faced, was successful. As will be elaborated on in Chapter Five, there were six students who were able to follow through with the group documentary task and work collaboratively together. Also, there was work produced by other students that demonstrated connections with the ideas of stereotypes and prejudice.

It is clear to me from the struggles I experienced as a teacher trying to implement a democratic curriculum that more needs to be done, that more teachers need to create "counternarratives" (Shultz, 2008, p. 154). Teachers need to push the boundaries and construct curricula that will inspire their audience to become critical-democratic learners.

### ***3.3.2 Problem-posing education***

Shor and Brown (cited in Bahruth & Steiner, 1998) suggest that in order to empower teachers to become critical practitioners there is need to "deconstruct authoritarian modes of discourse in traditional classrooms and to establish a democratic 'culture circle' where students' lived experiences are invited and encouraged in the construction of meaning" (p. 129). A culture circle, as described by Bahruth and Steiner (1998), is not just the practice of putting students into a circle, it is a pedagogical shift by teachers, that encompasses a change in discourse, to enable the voice of the student to be heard by all in the classroom. Essentially, the classroom disappears and what is created is a space that allows for the evolution of "their own criticality" (Bahruth & Steiner, 1998, p. 130).

A space that allows all participants, teacher and student, to “make meaning of their development based on the experiences they bring to the classroom” (Bahruth & Steiner, 1998, p. 130). The teacher’s role in an environment such as this is “to pose questions that provide an intellectual space for problematising culture itself” (Bahruth & Steiner, 1998, p. 133). Freire (2000) writes in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that “in problem-posing education, people develop the power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (p. 83). Students are empowered in such an environment and are able to question the world in which they live (Freire, 2000).

Freire (2000) presents an interesting concept in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the “banking system” (p. 72) of education. It is directly related to traditional teaching methods: the teacher lectures, the student listens and then deposits knowledge. Freire (2000) further states that students do not develop a “critical consciousness” (p. 73) that allows them to change the world. In order for students to become critically conscious of their world they need to be involved in problem-posing education. In his words, “the teacher is no longer... the-one-who-teaches, but the one who is himself taught in a dialogue with students, who in turn while being taught also teach” (Freire 2000, p. 80). The teacher essentially becomes the person that “poses-problems” to students to solve and in the process becomes a student themselves, learning from the students (Shor, 1992, p. 31).

“As long term exiles in classroom discourse,” Shor (1996, p. 42) writes that students can often be fearful to speak up when presented with a “pedagogy of questions” (p. 42). Shor (1996) explains how he opened up his class as a “cultural forum,” where the students could express their ideas about what they wanted changed in relation to the city and college they attended. What were their ideas of a utopic society? Shor (1996) collected their ideas and collated them, noting that, “agenda’s like these are documents for my classroom research into their ways of seeing the world, so that I can understand them a little better each year” (p. 49). To “frontload” student discourse, Shor (1996) contends, “problem-posing dialogue gives students a chance to voice their concerns” (p. 45-46) This example demonstrates the argument that Freire (2000) makes so clear, that “problem-posing education does not and cannot serve the interest of the oppressor. No oppressive order could omit the oppressed to begin to question: Why?” (p. 84). The voices of students are crucial to the achievement of a democratic education, and posing problems to students is one way to achieve this.

Freire’s (2000) ideas are additionally highlighted by Bahruth and Steiner (1998) on the use of culture circles as a method of problem-posing education, when they explain how “students who have been oppressed by traditional educational experiences tend to thrive in culture circles because the pedagogy addresses their frustrations and provides them with spaces to use voices previously silenced, ignored or misunderstood” (p. 132). Providing the spaces necessary for students to become critically engaged thinkers, that pose problems, and question the world in which they live will become increasingly imperative for students who live in the twenty-first century. This notion will require teachers to change their praxis; to do this they will need to shift their perspectives, and in the words of Kincheloe et al. (1992) “transcend the tyranny of common sense” (p.

30). It is important to highlight that this type of praxis change, whereby teachers become agents of change (Shor, 1992) can be a long-term process. Shor (1992) notes in *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change* that “an open process helps desocialise students from their long practiced passivity... they will need time to feel comfortable... some will take this risk... others will resist its challenge” (p. 261).

For me, as a teacher, the idea of problem-posing education is central to the success of challenging students’ stereotypes and prejudices. If they are to become democratic citizens of this world, where the barriers that divide people in society are deconstructed, they need to listen to everyone’s voice and hear them. They also need to use their voices, to convey their opinions. Posing problems to students, offers teachers the opportunity to do this (Shor, 1996; Bahruth & Steiner, 1998; Freire, 2000).

To empower teachers to develop a connectionist pedagogy in order to create agents of change, problem-posing education is one method that can help them do this (Shor, 1992; Goodman & Kuzmic, 1997; Freire, 2000). This section argues that when students are empowered to critically question the world, they can develop a critical consciousness and become agents of social change (Freire, 2000). However, teachers are also involved in this. Teachers need to give students the space, time and tools necessary to make this happen (Kincheloe et al., 1992).



### *3.3.3 Critical consciousness*

The current education system in Australia, which was outlined in Chapter Two, reflects neo-liberal views on education (Down, 1994; Beane, 2005; McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Down, 2009). Conservative liberal beliefs toward education hinders teachers who want to create democratic classrooms. McMahon and Portelli (2004) believe that education systems that operate under this guise “reinforce existing dominant views that promote a deficient and exclusionary mentality,” that it reinforces the “social inequalities of the status quo” (p. 61). Critical democratic engagement cannot occur without teachers adopting a critical democratic pedagogy (McMahon & Portelli, 2004).

Smyth et al. (2008) recommends three key aspects that need to be achieved for critical engagement:

1. A journey of collaborative learning;
2. Examining concepts of power, how things are they way they are and improving the situation for the most excluded through a ‘critical’ lens; and
3. Asking questions about the moral imperative to engage in collegial interaction with communities in ways that emphasise visceral qualities (such as self-determination) to encourage ‘engagement’ (pp. 5-6)

Teachers must encourage the students in their classrooms to become critical-democratic thinkers, by engaging them in the curriculum. The “one-size-fits-all” approach needs to be thrown out the door, so to speak, and teachers need to “find the critical spaces within which to work” in order to promote “creative learning”, that “revolves around key notions of ‘relevance control, ownership and innovation’ ” (Smyth et al., 2008, p. 28).

This thesis has highlighted that the context of Australian schools is concerning, with the introduction of NAPLAN testing and the *My Schools* website, student gain is becoming increasingly important (ACARA, 2011b). When student success is equated to how well they are achieving in the curriculum (that is usually controlled by the teacher), or distinctive behavioural dispositions emerge that are identifiable with curriculum success, an abstract conceptualisation of engagement emerges (McMahon & Portelli, 2004). This is regarded by some researchers as a “deficit mentality towards students” (McMahon & Portelli, 2004, p. 62). Newman et al. (cited in McMahon & Portelli, 2004) clearly direct this form of student engagement toward the “mastery of academic work” (p. 62). This view is supported by critical theorists in the field of education, including Kincheloe et al. (1992), Beane (2005) and Smyth et al. (2008) to name a few. Smyth et al. (2008) writes about the “mastery of academic work,”

[as a] view of engagement that is ‘goal driven’, with engaged students dutifully ‘attending classes’, trying hard in their studies, completing their homework, and not cheating...this...borders on ‘indoctrination’ because it adheres to an unquestioning view of what constitutes valued educational goals, and the belief that the purpose of education is to ‘socialise, sort and select students’ according to the degree to which they comply with these goals (pp. 4-5)

Teachers must ask themselves, so how are they able to change the “status quo” and create the spaces necessary for students to become twenty-first century learners, thinkers and doers, in an arena that is driven by nineteenth century mentalities of sorting and selecting students? This became the essential question I asked myself when thinking of ways I could challenge the stereotypes and prejudices students at my school.

The more standardised we make the curriculum to improve student achievement, the more we cut ourselves off from students' cultural, experiential, and personal resources on which learning should be built (Sleeter, 2005). Smyth et al. (2008) suggest that schools need to "deinstitutionalise relationships" (p. 31). There are deficit ways of thinking and they need to be unshackled and deconstructed to create a process of "imagining alternatives" (Smyth, et al, 2008, p. 31). "Stepping outside of the language and deficit practices that subordinate and devalue communities" (Smyth et al., 2008, p. 33) will require teachers to take risks. Sleeter (2005) puts it this way:

Teaching diverse perspectives does not mean preaching a particular perspective or getting into arguments about whose opinion is right. Rather, it involves helping students learn to identify and understand experiences, evidence, or values behind various viewpoints or ideologies" (p. 117).

If teachers embrace these suggestions, then the spaces for students to raise their voices, to be heard and contribute in a democratic manner toward their education, can be achieved. Teachers need to be proactive in their abilities to reform the education system. Teachers who teach for social justice by adopting methods derived from democratic schooling, such as using the community as a basis for designing curricula, negotiated curriculum design and allowing students to be researchers of their community, can help provide the spaces necessary for students' voices to be heard (Shor, 1996; Goodman & Kuzmic, 1997; Butler, 1998; Theobald & Curtiss, 2000; Meier, 2002; Smith, 2002; Fletcher, 2004).

Involving students in the curriculum making process is a key step in creating a democratic education for them (Beane, 2005). Students become connected to the world around them and are able to build stronger relationships with their community (Shor, 1996; Bulter, 1998; Fletcher, 2004). The first step I considered when designing a

curriculum that would engage students, was asking myself an essential question: How would I be able to engage students with the issues that affect their community? I was reminded of a crucial component within Shor's (1996) work when I began questioning my practice. Shor (1996) contends that "as a routine feature of formal education, there are no democratic mechanisms for students to pose their own courses, themes or syllabi... they are denied citizen status of a democracy" (p. 31). Creating a democratic curriculum centres on connecting students with their community and building a critical consciousness within them (Shor, 1996). Shor (1996) has termed this practise "negotiation" and "power-sharing" (p. 59), noting the following experience he had: "my proposal that we negotiate the curriculum was greeted with sturdy silence and eyes of wary wonderment" (p. 59). Creating a student voice within the classroom is what Beane (2005) believes is important, "giving students a voice in this way, no matter how restricted the teacher may feel by various mandates, is a step in the democratic direction" (p. 27).

Hattam et al. (1998) argue that young people's identities are "constructed by social, economic and political forces" (p. 97). This notion reasserts the idea posed by Vygotsky (McInerney & McInerney, 2002), that students' understanding of the world has been shaped by their social and cultural background. A quote by Freire (cited in Gruenwald, 2003) further reinforces this concept, that human beings are shaped by their social and cultural context.

People as beings 'in a situation,' find themselves rooted in temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark. They will tend to reflect on their own 'situationality' to the extent that they are challenged by it to act upon it. Human beings *are* because they are in a situation. And they will be *more*

the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it (p. 4).

Being “critically conscious” of ones own experiences, leads to a greater understanding of the world. If students are critically conscious it will enable them to question the world in which they live and have the opportunity to shape its future. They will be doing what Beane and Apple (1999) make clear in the their case for democratic schools, they will be “making decisions that effect their life” (p. 10). Schools must “reclaim” their position in society, stop teaching the traditional way where students “bank” what they have learnt, and critically examine the world in which they live (Hattam et al., 1998, p. 97).

Kincheloe et al. (1992) suggest that if teachers “shift their perspective” (p. 29) it would allow them to see students from outside a mainstream perspective. They argue that too often teachers “see from the uni-dimensional modern perspective” and neglect to realise the uniqueness of all the students in the classroom (Kincheloe et al., 1992, p. 29). When I began this research project I had become disempowered with the curriculum I was delivering to my classes. I realised that the students were not making the “big picture” connections that I was hoping. I felt I needed to re-invent my curriculum programs in order to challenge my students’ current place in the world. To do this I believed that introducing them to “other histories” was the right avenue by which to do this. I hoped they would understand that other people were oppressed by the dominant orders in society. I hoped they would empathise with these stories and understand how their own community’s values and beliefs shaped the way they understand and viewed the world.

In a uni-dimensional perspective the status quo is perpetuated, and students in the twenty-first century are faced with nineteenth century ways of thinking, “the economically disadvantaged and the culturally different are condemned to school failure” (Kincheloe et al., 1992, p. 29). Kincheloe et al. (1992) argue that this “Newtonian-Cartesian” frame of reference, that intelligence and genius are a “static and petrified entity,” (p 28) is the norm among teachers. This argument from Kincheloe, Steinberg and Tippins (1992) strengthens the assumption that ones culture and class in the twenty-first century does effect school performance. That, the pedagogies the educational institution represent, stem from nineteenth century ways of thinking about the world, and as a result “schools are pursuing baldness, working to turn out faceless students who go through the system quietly, unable to question the world around them” (Kincheloe et al., 1992, p. 11). This notion agitated me to the extent that I needed to change the way I deliver my curriculum. I needed to step students outside of their “comfort zones” of learning and banking, and stimulate a voice within them that would lead to them questioning the world in which they live. The result of this agitation was the program I developed, “Australian Immigration”. It sought to challenge the dominant held views within their community in order to grow social capital, and thus interrupting the stereotypes and prejudicial views that they held.

To this end, Kincheloe et al. (1992) suggest that students need to become post-formal thinkers, that they should “shatter the accepted narrative sequences... [so they are able] to see historical developments previously determined irrelevant” (p. 30) in order redress inequalities in the current education system. “To transcend the tyranny of common sense,” to deconstruct the known reality, teachers and students must shift their perspectives (Kincheloe et al., 1992, p. 30). If they do this, then such a “motif emerges

as a major factor in the shaping, not only of schools but in the construction of our own consciousness, our way of making sense of the world” (Kincheloe et al., 1992, p. 30). The ideas raised by Kincheloe, Steinberg and Tippins (1992) are relevant to this thesis in two ways. Firstly, that I as a teacher need to help my students and myself shift our perspectives in order to reconstruct our opinions on Australia’s immigration history. Secondly, I need to introduce students to “counter-narratives” or “other histories” in order to do this.

As students have skyrocketed into the world of the twenty-first century, where globalisation and the Internet have weaved their lives into a diverse and multi-faceted web, education can no longer be seen as “sets of isolated causal relationships” (Kincheloe et al., 1992, p. 32). As a consequence, schools in the postmodern world need to “teach us ever changing ways of living... new ways of living with each other” (Kincheloe et al., 1992, p. 32). This further reinforces the notion that if teachers push the boundaries, shatter the accepted narratives, then a post-modern framework to schooling can be achieved (Kincheloe et al., 1992). Teachers must become what Kincheloe et al. (1992) refer to as “teachers who work against the grain” (p. 34). So, with this in mind, I set about designing a curriculum package that would enable me to “teach against the grain” (Simon, 1992).

#### ***3.3.4 Anti-racist /multicultural lens***

So far, this discussion has focused on how teachers can work towards building a democratic curriculum that will engage students and provide them with a voice that will

begin to transform their learning. Through the creation of critical-democratic learners, teachers will be helping their students participate in a democratic society. The “non-engaged” students perceived by many teachers as the ones who are not succeeding or the ones with behavioural problems (the ones that tend to create a problem for the teacher in a standards based classroom), are usually the students who are disengaged for a reason (McMahon & Portelli, 2004). McMahon and Portelli (2004) explain that there has been very little attempt to address the issue of student dispossession, and that it fails to address the “substantive ethical and political issue” arising from student engagement (p. 60). This discussion now lends its focus to looking at literature from a “critical multicultural” stance, that empowered me as a teacher to adapt and reinvent my curriculum in order to challenge the values and beliefs of my students, to help them participate in a democratic society and re-evaluate how I dealt with “disengaged learners”.

“Multicultural education, conceptualised as broad-based school reform, can offer hope for change...[it] permits educators to explore alternatives to a system that leads to failure for too many of its students” (Neito, 1999, p. 2). This optimistic approach towards education by Nieto (1999), paints an optimistic picture of an education system wrought not only with problems but possibilities. This ‘hope’ will take time and dedication for teachers to achieve, it involves them pushing the boundaries and asking questions about the policies that governments implement and these everyday practices that reinforce stereotypes and prejudices among students and teachers alike (Smyth et al., 2008).



Neito (1999) asserts that when multicultural education is limited to “lessons in human relations and sensitivity training, units about ethnic holidays, education in inner-city schools or food festivals,” (p. 1) the ability of the school to develop substantive curriculum change in this area is limited. She further contends that multicultural education must adopt an “antiracist” perspective to forge substantial educational reform (Neito, 1999). Sleeter (2005) describes an example of how “stereotypes about students’ lives outside school substitute for knowledge of their lives” (p. 107). For example, Nougera, an author highlighted in Sleeter’s (2005) text, met with a group of urban high school teachers who “believed that a school improvement project wouldn’t work because ‘the families of their students simply did not value education’ ” (p. 107). This assumption by a group of urban high school teachers, demonstrates how people’s perceptions of others influences the way they view and see the world. Sleeter (2005) goes on to note that, at no time did the teachers consult with the community about what they thought, and the most concerning part of all was, that none of the teachers knew where their students lived. This example further demonstrates how teachers and students’ voices have been silenced by policy makers, to the extent that they “fear” to teach “dangerous topics” that will challenge the status quo (Sleeter, 2005). It is daunting, and does not offer a lot of hope in the realm of anti-racist teaching; unless teachers are pro-active participants in the policy making process.

Fine (cited in Neito, 1999) believes that teachers and schools fear and often refuse to engage in “discussions about racism,” as it “might ‘demoralise’ them,” it is “too dangerous a topic and better left alone” (p. 4). To me, this perspective is very scary; if teachers are not willing to transcend the boundaries of traditional schooling, where Fine (cited in Nieto, 1999) believes that schools are neglecting to cover both the “positive and

the negative aspects of history, the arts, and science,” (p. 4) then the voices of the suppressed will remain even more silent.

In Sleeter’s (2005) text *Un-standardising Curriculum: Multicultural Teaching in the Standards-Based Classroom*, Murrell believes that teachers who learn to construct meaningful learning environments for students from historically oppressed communities, can be described as a “community teacher” (p. 107). Community teachers, in the words of Murrell (cited in Sleeter, 2005), research

the knowledge traditions of the cultures represented among the children, families, and communities he or she serves,’ and then ‘enacts those knowledge traditions as a means of making meaningful connections for or with the children and their families’. A community teacher learns to ‘forge strong connections with children in diverse community settings as they elicit development and achievement in real practice’ (p. 7).

Neito believes that “all students are miseducated to the extent that they receive only a partial and biased education” (p. 8). This idea links well to a discussion that Bigelow (2003) raises about the role of Christopher Columbus in children’s biographies in America. He states that “they teach youngsters to accept the right of white people to rule over people of colour, of powerful nations to dominate weaker nations. And, because the Columbus myth is so pervasive – Columbus’s ‘discovery’ is probably the only historical episode with which all my students are familiar – it inhibits children from developing democratic, multicultural, and anti-racist attitudes” (Bigelow, 2003. p. 89). The recognition by teachers, that there are “multiple histories” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997) other than the history of western civilisation will lead to greater understanding of the past and connection to the present. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) agree with

Bigelow (2003) when they argue that if education accounted for the histories of non-Europeans then

the traditional curricular preoccupation with Europe would expand to a study of non-European cultures. The view of the age of Exploration as an isolated historical event would be replaced by an understanding of the connections between the past and the present... questions generated from critical multiculturalism would fundamentally change what mainstream educators and standardised test makers have labelled 'basic' knowledge about Western civilisation (p. 233).

Nelson and Pang (2001) paint a similar picture to that portrayed by Bigelow (2003) and Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997),

Social studies teachers may communicate to students that the classical music of Mozart and Bach are examples of 'high' culture, whereas blues is less 'developed' musical genre. This image offers a comparison about the role that 'Western history' has played in the development of mainstream curriculum design. Teachers convey, in the visible and the hidden curriculum, sets of values that rest on prejudices, rather than on knowledge (p. 146).

Social Studies teachers in Australia need to work towards dispelling the myths that appear in mainstream education. The idea that "white-centric" notions of colonialism and imperialism are the "right" history, is wrong. Teachers must begin to consider alternative themes in the form of "Learning Challenges" (Westheimer & Kahne, 1998) that break down social injustice. It is because "racism continues to influence the values people hold, the decisions they make, and how they treat each other," (Nelson & Pang, 2001, p. 146) that students find it difficult to transcend this dilemma. In fact, if education continues down the road of neo-liberalism, then the problem will become even more entrenched in the hypocrisy that already dominates the education arena (Down, 1994). Teachers must take an anti-racist, multicultural approach towards challenging ingrained values and beliefs of society, in order to dispel the social

injustice's that exist within education today and move towards the establishment of democratic schooling. The challenge I faced as a teacher, implementing a curriculum that would challenge students' stereotypes and prejudice, would rest on their willingness to accept new ideas in the form of "other histories" and different ways of viewing and seeing the world, in context to the community in which they live.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Authentic learning will need to become the focal point of a teacher's pedagogy in the twenty-first century (Morrell, 2004) if they want to begin to challenge the dominant ideologies present in mainstream classrooms. Implementing a curriculum that considers "other histories" and tackles concepts such as stereotypes and prejudice will help students develop ideals that allow for wider participation in a democratic society (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Bigelow, 2003). This discussion suggests that to increase student participation in a democracy the curriculum they are experiencing at school must be democratic (Goodman & Kuzmic, 1997), and to achieve this, the learning experiences should be derived from democratic ideals of negotiation, egalitarianism and community (Shor, 1996; Theobald & Curtiss, 2000; Fletcher, 2004; Beane, 2005). Teachers recognising that students' past experiences are crucial to the success they experience at school, is central to the aim of this study (Gonzales & Moll, 2002). Through fostering a "critical consciousness" within their students (Shor, 1996; Freire, 200), which takes time (Sleeter, 2005), teachers can pose-problems and allow the students the time and space necessary to consider, discuss and research problems relevant to their lives. For this to be achieved, teachers will need to shift their praxis (Kincheloe et al., 1992; Shor, 1996). They will need to become critical thinkers

themselves. When doing this, as I discovered on my journey, *Spectacular Things Can Happen Along the Way* (Shultz, 2008).

## **CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY**

### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter details the research methodology that underpins this study. It is in four parts. The first part outlines what action research is and how it was used to inform this project. The second part discusses the different types of action research that exist with a justification of why this project is situated within the emancipatory action research framework. The third part discusses ‘how you do’ action research, noting the participants and sources of data that were used to inform this study. The fourth part, details my journey as a teacher-researcher in the classroom context. Outlining what motivated me to change my teaching practice in order to challenge students’ stereotypes and prejudice and the struggles I experienced doing action research and the hope that emerged out of this research to continue with my desire to work for social change.

### **4.1 What is action research?**

As a methodology, action research has had a rough ride (Stout, 2006). Emerging from the “swampy lowlands” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006, p. 17) to become a respectable research methodology used by teachers to improve their work and to improve schools (Hendricks, 2009). Teachers who carry out research and who are interested in the contextual variables at play within their setting and the way this influences the outcomes of their study, will often apply an action research methodology (Hendricks, 2009).

Grundy (1995) uses the metaphor of a “journey” to describe the professional development of practitioners. She defines the aims of action research as “improvement and involvement” (Grundy, 1995, p. 9). Further noting,

those who are actually engaged in the practices are the ones who are also engaged in all facets of the action and the research... it often becomes clear that students can no longer be regarded as passive recipients of learning but are active constructors of the learning environment and the process...action research is a process of change, but not just change for change’s sake; it is change specifically directed towards improvement (Grundy, 1995, p. 9).

In context to the desired outcomes of this study, the action research methodology offered me a way to question my practice in order to improve it. The fact that the action research methodology recognises that students are active participants in the learning process supports the central notions of this study. That, practitioners can challenge their students to consider other points of view, specifically for this study, challenging stereotypes and prejudice held by student’s towards minority groups.

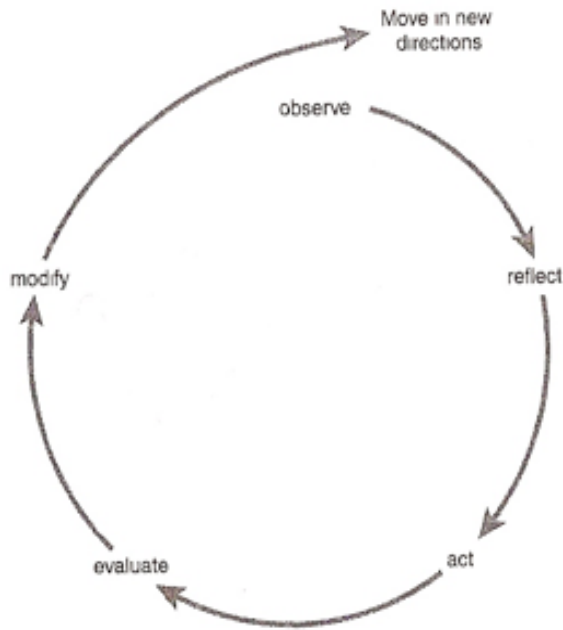
What makes action research important is the desire by the teacher to have “a vision of life in schools where things could and should be otherwise” (Stout, 2006, p. 196). This idea, Stout (2006) suggests, emerges from observations, knowledge and experience by the practitioner for the desire of “seeking one’s own voice, an authentic voice, a voice with which to speak one’s own experience and one’s ability to learn from that experience” (Winter, 1998, p. 54). The ‘voice’ of the teacher becomes a powerful tool that has ability to decentralise knowledge and provide an avenue to teachers and community members in their desire to help others (Winter, 1998). To help them “find their own voices, to encourage them to speak out, to ask questions, to contest

conventions and prescriptions” (Winter, 1998, p. 54). Winter’s (1998) notion of voice aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of this study. That is, in order to get students to use their “authentic voices” to initiate “authentic learning”, both practitioners and students will need to shift their praxis and challenge the dominant culture of schools and communities. This further reinforces what Hendricks (2009) notes about the importance of qualitative studies, “those who are studied are chosen purposively rather than randomly... the context is examined, rather than controlled, and findings are presented in light of the ‘complex inactive systems’ of the lived-in world” (p. 3).

McNiff and Whitehead (2006) present the process of action research as cyclical as outlined in Figure 2 (on the next page). Action research can start anywhere in the cycle, and it should also be noted that the cycle does not end, as indicated by the flow moving in a new direction. There are many models in existence, but they generally follow the same principles, of:

- Identifying a problem;
- Thinking of possible ways to move forward;
- Implementing ones ideas to initiate change;
- Monitoring it through the collection of data (such as reflections and observations); and
- Evaluating the process one has gone through to look for improvement (Grundy, 1982; Grundy, 1995; Tripp, 1995; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006).





(McNiff & Whitehead, 2006, p. 9)

**Figure 2: Action-reflection cycle**

For me, identifying a “problem” in context to the school in which I teach stemmed from my desire to help students think critically about the world in which they live. Central to this was helping students recognise their beliefs and values and then examining them in context to the their community and the wider world. This “problem” was set amidst the backdrop of a state based education system transitioning into a national curriculum, which poses its own implications for this study as well. This links to what Winter (1998) describes as “dialectical analysis” (p. 66), that is,

placing data from a specific situation in a wider social context, looking for tensions and contradictions in the data and considering how these contradictions may both reflect the history of the situation and may also be symptomatic of possible changes in the future” (p. 66).

My central research question focused on ways that I, as both teacher and researcher could adapt and reinvent my curriculum program in order to challenge my students’ values and beliefs. This concern derived from my observations over five years of

teaching and recognising that the students I taught carried prejudice towards other people from different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds as exemplified by the student work samples that appear throughout Chapter Five. The eleven-week program (refer to Appendix One) I subsequently developed became the avenue by which I could examine this problem.

## **4.2 Kinds of action research**

Shirley Grundy (1982), a seminal writer in the field of action research, identifies three different types of action research. The “philosophical stances which underpin the various modes, relate to the source and scope of the guiding ‘idea’ of the project” (Grundy, 1982, p. 23). They are:

### ***4.2.1 Technical***

The central element to this kind of research lies in the design; “it is designed to produce, make or create something” (Grundy, 1982, p. 25). “The aim of this type of action research is more effective and efficient practice, but the ‘idea’ by which the outcome will be measured pre-exists in the mind of the facilitator” (Grundy, 1982, p. 25). This type of action research does not provide a stimulus for change, rather, the teachers / principal researcher will revert back to their former style of teaching prior to their research. In this context the facilitator controls the power of the project (Grundy, 1982).

### ***4.2.2 Practical***

The emphasis of this kind of research is shared between a group of people seeking to “improve practice through the application of the personal wisdom of the participants” (Grundy, 1982, p. 27). It involves the teacher reflecting on their own knowledge to improve, often allowing students flexibility and responsibility in their learning (Grundy, 1982). In the case of reflection, the teacher can be subject to self-deception. Often teacher’s are guided by a facilitator who can aid in the process of self-reflection and reasoning (Grundy, 1982). This type of action research allows groups of teachers and individuals the opportunity to review their practice. Power lies in the individual’s recognition to take action, thus, power resides in the individual (Grundy, 1982).

### ***4.2.3 Emancipatory***

When there are “institutional restrictions” (Grundy, 1982, p. 28) preventing teachers from initiating change, the principles that define emancipatory action research offers teachers ways of instigating change, so, that power relationships within a group context can be shared (Grundy, 1982). Ultimately, the purpose of emancipatory action research it to provide teachers with a way of transcending the traditional teaching environment in order to change it. Grundy (1982) explains, “institutional restrictions impinge upon educational practice so that the individual or group, while operating prudently and professionally to initiate change, is powerless to do so because of the strength of the system” (p. 28). As the name suggests, this kind of action research aims to emancipate participants from the “dictates of compulsions of tradition, habit, coercion, as well as self-deception” (Grundy, 1982, p. 28). Habermas (cited in Carr & Kemmis, 1986) refers to this as “critical social science” as distinguished from “critical theory” (p. 144).

Critical social science is referred to as “a social process that combines collaboration in the process of critique with the political determination to act to overcome contradictions in the rationality and justice of social action and social institutions” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 144).

Habermas (cited in Grundy, 1982; Carr & Kemmis, 1986) has developed a “theoretical model for understanding emancipatory action research” (p. 28). Grundy (1982) describes the three phases as:

1. The formation and extension of critical theorems;
2. The organisation of processes of enlightenment; and
3. The selection of appropriate strategies.

Not only does a teacher need to have “critical intent” (Grundy, 1982, p. 28), but a “social consciousness” in order to establish “the extent to which the social milieu impedes the fostering of ‘the good’ ” (Grundy, 1982, p. 28). Grundy (1982) furthers her argument by noting, “this mode of action research... is informed by theory and often it is confronted with theory that provides the initiative to undertake action research” (p. 28).

The work of Carr and Kemmis (1986) also highlights the point made by Grundy (1982), that

action research not only creates conditions under which practitioners can identify aspects of institutional life which frustrate rational change; it also offers a theoretical account on why these constraints on rational change should be

overcome, by offering and enacting an emancipatory theory in the form of the theory by which action research itself is justified (p. 198).

The result gained from this experience, that is, reflecting on theory, is knowledge that is personal (Grundy, 1982). Grundy (1982) asserts that “knowledge, personalised in this way can empower the individual to act because it brings with it responsibility, since it is now ‘owned’ ” (p. 29). Grundy surmises, “critical intent is the disposition which enables the development of critical theorems through the interaction of ‘theory’ with ‘personal judgment’ by the processes of reflection” (p. 29).

This study draws from the philosophy of emancipatory action research. The situation of the state education system, evolving into a national based system, will place increasing demands on teachers to perform to expected targets and standards. My concern for my students stemmed from my desire to challenge their current place in the world with particular attention being paid to the prejudices and stereotypes student’s hold, whilst working within the confines of the system. As a teacher-researcher, I was driven by the desire to challenge my students’ stereotypes and prejudice towards minority groups by asking them to critically analyse the community and world in which they live. The study draws on the student work samples and my reflective writings to document how changes occurred or did not occur in the their learning over an eleven week period.

### **4.3 Doing action research**

Barrett and Whitehead (cited in Water-Adams, 2006) raise six important questions teachers need to ask themselves when undertaking action research:

1. What is your concern?
2. Why are you concerned?
3. What do you think you could do about it?
4. What kind of evidence could you collect to help you make some judgement about what is happening?
5. How would you collect such evidence?
6. How would you check that your judgement about what has happened is reasonable, fair and accurate? (section 3, para 1)

These questions helped me narrow down my research project and identify a problem that, as a teacher, I might be able to change. Many of the students I have taught, have held prejudices and stereotypes toward people of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. The school in which I teach is very “white” and as Australia is a multicultural community, my concern for my student’s stemmed from the fact that they soon would be adults faced with making decisions in the “real world”. The stereotypes and prejudices they held, I believed, would be detrimental for them when negotiating their place in the world. This concern was predominantly the main reason driving my desire for curriculum change.

Futhermore, I was concerned about the students’ lack of understanding of Australia’s complex immigration history, because the West Australian *Curriculum Framework*, which was used to develop the program “Australian Immigration”, notes that the ideas and values students have today have been influenced by the actions and values of those who came before them (Curriculum Council, 1998). So, when they had not heard of the “White Australia Policy” or Immigration Restriction Act I began to ask myself questions. How had these students come through ten years of schooling without this understanding, and, as a teacher, what could I do to change it? These two questions led

me to design and implement a curriculum that sought to break down the barriers that were impinging on their 'right' to form and make opinions that were their own. So, that they could experience a curriculum that put their learning, embedded in their world, center stage, in order for authentic learning to take place.

#### **4.3.1 Participants**

The participants of this study consisted of one class of twenty-five Year Ten Society and Environment students and myself, as teacher-researcher. In the school where the study took place, Year Ten is the first year of Senior School for students and, at the time of this study it was compulsory for students to undertake studies in this Learning Area. Now that the Australian Curriculum has begun implementation, Society and Environment essentially does not exist, the disciplines within the Learning Area have become stand-alone subjects; the History curriculum is an example of this (ACARA, 2012 b). My desire for the students once they had completed the curriculum package I designed, was for them to be more aware of Australia's immigration history and become more active participants in their community. So, that they would recognise how detrimental it can be to hold prejudices and stereotypes towards people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds.

#### ***4.3.2 Duration of the study***

Essentially the plan was to conduct the project over one semester (which equated to 20 weeks). However, this did not happen due to the restraints of disciplines that need to be covered in one calendar year. Normally the subjects of History, Geography, Economics and Politics and Law would need to be taught over the course of a year. So, the project

was designed for an eleven-week period in one term. Throughout any normal week, I had four hours of contact time with the students in the classroom. Patton (2002) explains “fieldwork in basic and applied social science aims to unveil the interwoven complexities of social life – actual, perceived, constructed and analysed. Such studies take a long time” (p. 273). Although I would of liked to have had one semester to undertake this project, to allow it to develop more in order to explore student stereotypes and prejudices in greater depth, I could not. This is one of the struggles I faced as a teacher and is elaborated on in Chapter Five.

#### ***4.3.3 Ethical and credibility considerations***

To ensure the credibility of my research the following components were adopted and used throughout the research process:

a) Murdoch University Consent

The Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee granted ‘Outright Approval’ for this study to be conducted in November 2009. The research was conducted according to the standards of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007) and Murdoch University policies.

b) Principal Informed Consent

The Principal of the school where the research was conducted was provided with an information letter outlining the purpose of the project and a consent form to sign prior to the commencement of this study. Approval was gained in January 2010 to conduct this research.



#### c) Parent/Student Informed Consent

Parents and students were provided with a letter outlining the purpose and nature of the research being conducted within the normal school program. All information collected from the students has remained confidential, and the students have not been identified by name, pseudonyms were used to protect students throughout the thesis.

#### ***4.3.3.1 My positionality***

This study was conducted out of the growing concerns I had for the students that I taught. My observations led me to believe that these students did not understand the prejudice and stereotypes they carried with them towards people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. In stating this, it is important for me to be aware of my own positionality as both a teacher-researcher conducting a self-study, which is elaborated on in section 4.3.4.1, and a white teacher, which is the focus of this section. I come from a background of privilege, and in a sense, so do the students that I teach, attending a private low fee paying Independent School in a predominantly Anglo-celtic community. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) articulate in *Changing Multiculturalism*, “that since our understanding of the world and ourselves is socially constructed, we must devote special attention to the differing ways individuals from diverse social backgrounds construct knowledge and make meaning” (p. 206). Through linking the curriculum to the lives of the students, and asking them for their opinions and voices on issues that directly affected them, namely issues related to race, I hoped to create a space that would enable them the opportunity to construct their own meaning of reality, as opposed to believe what they see through media outlets. Much like Anzaldua (as cited in

Aveling, 2004) I wanted my students to confront this issue, to become "...uncomfortable in [our] racism" (p. 3).

As Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) state, "even though no one at this point really knows what whiteness is, most observers agree that it is intimately involved with issues of power and power differences between white and non-white people." (p. 207). As demonstrated from the student work samples, which appear throughout Chapter Five, many of the students I taught when asked about significant events in Australia's past, identified events from Australia's colonial past, as opposed to identifying "other" histories, such as those of Aboriginal Australians. As Giroux (as cited in Aveling, 2004) explains, "analysing whiteness opens a theoretical space for teachers and students to articulate how their own racial identities have been shaped within a broader racist culture and what responsibilities they might assume for living in a present in which Whites are accorded privileges and opportunities" (p. 2). For my students to understand where they come from, and how their identity is constructed and shaped by the community in which they live, I needed to engage my students in "discussions about racism" (Neito, 1999, p. 4). As affirmed by Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) in my endeavour to help students identify with their community, and ultimately Australia's immigration history, I needed to get my students to "see themselves through the eyes of blacks, Latinos, Asians and indigenous peoples" so they could "begin to move away from the conservative constructions of the dominant culture." (p. 208).

It is with this in mind that I chose to implement a critical democratic curriculum that used different methods of teaching and learning to develop authentic learning

experiences that asked students to question the world around them and recognise that their own identity is socially and culturally constructed.

#### ***4.3.4 Sources of data***

##### ***4.3.4.1 Participant observation***

Participant observation was one of the primary methods used for gathering data, especially the reflections recorded in my journal. As teacher-researcher I was the person delivering the curriculum package to the students. Therefore, I was a part of the phenomena under study. Patton (2002) discusses five advantages of having direct personal contact with the phenomena:

- a) That you are better able to understand and capture context of interaction;
- b) The researcher is getting first hand experience of the setting and the people in it;
- c) That you see things that may routinely escape awareness;
- d) That you learn things that people neglect to mention in an interview; and
- e) That you can draw on personal knowledge throughout the formal interpretation stage (pp. 262 – 264).

As a participant observer I was fully engaged in the experiences of the setting and I was able to observe the reactions my students had to the curriculum package first hand. This enabled me to gain an understanding of the ways in which the students interpreted and approached the content they were introduced to and I was able to see how they applied what they had learnt, in practice. Although there are implications of being both teacher-researcher, it enabled me to witness data that may not have been discovered or known by other researchers (Patton, 2002).

To further explore the concept of a teacher-researchers duties and responsibilities, Bournot-Trites and Belanger (2005) argue that it is much more difficult for teacher-researchers to gain consent than outsiders. “Teacher researchers have a primary obligation to the welfare of their students,” whereas outsiders in the school are not seen as “having control over students” (Bournot-Trites & Belanger, 2005, p. 208). This is the dilemma I faced wanting to conduct a self-study research, involving the students that I teach. However, on a positive note, Ray (as cited in Bournot-Trites and Belanger, 2005) notes “teachers are directly responsible for their actions to their students, to parents, to school administrators, and to school boards” (p. 209). Primarily, as a teacher-researcher, a teachers main priority must be to their students and school communities, as opposed to the benefits of their research (Bournot-Trites & Belanger, 2005, p. 209). In the case of this investigation, all students had to participate in the curriculum that was designed for the classroom; in fact, there were four other teachers who were running the program to varying degrees. They opted not to use the documentary approach or group work, instead using an essay based question to assess student understanding of their research. This study was based on voluntary participation through students allowing me the use of their work samples.

#### ***4.3.4.2 Student work samples***

The student work samples became one of the main artifacts used to examine my research questions. Formative and summative assessment tasks are used as examples to demonstrate how their learning changed or did not change throughout the course of the project. On top of the normal work the students completed, they kept an ongoing

learning journal. My guiding research questions were written to gain an understanding of the students' learning in relation to the "Australian Immigration" curriculum package. In the latter part of the study, students were asked to undertake a five week group research project that required them to complete a research organiser (where all their research questions, note taking and conclusions were kept), a learning journal and a group documentary (this part of the project will be discussed further in Chapter Five, in relation to how the students applied themselves and what they completed).

Daniel Baron (2008), a senior fellow with the National School Reform Faculty (a division of the Harmony Education Centre) writes "my peers helped me look for the strengths in students' work, find the patterns in their responses, and think about things that I might do differently in my teaching..." (p. 67). The students' work that is used for this project became a vital component I used to analyse my teaching practice. As Baron (2008) notes, reflective practice enables a teacher to think about how they would do things differently. Analysing student work is a component of being a "reflective inquirer" (Langer et al., 2003, p. 26), in that the "teachers who continuously inquire into their practice... engage in... transformative learning..." (p. 27). Using the student work samples within this project was critical in order to assess student learning in conjunction with the desired outcomes of this project. Namely, challenging student stereotypes and prejudice.

#### ***4.3.4.3 Fieldwork observations/ Reflective Journal***

Lastly, the reflections I recorded in my journal as a teacher-researcher form a significant piece of data in relation to this study. Specifically, in connection to the progress I

believed the students were making over the course of the eleven-week program and how I responded to what was taking place in the classroom. John Dewey (1910), author of *How We Think*, writes about the process of human thought. He uses the example of Columbus' theory that the world was not flat, that it was in fact round, to emphasise the point he was trying to make about thoughts that resulted in belief. Dewey (1910) noted that "because Columbus did not accept unhesitatingly the current traditional theory, because he doubted and inquired, he arrived at this thought" (p. 6). This notion, that when people critically question ideas, it can lead to one of two conclusions. That, one, the theory was right, or, two, in the words of Dewey (1910) "even if his conclusion had finally turned out wrong, it would have been a different sort of belief from those it antagonize, because it was reached by a different method" (p. 6).

Reflective practice allows teachers to reflect critically on their own practice and arrive at conclusions themselves, rather than relying on what is perceived to be correct by others (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Carr and Kemmis (1986) note that

the self-reflective spiral links reconstruction of the past with construction of a concrete and immediate future through action. And links the discourse of those involved in the action with their practice in the social context. Taken together, these elements of the process create the conditions under which those involved can establish a programme of critical reflection both for the organisation of their own enlightenment and for the organisation of their own collaborative action in educational reform (p. 187).

As a process within the action research spiral itself, reflective practice enables teachers to become agents of social change (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Teachers become aware that their involvement in the 'action' can lead to a programme of "critical reflection" in the hope of contributing towards educational reform (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 187). In the

words of Dewey (1910) “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective practice” (p. 6). Through the process of reflective practice, teachers become “products and producers of history” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 187). The ideas espoused by Dewey in 1910, have only become a phenomena adopted by teachers since the publication of Donald Schon’s important work on reflection in the 1980s (Hendricks, 2009, p. 25).

This project used the process of reflective practice in conjunction with action research to analyse whether or not students’ thoughts and learning processes changed or did not change over the course of an eleven week Society and Environment program that focused on challenging students’ stereotypes and prejudice.

#### **4.4. Thinking critically and theoretically**

To reiterate what has been stated, my primary objective for this project was a desire to challenge the prejudices and stereotypes students held towards people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. When this project was conducted I had been working at the same school for a period of five years and I had noted how “white” the school was. I had also noted the lack of students’ understanding of Australia’s immigration history. As a History teacher, this was deeply concerning to me. I wondered, how the students had come so far in their education without learning critically about Australia’s past in this context? Presently, Australia has a diverse population in terms of people’s ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, 27 per cent of Australia’s population is estimated to be born overseas (ABS, 2103). Whilst the United

Kingdom continues to be Australia's main source of over-seas born residents, migrants from the countries of New Zealand, China, India, Vietnam and Italy are also beginning to form a small percentage of Australia's population (ABS, 2013). I also believe that as Australia's population increases, it will become even more diverse and culturally rich. This dilemma in context to the literature I had been reading on anti-racist and multicultural education (Nelson & Pang, 2001; Singh, 2001; Irving, 2006) reinforced my desire to conduct this research. It empowered me to adapt and re-invent my curriculum in order to challenge their beliefs so that they would become active participants within their community. I believed our system was failing to deliver a democratic education to the students, of which they were entitled, and set about a journey, as one teacher, to change the situation. In the words of Grundy (1982), I had "critical intent" (p. 28).

The first step of this journey was deciding how I should do this. The only solution I considered appropriate was re-writing the Year Ten Society and Environment History program at my school. What resulted was an eleven week program entitled "Australian Immigration" (for a complete guide to the curriculum package refer to Appendix One).

Society and Environment involves the study of societies and the way they live and interact together (Curriculum Council, 1998). This was one of the fundamental Overarching Learning Area Outcomes at the time that this study took place (Curriculum Council, 1998). Taking these two points into consideration, my curriculum package focused on how my students could understand the stories of people from different cultures and the beliefs that existed in Australia towards immigrants. The students' community would become the focal point under which they would conduct a group



investigation based on analysing their own and their community's beliefs, in context to national beliefs about immigrants.

I believed that this project had to be approached through a chronology of events in relation to immigration in Australia. The curriculum package I designed, taking into consideration the eleven-week time frame, started from the time of Australia's first immigration minister, Arthur Calwell in 1946. The chronology followed an introduction to key terms and concepts, namely stereotypes and prejudice. By comparing and contrasting their own values and beliefs in context to their local community, and nationally held perceptions towards immigrants. I hoped that I would be able to challenge the stereotypes and prejudice students in my Year Ten class held towards people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds.

Further reading on the topic "students as researchers" (which was introduced in Chapter Three) provided me with the idea of conducting a research project, where the students focused on researching community values and beliefs and producing a documentary of their findings (Refer to Appendix Two for an overview of the Group Assessment Task). At the school where I work the integration of technology into the classroom environment is considered important.

In Term One 2010 (February – April), the year that I conducted this project, the students in Year Ten did not have one to one laptop access (by this I mean an individual computer that the students' parents leased from the school. Meaning that students were

able to take their laptops home as well). Staff still had to “book” in their required laptop usage time on a booking form they shared with other staff. So, throughout this project the students struggled to gain access to the internet. This was a crucial element built into the curriculum. The building in which I worked housed two banks of fifteen computer on wheels (what I commonly knew as a “COW”). Whilst there were COWs in other buildings, there was still liaison and negotiation that had to occur with other staff members. Accessing the Internet offered students the ability to conduct independent research on the topics we were covering, however, more often than not, this proved not to be the case.

With twenty-five students in the class, a teacher needed both banks of computers for each child to have access to a one on one situation. However, often negotiating the use of both COWs at the same time with another teacher was near impossible. Considering there were also four other Society and Environment classes scheduled on at the same time with the same number of students in each class. With inadequate resources in the school library for Senior School students, staff members had no other choice than to use the Internet as a source of research for their students. The ‘inquiry process’ is the main method that underpins learning in Society and Environment; it forms the process strand Investigation, Communication and Participation in the West Australian Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council, 1998). Embedding this process into curriculum design was essential (Curriculum Council, 1998).

The issue of technology access at my school was not resolved until Term Four 2011, when, finally, all students in the Senior School had access to the one to one laptop

program. The cohort of students I taught in 2010, were the last year group of students to get access to this technology in the Senior School. This situation posed implications to this research project and is elaborated on in Chapter Five.

Research has shown in the past that if you want to challenge students' constructions of reality, you need to make learning relevant to their own lives, their lived experience through a negotiated curriculum (Shor, 1996; Butler, 1998; Gonzales & Moll, 2002; Fletcher, 2004). When I read *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire (2000) I was confronted by what he wrote, particularly his concept on "banking information". He states, "...knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (Freire, 2000, p. 72). This made me question the validity of my teaching. Was I one of those teacher's who 'bestowed' knowledge upon others? Did I 'teach to the test'? Was I a teacher in a system that could not 'escape' the environment of high stakes testing?

I pondered this thought and wondered if I was doing enough to encourage citizenship education in my classroom. What resulted was a step towards challenging myself as a teacher, to develop a program that would challenge the stereotypes and prejudices students held towards people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. The objective of the project was to foster values of democracy and citizenship within my students, so that they would be able to participate as active citizens within their community. So, that the students could become agents of social change, able to use their "authentic voices" (Ellsworth, 1989).

## **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to explain the research methodology that underpins this research project, and to provide a justification for pursuing a critical emancipatory action research approach. Attention has been paid to the journey I experienced as a teacher-researcher with the “critical intention” (Grundy, 1982) of fostering the values of citizenship within my students in order to challenge their values and beliefs, specifically the stereotypes and prejudice’s they held towards people of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. The next chapter details the outcomes of the research, in specific context to the research questions developed. Six themes have been identified and examples from student work and my learning journal have been used to trace the journey I embarked upon.

## **CHAPTER V: IT AIN'T EASY DOING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE CLASSROOM**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I will discuss the journey I embarked on as a teacher-researcher in order to challenge the prejudices and stereotypes students at my school held towards people from different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. Student work samples and pieces of my reflective writings have been interwoven into the story to demonstrate the struggles I faced as a teacher-researcher on this journey. My reflective writings also outline how difficult it is for teachers to encourage and work with other teachers in order to promote a critical democratic curriculum. Six themes have been highlighted that emerged from the student-work samples and my reflective writing – students have misguided representations of the past; students only know what they have been taught; students need to be given the opportunity to voice their opinion; students find it hard to collaborate with their peers; teachers can engage students in a critical democratic curriculum; and, teachers need the time and space to critically reflect on and plan a critical democratic curriculum founded on the principles of social justice - to portray how students' thoughts and learning processes changed or did not change throughout the duration of this study.

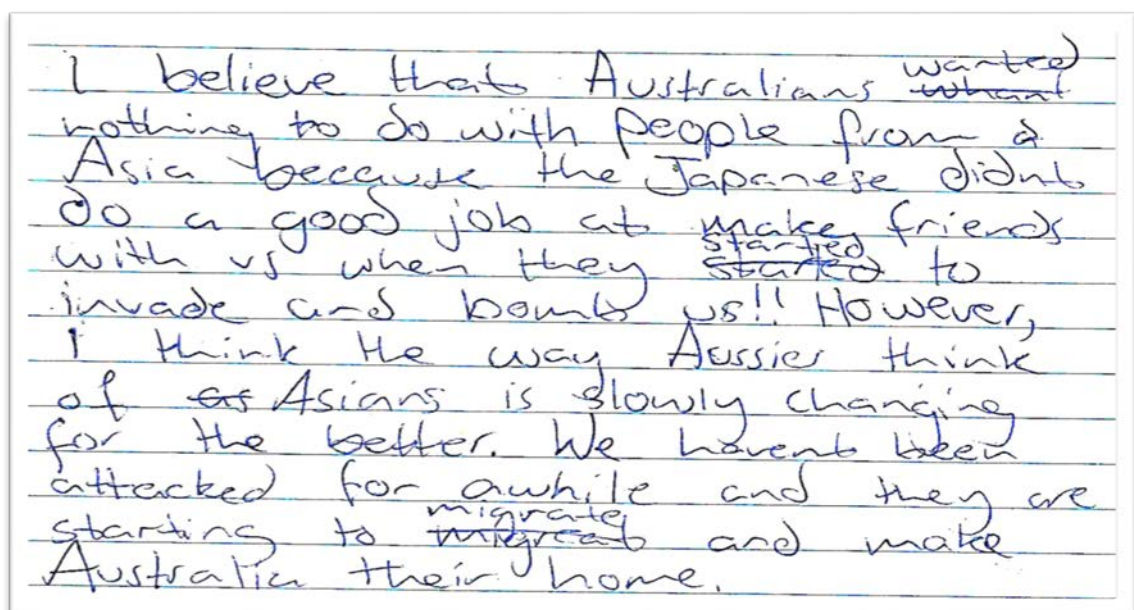
### **5.2 My journey**

The year that I undertook this research project, 2010, was the fifth year that I had been teaching at my current school. I had been involved in the development of the history course for Year Ten since my arrival. The teachers who I worked with, approached the

development of curriculum with enthusiasm for their subject area, so the task of developing curriculum was shared amongst us. After some time, I became weary of teaching a curriculum to students that, to me, had no substance or meaning to their lives. After several years, I began thinking of ways in which I could re-invent the Year Ten curriculum that would offer the students “rewards”. To me, rewards are the moments in the classroom, when you think to yourself, “finally, they understand”. I wanted to pursue an avenue that would make learning relevant to their lives, to the world and community in which they lived. I wanted students to think critically about the world, to question it, and think of ways that they could become active participants within their community. As outlined in Chapter One, I thought of two possible learning ideas to explore. The first was an environmental approach whereby the students would analyse concepts of climate change in context to their own lives. The second avenue was tied closely with their own identity, and that of the community and nation of which they are apart. Challenging students to consider their own values and beliefs towards the concept of multiculturalism became the focus of my research project. As I have stated before in previous chapters, the population of the school and community in which the school is located predominantly Anglo-Celtic (data to support this assertion appears in Section 1.6). So, the idea of encouraging the students to become researchers of their own community by grounding the curriculum within the realm of their lived experiences, became the method by which I would challenge the stereotypes and prejudices’ students held towards people from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

### 5.2.1 Why do students have misguided representations of the past?

I started by considering what would be the most ideal and relevant place in Australia's history to start writing the program. I struggled to identify a time period that I considered appropriate to begin writing the curriculum, as Australia's immigration history is complex. I only had eleven weeks to teach this course and within that period students had to conduct a research investigation, I was limited with the time I had. I decided that the "best" place to start was the period after the Second World War, when Australia's first immigration office was established. However, it was crucial that I also introduce students to the Immigration Restriction Act 1901. I had previously thought that the students would be well aware of this policy which had defined and shaped Australian immigration policy for the last 100 years. However, I was surprised to learn, that students knew very little, carrying with them 'untruths'. David's thoughts below on Australia's relationship with Japan illustrates the general lack of historical understanding of many students. The question became, where do his views come from?

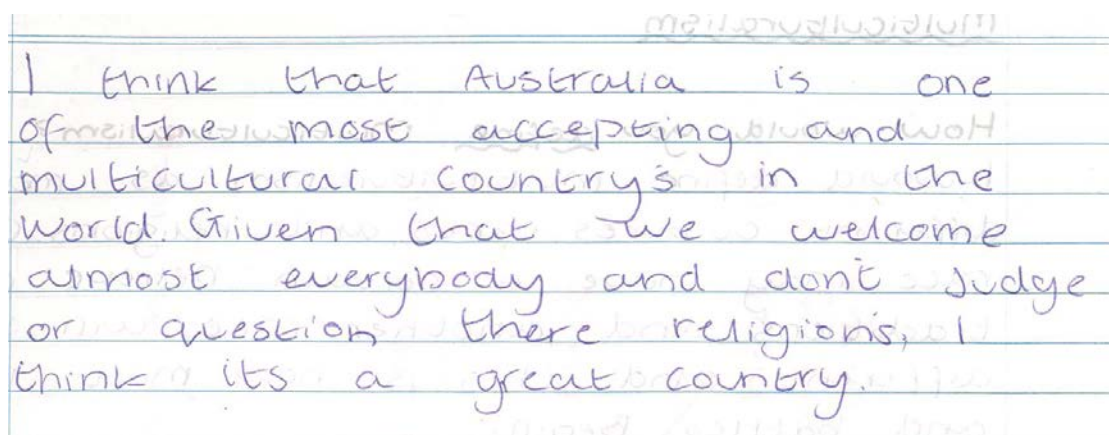


I believe that Australians ~~want~~ <sup>wanted</sup> nothing to do with people from Asia because the Japanese didn't do a good job at ~~make~~ <sup>make</sup> friends with us when they ~~started~~ <sup>started</sup> to invade and bomb us!! However, I think the way Aussies think of ~~as~~ Asians is slowly changing for the better. We haven't been attacked for a while and they are starting to ~~migrate~~ <sup>migrate</sup> and make Australia their home.

This student-work sample, from the first week of the school term, demonstrates how students carry with them, misguided representations of the past. David, in his efforts to portray an ‘anti-racist’ response, would have been unaware that what he actually did write, was racist. As indicated in my journal entry, I struggled to understand how I could engage students in a curriculum program with a topic of which they had limited understanding. I reflect on this issue in my journal:

*Upon questioning the students in a class discussion I found out that they are quite hesitant to speak their minds. I wonder if this will be my hardest challenge when delivering this curriculum to the students? Being faced with adversity before we even begin... How can I get more students involved in classroom discussions? (Journal Entry, 8<sup>th</sup> February, 2010)*

I also discovered, that not only did the students have misguided representations of the past. But, they had developed a perception of this nation as being one of the “most accepting country’s in the world” towards other cultures. Melissa highlighted this in a reflection in her learning journal.



I think that Australia is one of the most accepting and multicultural countries in the world. Given that we welcome almost everybody and don't judge or question their religions, I think it's a great country.



This led me to question and explore the prejudices' my students carried with them. Race is a taboo topic (Tatum, 1992; Kroll, 2008) and, as Tatum (1992) notes when she writes about the personal experiences of College students she has taught, "when asked to reflect on their earliest race-related memories and the feelings associated with them, both White students and students of colour often report feelings of confusion, anxiety, and/or fear" (p. 5). Kroll (2008) furthers this argument, "often, individuals are unable to see the connections between racial, class and gender discrimination and economic power because our ideology on social equality creates a climate of denial around documented inequalities" (p. 32). By designing a curriculum that, in Smyth's (2004) words "interrupts the issues of power" (p. 23), I sought to reveal the values and beliefs entrenched in my classroom, to externalise the stereotypes and prejudices my students held. I wanted my students to transcend the "power/knowledge nexus" (Kroll, 2008, p. 32) in order to become active participants in their own community. I did not want to 're-invent the wheel' and carry on teaching a curriculum "with the presence of only dominant stories" (Tupper, 2008, p. 82). Drawing on Tupper (2008) I did not want "to create a curriculum that disguises or distorts the realities of racism and sexism [which] is yet again to privilege the vantage point of dominant (White) students who rarely experience racial discrimination, who remain unaware of the privilege they carry" (p. 82).

David, unaware of the privilege he carries, attempted to justify his prejudice by adding in "I think the ways Aussies think of Asians is slowly changing for the better". Melissa, believed that Australia was one of the most accepting countries in the world, where people do not judge or question other people's religion.

My ultimate desire for this curriculum was to introduce students to “counter narratives” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997), so that the perceptions displayed by students such as David and Melissa can be challenged. Students have been subject to ‘multiple histories’ (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997) that neglect to cover issues of ‘sensitivity’ (Neito, 1999). This became an important issue for me to explore. I wanted to understand how my students gained views such as the ones demonstrated by David and Melissa in the work samples above. Two questions I pondered in context to the views expressed by David and Melissa were:

1. Does a family’s cultural capital contribute towards these misguided representations? and,
2. Has the portrayal of ‘dominant histories’ through the curriculum resulted in the reproduction of hegemonic narratives and how does this link to a person’s cultural capital?

#### ***5.2.1.1 Thinking critically***

Firstly, I would like to grapple with the idea of how social class could be one of the reasons why my students carry with them misguided representations of the past. I noticed that as the students began to explore concepts of prejudice and stereotypes that their perceptions, demonstrated in earlier work samples (such as David and Melissa), began to change. Three weeks in to the term, Sophia, wrote the following reflection in her learning journal.

Australians perceptions on Asians' is negative and often incorrect. They stereotype Asians as second class inferior.

Sophia has concluded that the perceptions Australian's have towards Asian's is in fact negative, not accepting as Melissa had previously portrayed. Melissa's perceptions also changed. Melissa's reflection on learning not to judge people on the way they look, instead "you might actually have to go to the place before you can judge," (see work sample below) demonstrates that when given the opportunity to explore concepts of stereotypes and prejudice (multiple histories), that teachers can provide students with the opportunities to challenge the dominant histories they have been taught.

This task reveals that you can't judge on what you see immediately, you might have to actually go to the place before you can judge, you have to consider the more important things about the country.

Returning to David's work, from section 5.2.1, we can begin to see how a person's social class and background can affect the type of education a student receives.

The notion of a socially just education has become blurred in recent years. For instance, in the United Kingdom, Lauder and Hughes (1999) explore how social class determines

access to educational markets and ultimately influencing the experience students have. Lauder and Hughes (1999) undertook research into the outcome of two UK families gaining their daughter a placement in the same educational institution, yet, having completely different social backgrounds. Anna is a twelve-year-old teenager whose parents have a middle class background and want her to attend Sheppard High, a single-sex state school located within a middle class suburb. Patricia is another twelve-year old whose parents have a working class background and want her to attend the same state high school. For both girls the school is not located within their zone, and gaining access to the school requires an application and interview. In the end, Anna gained a place and Patricia did not. The point being made by Lauder and Hughes (1999) in the analysis of the situation is simply that it highlights the positioning of people in relation to ‘education markets’ and their access to and knowledge of how the system works. I reflected on this in my journal:

*The area in which my students live is typical of a “working class” background. I have been struggling to understand how the students I teach, particularly this class, have developed misguided representations of the past. Can the type of education a child receive impact on the perceptions they develop about the past? What else would affect the stereotypes and prejudice that students develop?*  
(Journal entry, 15<sup>th</sup> February 2010)

The arguments raised by Lauder and Hughes (1999) find resonance in the Australian context through a statement made by Smyth (1994),

Gone will be the universal, equitably resourced, quality public education, and in its place will be a variety of franchised stand alone institutions, competing against one another for students and shrinking resources. What the so-called “consumers” of education will get, will depend even more than in the past, on a capacity to pay. (p. 2)

In this situation presented by Smyth (1994) above, middle class citizens are more than likely to gain access to better education, as they have the knowledge of 'how to work the system' and are financially 'better-off than people from a working class backgrounds.

The arguments raised by Lauder and Hughes (1999) and Smyth (1994) on social class and access to educational markets link to the discussion on why students form misguided representations of the past because it demonstrates that their access to knowledge can be different, and this may have an affect on the type of history curriculum they are subject to, being (in the cases I have presented) the 'dominant narratives' that reproduce the prevailing (white) history (Lea & Sims, 2008).

The other point I considered necessary to explore in conext to Melissa and David's views expressed in section 5.2.1, is why dominant histories are reinforced through the curriculum and how it relates to a person/families cultural capital? I pondered on this thought in my journal.

*This is my eight-year of teaching and my fifth year of teaching at this school. It has always amazed me how 'protected' from world issues and even historical understanding some/most of the students at this school are. It is with this 'challenge' in mind that I embark on this action research journey. I eagerly seek to create a shared understanding within my students of the struggles Australia has faced, as well as their own community, to bring about change towards racial prejudice and discrimination. (Journal entry, 13<sup>th</sup> February 2010)*

Now having the chance to digest this reflection, I realise that it was not so much the students being ‘protected’ that was the main dilemma I faced. Relating this experience to the literature has made me realise that the students had failed to be given the opportunity to connect with diverse and multiple understandings of the past and had only been subject to the dominant narratives. An argument raised by Fernandez-Balboa (cited in Kincheloe, 2008) is of particular interest to this study. He highlights how the first step to empowering people, is to help them realise that “... their status is due, to a great extent, to systemic forces (e.g. institutional meritocracy) designed to keep them ignorant and resigned” (Fernandez-Balboa, cited in Kincheloe, 2008, p. 110). Kincheloe (2008) writes, “my students become more adept critical analysts when they understand the ways cultural capital is deployed to keep the marginalized in a subordinate position and the privileged in a dominant one” (p. 110). This is connected to my previous point on why social class can determine the type of education one receives because if the power structures in society are reinforced through the curriculum, how can students possibly develop an understanding of multiple histories when the status quo is reproduced? Perhaps this is one of the contributing factors as to why my students carry with them misguided representations of the past.

The next section will explore, in more detail, the ways in which a teacher can strive to interrupt the issues of hegemony and begin to teach students about the multiple histories that exist, so that students are able to form their own opinions on the past, rather than the ones pre-imposed on them through the curriculum. Because, as it has been demonstrated by Melissa and Sophia, if you give a student the opportunity to learn this, then they can form their own views of the past.

### ***5.2.2 How can you challenge students when they only know what they are taught, or not taught?***

The first week of the school term was spent introducing students to the central concepts of the course: prejudice, racism and stereotypes. These key ideas would become essential for the students to consider and reflect on throughout the eleven-week program. By reflecting on these ‘big picture ideas’ in conjunction with their understandings of Australian history to date, I hoped I would challenge their current place in the world and stimulate them to learn more about the world in which they live. Fostering the ideals of democracy and tolerance in them, so that they had the necessary capabilities and sensitivities to participate in a democratic and socially just world.

Mary is one of the students who I taught and below is evidence of one of the activities I completed in the first week. I was trying to gauge an understanding of their knowledge of Australian history and concepts of tolerance that Australian’s hold towards people from different religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. I asked students a series of questions regarding multiculturalism and Australian history.

3. What do you know about Australia's past?  
It was a nice place where convicts were sent. There were lots of indigenous people living without any rules until the convicts took over

4. Some people have different thoughts/opinions on other cultures. Do you think most Australian's are accepting of others?  
Yes, I think they are accepting.

As you can see from Mary's example, she has conveyed her opinions on Australia's past. Her knowledge is clearly limited, which often leads to misunderstandings. There was a common theme throughout the work samples: students had perceived stereotypes and understandings about the country that they lived in, which often resulted in misconceived understandings. As the work sample from Beatrice highlights below, people can only be racist and violent when they are drunk.

I think Australia is a fair country to live in with a good government. The only problem is some people are racist and violent when drunk.

To further support this claim, Cynthia's work sample on the following page only highlights historical events which relate to white history, there is no acknowledgement about the impact white settlement had on Aboriginal people or how Australian's, at the time of the Gold Rushes, perceived Chinese migrants.



3. What do you know about Australia's past?

- Convicts - from England
- Ned Kelly - Kelly gang
- 1901 - foundation year
- Gold Rush - UIC

4. Some people have different thoughts/opinions on other cultures, Do you think most Australians are accepting of others?

Yes I do because children from a young age are taught to accept all people.

The notion that students have developed misconceptions and understandings of the past reminds me of what Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) write about developing 'critical multiculturalism' among students. That is, traditional curriculum whether conservative, liberal or pluralist, "refuses to recognise culture as a terrain of struggle. The relationship between knowledge and power is ignored..." (p. 230). As Mary, Beatrice and Cynthia's work illustrates, students have little or no knowledge of significant historical events and moments, and even less of a critical understanding of their past. By default students are left with an impoverished education because the "dominant narratives," are left unexamined and assumed to be 'right' (Kincheloe et al., 1992).

The conclusions that can be drawn from these pieces of student work, further facilitate the argument that I have made. Students are taught the dominant narratives of the society, believing that the narratives they are taught are ‘right’ (Kincheloe et al., 1992).

### ***5.2.2.1 Thinking critically***

When thinking critically about this issue one of the most difficult challenges I faced was engaging students in critical thinking. In fact, I struggled with this for the entire eleven weeks. The following extract from my journal highlights this struggle. I am reminded of an activity I completed with the students, when teaching the program “Australian Immigration”.

*I read an excerpt of a text out to the students today and quoted a famous Australian... the first Immigration Minister. I read out to the students, “two Wong’s don’t make a White” (Journal entry, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2010).*

The original intention of introducing this quote to the class was to demonstrate, that even political leaders whose job it was to uphold the law, publicly announced their own prejudices to society. The journal entry continues,

*Most of the students laughed. I wonder why they think this is funny? Were they thinking at all when I said this? Obviously stereotypes are so far entrenched in our society that students find them funny. Is it to do with their lack of education, or the mono-cultural community of which they are apart? (Journal entry, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2010)*

Sammel and Martin (2008) explore the impact that the new accreditation standards for teachers in Queensland has had on “professional praxis in relation to antiracist and

critical multicultural pedagogy” (p. 85). They note that, “such expressions of race and racism have historically flickered in and out of visibility on the national scene – as they are anchored firmly in White normativity – which has remained a relatively stable category in relation to successive waves of highly politicised and radicalised “others” who have been held up for political and cultural scrutiny” (p. 88).

Returning to Mary’s work sample, it becomes clear that teachers need to create learning spaces for students that allow them to question their own understanding of the past, so that they are able to form their own opinions on issues such as racism and stereotypes. Sammel and Martin (2008) believe that teachers need to recode the curriculum in order to engage students in “multiple social practices that promote a shared understanding of civic identity” (Sammel & Martin, 2008, p. 88).

This year, 2012, marked the twentieth anniversary of the Mabo decision in Australia. This decision had a profound impact on Aboriginal identity in Australia. If this event is not evidence enough of the need for the curriculum to change in order to encourage students to become what Kincheloe et al. (1992) refer to as “post-formal thinkers” (p. 30), then there are serious problems that need to be redressed in our education system. Teachers need to be proactive, in challenging the dominant discourses that children are subjected to, and teach a curriculum that challenges their students to think critically (Murrell, cited in Sleeter, 2005). Otherwise our students end up forming narratives that neglect to take into consideration the whole story. For example, Mary believes that Australia was a “nice place where convicts were sent” and where the indigenous people “lived without any rules”. To address these partial and incomplete stories, Shor (1992)

believes “an academic subject can become a research project where students judge different versions of history instead of absorbing only an official story” (p. 177).

In order to develop my students a “post-formal thinkers” (Kincheloe, 1992) I tried to encourage them to write down their own questions that would enable them to gain an understanding of the topics they were investigating in groups. Not only did I struggle to engage students with independent thinking, but they also struggled to pose questions and find appropriate answers. Jenny wrote the following question for her research:

**Focus Question 3**

Why did WW2 start?

Jenny explained this through broad sweeping generalisations about the Nazi Party and then proceeded to write about displaced persons.

World war two began because of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis because of him being a dictator and people did not like that so yeah.

They came because of poverty and bad people in their own country and they heard how good life is in Australia. Like Asians and like different countries people came

This response, much the same as Mary's and Beatrice's, clearly demonstrates Jenny's limited historical understanding of the period. This further highlights how the students I taught struggled to pose their own questions and independently research them to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. I reflected on this experience in my journal.

*I had the opportunity to sit down with some individual students and ask them about their progress I noticed that many of the students wrote very generic questions, and struggled to engage with the question critically. I wonder why this is so? (Journal entry, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2010)*

The question for me then became, how does a teacher begin to empower their students so that they have the skills necessary to participate in a democratic society? This idea is explored in the next section.

### ***5.2.3 How can teachers provide students with the opportunity to voice their opinion and not feel threatened?***

After the first week of exploring concepts, students were asked to do some reflective writing. The reflective writing process became an important component of the curriculum, as it enabled me to see what the students were thinking and whether or not their thoughts and learning processes changed or did not change over the course of the term. I was really surprised by the honesty with which the students approached these reflections. Simon and Sarah approached a reflective question I posed to them with brute honesty. As a teacher, I was shocked by these two replies in particular. As the course of the eleven week project progressed I came to realise how naïve and prejudiced the students I taught were. Simon explains how he believes that when a person tells a joke

about an Indigenous Australian, that it is funny and it does not have an embedded message.

4. Do you tell racist jokes? Why do we think they are funny? Can they have a serious message?

I do sometimes, when were having a joke tournament I would say a joke that would involve an aboriginal. I think they are funny when the person tells it is funny. No they don't have a serious message.

Sarah was unsure at first how she should reply to this question. In the end, she answered truthfully, and, like Simon, she believed that there are no underlying messages in jokes, that they are simply “just a joke”.

4. Do you tell racist jokes? Why do we think they are funny? Can they have a serious message?

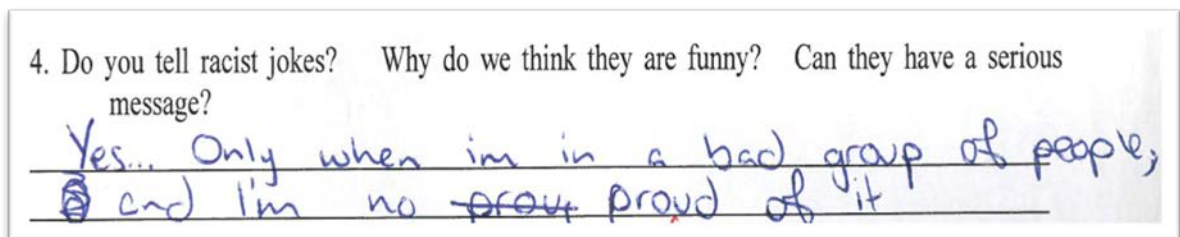
No, sometimes ~~the~~ Yes. Most the time its just a joke and you dont take it seriously.

This activity, more than any other, made me realise that these students had not been taught to think critically, not been taught to question the world. I reflected on this experience in my journal, finding that I only came up with more questions than answers.

*I am angry, depressed and annoyed at the same time. I have been reading through some of the reflective pieces of writing students have been completing. Are they really that naïve? What has made students think that if they tell a joke, it cannot hurt someone? I am reminded of a saying ‘sticks and stones may breaks my bones, but names will never hurt me.’ Is this the culture in which students are*

*brought up? Is it impacting on the way they think? Is it the education system failing them? Is it their age? I seem to be coming up with more questions than solutions. (Journal entry, 8 February 2010)*

I only came across one student who took an empathetic approach towards this question. It was David. He seemed to be engaging with the question critically and thinking about the wider impact that it had.



He acknowledged that his peers influenced his behaviour. It was students such as David, who were my 'glimmers of hope'. It was the students such as David, in which I was able to observe changes in students' thoughts and learning processes throughout the course of the eleven-week program. I thought more about this issue and wondered how I could get the students to imagine what life was like for an immigrant travelling to a new country. I thought that a role-play activity would situate students in the right frame of mind to critically think about this issue. I wrote a short paragraph in my journal entry about this activity.

*We did a role-play exercise in class. Students assumed the identity of different migrants coming to Australia. They were given an information sheet containing the background of the person whom they were role-playing, and they were tasked with interacting with other 'migrants'. Following the activity we had a class discussion, it seemed to me that students were beginning to understand what it would be like as a migrant coming to a new country and how hard it was for*

*them, to leave behind everything they knew, so that they may have a better life.*

*(Journal entry, 8<sup>th</sup> February 2010)*

By providing students with an avenue to experience what it would be like coming to Australia from a different country, I hoped to open up a space for students to voice their opinions and learn about different narratives. Sleeter (2005) believes the more standardised the curriculum, the more teachers cut themselves off from their students. Sleeter (2005) quotes Christi, a teacher of Latino students in the USA, “once they knew I was committed to hearing what they really had to say, and I wasn’t going to get down on them, I wasn’t going to grade them down, then they really started opening up” (p. 124). If teachers are able to provide the spaces for students to voice their opinion and experience a “culturally relevant curriculum...” then it is demonstrative that there is more to “...schooling than getting the one right answer” (Sleeter, 2005, p. 125).

George’s reflection on the activity demonstrates how the students were beginning to think about the reason why migrants, after the Second World War, moved to other countries.



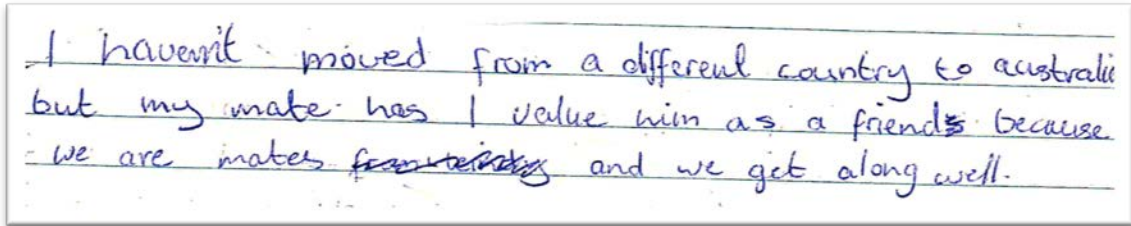
~~Chris~~ I had Chris his family moved from the Ukraine after world war II ... his father's town was invaded by Russian communists under Stalin. They would be starved of food if they didn't follow orders. They were not allowed to speak native language or go to their church.

German Nazis invaded after Russians and sent Chris's father to work in Germany.

Chris knows all the dances, symbols, songs, and ceremonies from the Ukraine.

People move to different countries to get away from the fighting and they like the country or just for work purposes and ~~better~~ better education.

George was role-playing 'Chris' a Ukrainian man who had experienced life in the Ukraine under Stalin, and then occupied by the Nazis during World War Two. George provides background on Chris's experiences and the reasons he came to Australia. This activity, more than others, acted as a catalyst for getting students to understand migrant experiences. This activity got students moving around the classroom, it got them interacting with others to determine for themselves the reasons why people move to new countries. For George, a student who has not experienced this, it taught him to reflect critically, and relate it to experiences relevant to his own life.



I haven't moved from a different country to Australia but my mate has I value him as a friend because we are mates ~~from~~ and we get along well.

To George his “mates” are important to him, and his “mate” had moved from a different country. George “values him as a friend”. This activity proved to me, that if I made learning “messy” (Beane, 2005) it created a space that enabled George to make connections to his own life.

#### ***5.2.3.1 Thinking critically***

When introducing this curriculum package to the students it became necessary to adapt my teaching ideas and methods for the students as the course progressed in order to make learning more purposeful for them. Shultz (2008) believes teachers must approach education with authenticity and purpose. A curriculum that integrates different ideas, issues and subjects will lose its “compartmentalisation” (Shultz, 2008, p. 136). He continues further, “if a teacher listens to and follows students’ needs, the curriculum cannot only be created by the students but also can subsequently be of and therefore, for them” (Shultz, 2008, p. 137). Democracy, according to Beane (2005), is messy,

classrooms where teachers and students plan together, where projects are almost always underway, where new questions and problems are constantly arising, and where small and large groups are frequently in discussion often seem noisy, cluttered and even chaotic... the reason, of course, is that democracy is a “messy” business... it takes more time (p. 122).

I believed that by providing the avenues for students to understand migrant experiences, and opening up the spaces for them to have discussions on subjects that are normally

ignored (Sammel & Martin, 2008) that we could work together to build a shared understanding of Australia's past and apply it to their understanding of the world today. I hoped that with more time, students would confront their learning the way George and David did, with honesty and empathy. Teachers need to work with students to help them understand the past from the perspective of all people, not just the dominant narratives that seek to ignore others (Sammel and Martin, 2008).

I am distressed to think what will happen if teachers do not renegotiate the curriculum and work with their students to create the spaces necessary for twenty-first century learning. Sammel and Martin (2008) make reference to this in their paper "*Other-ed*" *Pedagogy: The Praxis of Critical Democratic Education*,

Challenging and transforming dominant structures within the sphere of production requires that we connect the often intensely individual, internal, and imagined quest to renegotiate a new identity to the collective struggles and material interests of oppressed and exploited groups, strata and classes in society. For if we do not engage our students in reflecting on the individual and infrastructural complexities associated with teaching about the "Other" or the reflection of the "ethnic self" within the backdrop of the hegemony of White privilege in Queensland, then they will not understand the complexities of teaching in this century (pp. 98-99).

If teachers are going to teach for democracy then, in the words of Hinchey (2004), teachers need to "decide whether or not to endorse the prevailing vision or to work for change" (p. 115). As I have noted before, the broader landscape has produced a climate of inequality (Smyth, 1994; Rea & Weiner, 1998; Bean & Apple, 1999), and teachers have had ideologies imposed upon them (Gunter, 1997). However, teachers cannot just take a back seat and accept this. Hinchey (2004) notes that "an uncritical acceptance of any means to advance the ends of greater wealth and consumption...harms the well-

being of countless others...” (p. 117). This only goes to emphasise my argument, that teachers cannot accept this, and must raise the silent voices of the students by designing, implementing and teaching a curriculum that centres on social justice, that seeks to break down stereotypes and prejudice.

#### ***5.2.4 Why do students find it hard to collaborate?***

Five weeks into the term, and two weeks into their assessments, I was quite pleased with the progress the students had made. I reflected on this in my journal.

*Students have been working in their groups to plan out their documentaries, ready to begin filming for next week. One group has already taken the initiative and started filming. I thought this showed a lot of enthusiasm... So far they have worked really well in their groups to finish their research (Journal entry, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2010).*

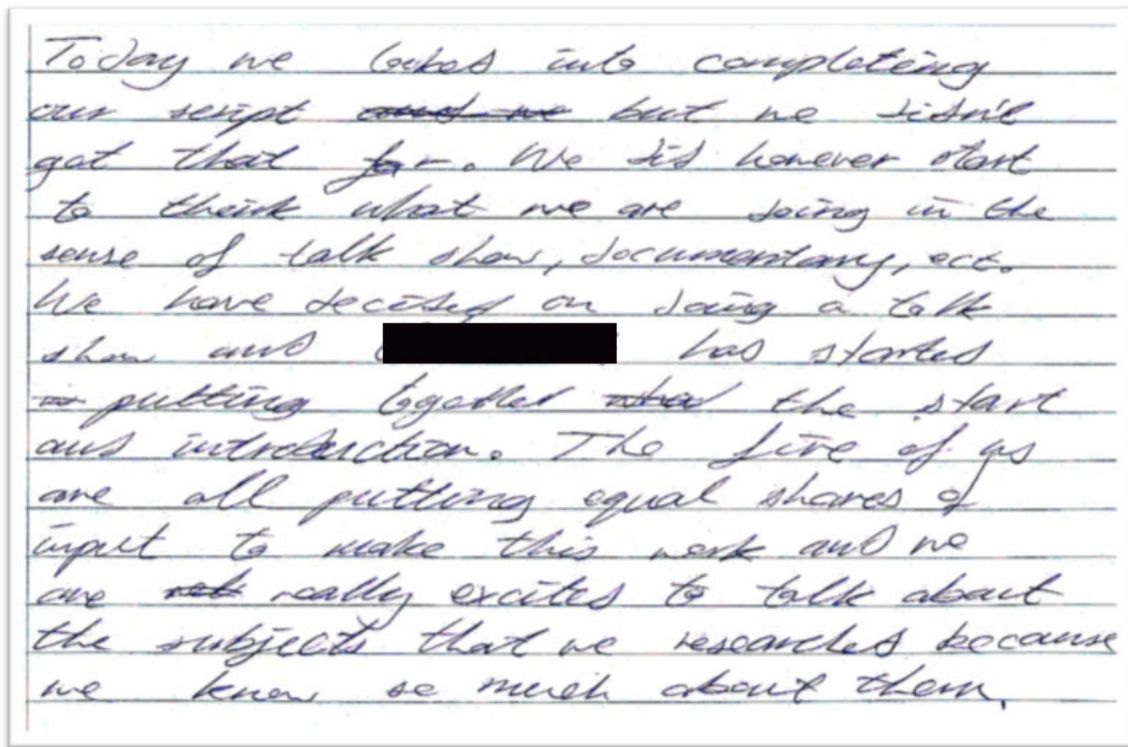
I believe that this is evidence of the ‘glimmers of hope’, which came to define the success I experienced throughout the project. Students were delegating, in their groups, who should individually research a certain time period in Australian history and how it relates to immigration. After this, they then collated their information in their groups. This was broadly based on the instructions laid down in the assessment task and how the students approached it. The other reason behind why I believed it was going well was based on the excitement students were displaying when I demonstrated how to use flip videos to create their documentaries. The following journal entries recognise this.

*I have been teaching the students how to film using flip videos... there are some members in the groups who appear to be comfortable with this technology.*

*Hopefully they will be able to help their peers with this (Journal entry, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2010).*

*Now that students have begun to think about their documentaries and what to include in their projects. It is fantastic to see that many of them want to interview students and teachers about their experiences. (Journal entry, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2010)*

Amy reflected on these experiences in her learning journal. She notes how her group was working really well and how excited they were to start creating their documentary.



Today we looked into completing our script ~~and we~~ but we didn't get that far. We did however start to think what we are doing in the sense of talk show, documentary, etc. We have decided on doing a talk show and [REDACTED] has started ~~in~~ putting together what the start and introduction. The five of us are all putting equal shares of input to make this work and we are ~~not~~ really excited to talk about the subjects that we researched because we knew so much about them.

Almost two weeks after these entries, cracks began to appear in the group dynamics. I became concerned about why the students were not working well together. As indicated in my journal entry from 24<sup>th</sup> March.

*I am quite concerned about the lack of progress students have made from planning to filming. The students do not appear to working together, in the same group, well. I wonder why this has occurred. They had planned their aspect of*

*the assessment individually, now, that they have to work together and get 'messy', it appears as if they do not want to do it. What is stopping them?*  
(Journal entry, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2010)

#### **5.2.4.1 Thinking critically**

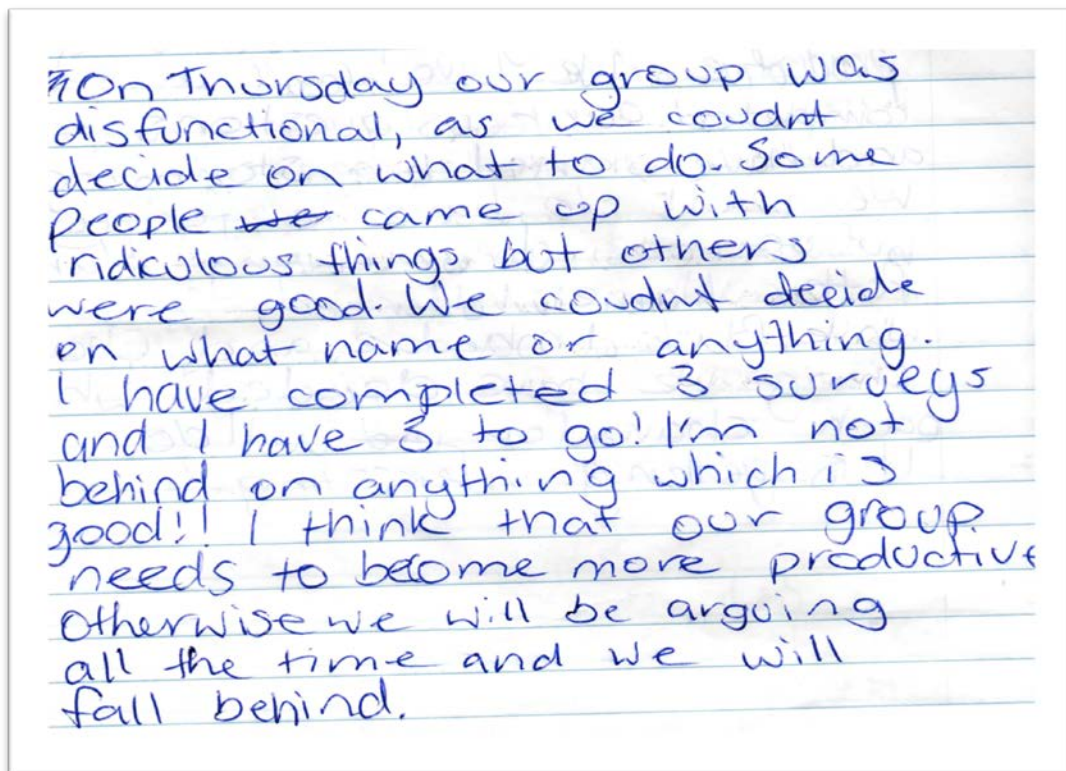
When thinking critically about this theme, I struggled to understand why students found it hard to collaborate, especially considering they were working well together on their planning. Smyth et al. (2008) recognise that whilst “innovative and engaging” (p. 135) curriculum is beneficial, teachers and students do face difficulties. Shor (1992) also explains how “empowering education” enables the creation of “critical dimensions” so students can relate the curriculum to their everyday life (p. 44). However, this is not easy to achieve (Shor, 1992; Smyth et al., 2008). The traditional methods of teaching, which for Freire (2000) involved “banking information”, “expects the students to adapt unilaterally to the standard curriculum” (Shor, 1992, p. 45). This creates obstacles for teachers seeking to implement an “innovative and engaging” curriculum, the obstacles come in the form of “student alienation and resistance” (Smyth et al., 2008, p. 135). In the words of Smyth et al. (2008) “there is considerable unlearning to occur before many working-class students can begin to trust an education system that has historically failed them” (p. 135).

What Shor (1992) and Smyth et al. (2008) describe in the above paragraph, about the difficulties teachers face when trying to create a democratically orientated curriculum, I experienced myself.



*I struggled to connect with some students through this assessment. Aside from one group of boys and two girls from another group who broke away from their peers, who did not want to make a documentary, in order to use technology as the medium by which they would present their assessment, everybody else opted out. They went on to complete an essay on the topic. (Journal entry, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2010)*

Through this research project, I discovered that it was easier for the students to revert to the 'traditional' methods of schooling to complete their assessment task. Students were concerned about the lack of equality in their groups and began to stress out. They became dysfunctional. They felt that their grades would slip as a result. Judy indicates in her learning journal that if her group did not stay on task they would end up arguing and fall behind in their work.



On Thursday our group was dysfunctional, as we couldn't decide on what to do. Some people ~~we~~ came up with ridiculous things but others were good. We couldn't decide on what name or anything. I have completed 3 surveys and I have 3 to go! I'm not behind on anything which is good!! I think that our group needs to become more productive otherwise we will be arguing all the time and we will fall behind.

I tried to reinforce the positiveness of the task they were doing and why it was important. However, the majority of students in the class diverted to writing their own essay on the topic, and neglecting to cover the essential elements of the task I was trying to achieve. The option to complete an essay was introduced to the students as an alternative task to completing the documentary, when I came to realise that individuals could not cope with the task of working democratically in groups.

I now realise that this situation could not have been avoided. It is one of the struggles a teacher, striving to teach for social justice, will face in their classroom. Sleeter (2005) notes that “pressure to follow curriculum standards and textbooks reverses efforts that some teachers and schools have made to develop culturally and linguistically relevant programs that work for their students” (p. 179). In an arena fuelled by standardisation, how can one teacher make a difference? It was evident to me that the four boys and two girls who had followed through with their documentaries, had incorporated different perspectives from community members into their work, that they were making the ‘big picture’ connection. They became my ‘glimmers of hope’. How can students acculturate to this method of teaching without experiencing it? If I managed to reach six of my twenty-five students, one might say this was a success? Beane (2005) writes in *A Reason to Teach: Creating Classrooms of Dignity and Hope* that “I suspect there is one crucial reason why many people, educators included, criticise and resist the idea of teaching the democratic way. They have never experienced it” (p. 130). I am inspired to think, that if I keep teaching for social justice, keep pushing the boundaries, that I will eventually inspire others to struggle through the “political and procedural barriers”, so that they too can “move toward the democratic way” (Beane, 2005, p. 130).



McMahon and Portelli (2004) offer three definitions of student engagement that is necessary for teachers to consider, as they believe that without such consideration it has the potential to “reproduce the dominant existing views,” which they believe “promotes an exclusionary mentality” (p. 59). One of the ideas was mentioned in Chapter One, however, I feel it is necessary to re-address this in light of the student work samples and discussion that has emerged around student engagement. The three definitions that McMahon and Portelli (2004) address are:

1. The conservative or traditional conception: They believe that this view limits student engagement (McMahon & Portelli, 2004). Noting that “this conception of engagement seems to favour or advantage those students who accept the mainstream functionalist conception of education” (McMahon & Portelli, 2004, p. 64). This view focuses on academic achievement as the goal.
2. The liberal or student orientated conception: This conception moves beyond a traditional “notion” (p. 65). Whilst, they argue, it “...allow[s] for a wider notion of academic work and/or success’ and seeks to incorporate students’ voices,” it still has “...major problems” (McMahon & Portelli, 2004, p. 69). This conception does not consider student engagement in context to “democratic and/or social transformation” (McMahon & Portelli, 2004, p. 69).
3. The Critical democratic conception of engagement: As raised in Chapter One, this notion of student engagement lies in a teachers ability to “critically” engage students. McMahon and Portelli (2004) argue that with a critical democratic perspective the status quo is questioned, and students and teachers begin to transform themselves. Social justice becomes the guiding principle by which students and teachers are liberated to enact action (McMahon & Portelli, 2004).

Empowered to teach for social justice, I sought to engage my students in a critical democratic curriculum. In order to do this, I realised that I had to shift my praxis and begin teaching a democratically orientated curriculum. In light of McMahon and Portelli's (2004) three definitions of student engagement, I believe that the curriculum I developed was attempting to shift from a liberal student orientated approach of conception to one of critical democratic engagement (McMahon & Portelli, 2004). I attempted to do this, by asking the students to question the world in which they live assessing the stereotypes and prejudices within their community towards people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Teachers need to consider these three definitions offered by McMahon and Portelli (2004), so that they can work for change, in order to offer their students a "curriculum of life" (p. 59).

#### ***5.2.5 What does it look like when students engage critically and work collaboratively?***

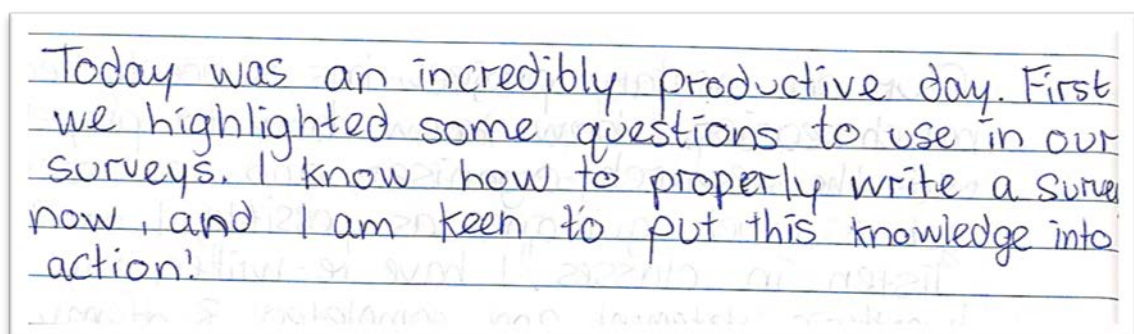
Six out of the twenty-five students completed the documentary along with my observations of several other students critically engaging with the content; these were my 'glimmers of hope'. Although the large majority of the groups became disengaged through the process of collaboration and critical thinking, there were still six students, who managed to complete the task. There were also 'flashpoints' throughout various stages of the curriculum program when other students demonstrated forms of critical thinking and engagement with the curriculum program.

As part of the research project students were asked to compile a class survey. They had to work together to devise questions and then decide together as a class, which ones

would be most appropriate. I believed this was an important activity for students to experience, as it would allow them to think critically about the opinions people in their community hold towards people from different religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. I wrote the following passage in my journal about how the students were working together.

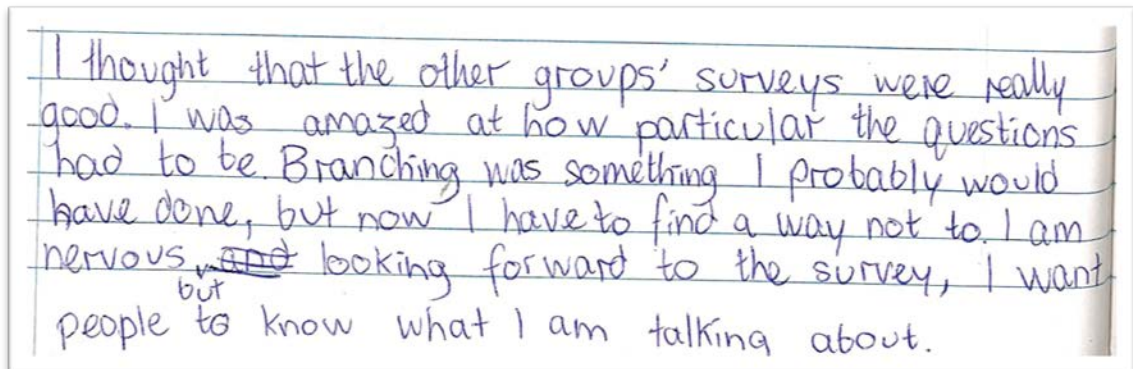
*This week the students spent their time constructing surveys... there have been three lessons this week and students have been working well together, it seems to have gone off with a 'hit'... I demonstrated to the students how to write 'good' survey questions, and from there, they went away in their groups and thought about possible questions they could use in their survey's... I thought this was a great way to introduce students to survey construction. In their groups they created about five questions each. We then had a class discussion and dissected all the questions on the board and decided which ones to use. (Journal entry, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2010)*

The class seemed to work well with small activities, operated and guided by the teacher. The construction of the survey as a class is an example of this. The following reflection completed by Ana in her Learning Journal demonstrates how productive she felt the lesson was.



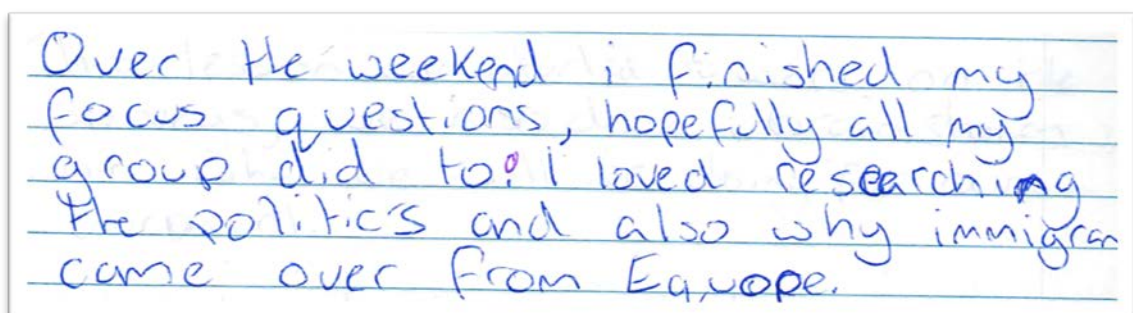
Today was an incredibly productive day. First we highlighted some questions to use in our surveys. I know how to properly write a survey now, and I am keen to put this knowledge into action!

Ana, reflecting critically on the lesson, also noted how difficult it could be to devise survey questions, feeling overwhelmed. However, she wanted to complete it properly and was excited about it.

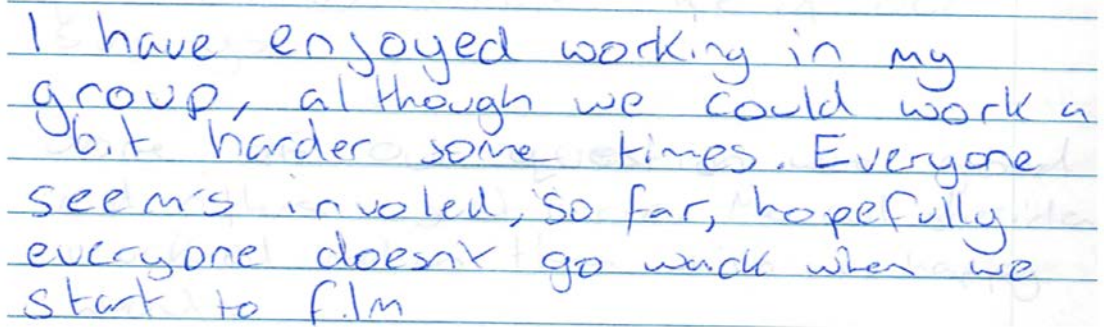
A photograph of a handwritten note on lined paper. The text is written in blue ink and reads: "I thought that the other groups' surveys were really good. I was amazed at how particular the questions had to be. Branching was something I probably would have done, but now I have to find a way not to. I am nervous, ~~and~~ looking forward to the survey, I want people to know what I am talking about." There is a small correction from "and" to "but" above the word "looking".

I thought that the other groups' surveys were really good. I was amazed at how particular the questions had to be. Branching was something I probably would have done, but now I have to find a way not to. I am nervous, ~~and~~ looking forward to the survey, I want people to know what I am talking about.

Other students have demonstrated excitement about learning in a different context. Melissa enjoyed researching and working in her group, although at times difficult, the fact that she thought critically about it, demonstrates that, to an extent, she was hopeful of the outcome.

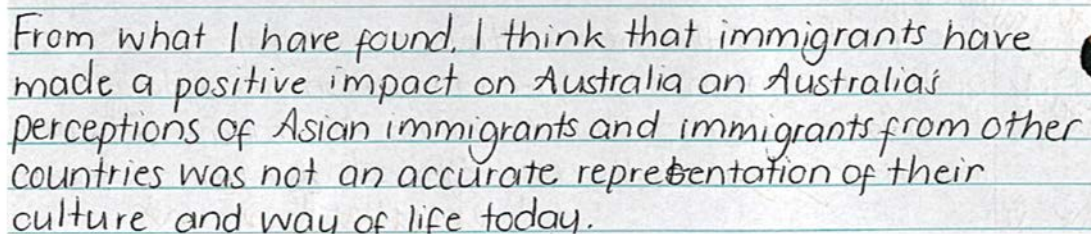
A photograph of a handwritten note on lined paper. The text is written in blue ink and reads: "Over the weekend I finished my focus questions, hopefully all my group did to. I loved researching the politics and also why immigrants came over from Europe."

Over the weekend I finished my focus questions, hopefully all my group did to. I loved researching the politics and also why immigrants came over from Europe.

A photograph of a handwritten note on lined paper. The text is written in blue ink and reads: "I have enjoyed working in my group, although we could work a bit harder some times. Everyone seems involved, so far, hopefully everyone doesn't go wack when we start to film".

I have enjoyed working in my group, although we could work a bit harder some times. Everyone seems involved, so far, hopefully everyone doesn't go wack when we start to film

Lastly, I want to discuss two other 'glimmers of hope'. One, is a piece of writing from Mary, whom, at the beginning of the project displayed misguided representations of Australia's past (refer to section 5.2.2). I was inspired by the reflection she made at the end of the term. Inspired by the changes in her understanding of Australia's past.

A photograph of a handwritten note on lined paper. The text is written in blue ink and reads: "From what I have found, I think that immigrants have made a positive impact on Australia as Australia's perceptions of Asian immigrants and immigrants from other countries was not an accurate representation of their culture and way of life today."

From what I have found, I think that immigrants have made a positive impact on Australia as Australia's perceptions of Asian immigrants and immigrants from other countries was not an accurate representation of their culture and way of life today.

Having previously believed that most Australian's were accepting of others at the start of the term, she acknowledged at the end of the term that immigrants had made a positive impact and that perceptions of Asian immigrants in the past were not accurate. Secondly, the other 'glimmer of hope' came in the form of the six students who followed through with the assessment by creating a documentary. Together they devised research questions and survey questions, researched, negotiated, posed problems and reflected on their learning. I reflected on these six students in my journal.

*I am encouraged to think even though it is only six students who have completed this task properly, they have struggled through it and done an amazing job. The group of boys incorporated opinions of people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in the community, and used it to tell a story of Australia's past. It was a very informative piece of work that demonstrated their enthusiasm for the topic... Then, the two girls, who had broken away from their peers to produce a documentary; they had put a lot of thought into it. (Journal entry, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010)*

#### **5.2.5.1 Thinking critically**

When thinking critically about students engaging critically and working collaboratively together in a classroom context, I approached it from two different perspectives. Firstly, that if a teacher wants to work for change, they need to give students the spaces necessary to pose problems, negotiate and work collaboratively and, secondly, that to transform student learning they need to be taught how to think critically. My goal was to work for change by enabling the students to explore with their peers Australia's immigration history in order to undo the "whiteness" that had been exposed through the student work samples.

Teacher's face many obstacles and barriers when trying to teach for social justice (Bigelow, 2003). For me, it came in the form of students having misguided representations of the past, students "banking information" and only knowing what they are 'taught', not having enough opportunities to voice their opinion in the classroom and the lack of time and space teachers get to critically reflect and plan. Lea and Sims (2008b) write that teachers, especially student-teachers, are prepared (taught) to

“perform the functions of the state” (p. 190). They claim that hegemonic practices need to be transformed (Lea & Sims, 2008b). Lea and Sims (2008b) note,

to help our student teachers contribute to this goal by understanding the nature of and acting to transform the hegemonic practices that divide, control and blind us to the inequalities that exist in the United States and beyond, we need to develop creative experiences through which they can begin to socially *deconstruct* what is considered “normal” in public schools. (Lea & Sims, 2008b, p. 191)

Although Lea and Sims (2008b) have written this in the context of helping student-teachers enrolled in “Multicultural Pedagogy” try to identify and undo whiteness in the classroom, I believe it is applicable to any teacher, whether they have taught for five years, or for twenty years. Lea and Sims (2008b) claim that although there are some teachers, parents, community members and students which have an understanding of the “processes that govern the mainstream” and are capable of making change, it is the lack of understanding of hegemony that acts to maintain the traditional Eurocentric classroom (Lea & Sims, 2008b, pp. 188-189). Lea and Sims (2008b) assert that people experience cognitive dissonance when introduced to “conflicting sets of knowledge” (p. 189). This ensures, more often than not, that people must “rationalise that the system is not unjust, or hide that knowledge away in our conscious minds if we are going to go on and act as if we are socially just individuals (at the same time doing nothing to change an unjust system)” (Lea & Sims, 2008b, p. 189).

Mary, unaware of the issues at play in the broader landscape of education, would have gone on thinking that most Australian’s were accepting of others and that the Aboriginal people lived here without any rules until the convicts came along. Teachers must be willing to step up to the challenge and begin to think critically about the curriculum they

deliver to their students. A socially just education, where a teacher uses critical pedagogy to challenge students to think about their place in the world, according to Kincheloe (2008), holds no place in a Eurocentric Western society. He is overly concerned that the role of the school and the role of the teaching profession will become “trash”, as described in the passage below. Kincheloe (2008) writes,

never before have we so needed the allies of oppressed peoples within North American and European contexts and around the world to help us in the struggle against dominant colonial and other forms of power. As a criticalist, I stand in awe of the power of the narratives, histories, conceptual insights, interpretations, epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies diverse peoples bring to the struggle for social justice, ecological sustainability, sane economic policies and critical pedagogy. Even so, still at this point in Western history such perspectives are viewed as epistemological trash (pp. 155-156).

He alludes to the notion that teachers will be hired “who have little background in the social, cultural, political, economic, psychological and pedagogical referenced in critical pedagogy,” that if they are able to “read at an eighth-grade level, follow the scripts their administrators give them, never comment on educational policy, they can become the Exxon ‘teacher of the month’. Such winners will be placed in competition for the Disney ‘teacher of the year’ award” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 155).

The work samples displayed in the chapter above - changes in Mary’s learning, the willingness of students to ‘give it a go’ and their excitement about learning - stand as a testament for teachers working for change. If teachers work for social justice, work to challenge the stereotypes and prejudices’ students hold, changes can take place in their learning. Students can be ‘turned on’ by learning about different histories, through different methods of investigation; in this case it was researching community beliefs



towards stereotypes and prejudice, by surveying their community. Students can actually think critically, pose problems, question the world and, particularly in this context, local forms of knowledge can act as a powerful tools to transform learning (Kincheloe, 2008).

Transformative learning can take place when a teacher adopts a critical pedagogy or if a teacher works to develop students as agents of change (Giroux, cited in Kincheloe et al., 1992; Shor, 1992). Shor (1992) describes this as “change agency” (p. 190). Shor (1992) claims that empowering education is a long process. That, it will "take some time to develop” (Shor, 1992, p. 195). However, there is an important point he makes in relation to this argument, “ critical teachers do not have to wait for everything to change before anything can be changed” (p. 195). This is important in context to this study, as some students in my classroom were more willing than others to collaborate, pose problems and think critically. There are policy issues teachers will face when trying to implement a socially just curriculum that challenges the dominant narratives of society (Shor, 1992; Kincheloe, 2008). The positive that can be taken from this situation, as described by Shor (1992), is that “part of the empowering experiment is researching what open space exists in any setting for critical teaching and activist projects” (p. 196).

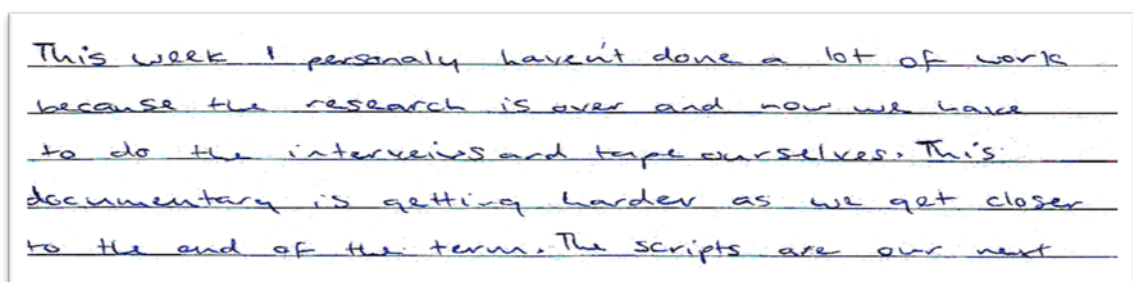
I am encouraged by these words and the work that my students did. I am encouraged to think that when a teacher delves into the world of teaching for social justice, changes their praxis and “transcend the tyranny of common sense (Kincheloe et al., 1992), that “spectacular things can happen along the way” (Shultz, 2008). Mary, Ana, Melissa and the six students who followed through with their documentaries are testament to this.

### ***5.2.6 Why are teachers and students under pressure to 'get work done'?***

It was nearing the end of the term when I realised how much pressure I was under to get the unit of work complete within the time period, and also, to get the students to finish their research assessments. What was hindering student progress was lack of access to technology to complete their filming. In the end, many of the students chose to do an essay as a result of both failure to work in groups, and failure to access technology. This situation stressed me out, as indicated in the journal entry below.

*After this week, there are four weeks left at school and I am wondering if we will all finish this term? If only I was not under pressure to get work complete within a set time frame, it would feel like I was not rushing them so much. Students should be able to progress through their work at their own pace. (Journal entry, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2010)*

I also noticed that it affected the students. Patrick made note of this in his learning journal.



This week I personally haven't done a lot of work because the research is over and now we have to do the interviews and tape ourselves. This documentary is getting harder as we get closer to the end of the term. The scripts are our next

He notes how coming together as a group, to try and complete the documentary within the set time frame, was hard. This made me question the proposed timeline I had created

to get the program complete within one school term. In an ideal world, it most likely could have been done (not that this would have been the ideal circumstance). However, in hindsight, there are always events and activities happening in a school that take students out of a normal timetabled day. By this I mean such events as schools sports days, excursions and school camps. I noted the timeline I had created as being a problem in my journal.

*I have been checking student work and reflecting on the timeline I created... I am noticing that there is too much content to get through within the eleven-week term. I need to investigate this further. Why is this happening? (Journal entry, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2010)*

One of the other major factors I faced as a teacher trying to implement a critical democratic curriculum centered around the time I needed to spend with students in order to help them adjust to using new methods of learning. I believe this is one of the major factors I underestimated, the limited experience of student with critical inquiry.

Sophia was quite skeptical about the project she was undertaking at the beginning of the program. The students had to use their own time management and negotiation skills in order to work out who would do what and how they would put their final piece of work together. She is hesitant about both the task, and using a learning journal (which she refers to as a study journal) to reflect on her learning journey. Noting that it was something she had “never used”.

In class this week we began to look at our task and our group has split the task into sections of time. I'm not sure that this will work out as more related to the topic will have happened in certain times. I am also finding it hard to use the study journal at the moment as I have never used anything like it. I am concerned that our group is behind as we really only pulled our act together today. However I feel we can now start to work efficiently. Already I am starting to see that prejudices against other people are still a large part in Australian culture and has shaped the Australia we know today.

Unfortunately for Sophia, her group split up and they opted to write an essay individually. I feel that if I had more time to spend with the students, then barriers such as this could have been broken down and they would have had more time to complete their documentaries. However, the reality of the program was, that I was under pressure to complete the unit of work in the eleven-week period, as these students would then need to study Geography. This is one of the major dilemmas I encountered as a teacher trying to implement a critical democratic curriculum.

#### **5.2.6.1 Thinking critically**

When I think about the dilemmas the students encountered and that I faced as well, I am reminded that teachers are under pressure to get work done. As a result, trying to teach the democratic way, often, is not an option for them, teachers are nervous to push the boundaries and consider alternative pedagogies (O'Sullivan, 2008). O'Sullivan (2008)

attributes this to the domestication of education, that for students “in mainstream classrooms, curriculum is taught by teachers, who, for the most part, have been imbued since childhood with the dominant ideology. Understandably, they interpret everything they teach through the lens of this dominant perspective that fails to query issues of power and social inequality” (p. 59). I encountered this problem, when I strived to get other teachers involved in teaching the same content. There were four other Year Ten Society and Environment classes timetabled on the same grid line, which meant there were five different teachers, teaching the classes. This posed problems, in itself. One teacher chose not to follow the program, and stick to the traditional program that had been in operation at the College in previous years and the other three teachers approached this with hesitation. I reflected on this in my journal.

*It is hard to try and encourage other staff members to follow a program you have developed. I have found that they are particularly against the research assessment I have created. Teachers do not like the idea of a collaborative group based assessment and utilisation of the flip videos to create a documentary. I think they are interpreting the program I have created in their own way and utilising ‘bits and pieces’ to teach the students the content, rather than focus on teaching for social justice. That is, getting the students to create research questions and work collaboratively to devise a survey and conduct it within their community. (Journal entry, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2010)*

This idea, that teachers are resistant to change, is also supported by other scholars such as Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) and Morrell (2004). Kincheloe and Steinberg’s (1997) stance on critical multiculturalism connects to O’Sullivan’s (2008) argument

through their belief in presenting students with multiple histories, rather than teaching through the lens of the dominant narrative. Morrell's (2004) perspective on this issue comes in the form of teachers transforming their perspective, and making learning authentic for the students by challenging the dominant ideologies present in the classroom. Although I struggled to connect with some of the students in my classroom, I believe the work I have done with them, was successful. Their resistance, which came in the form of completing an assessment task individually, was due in part to their lack of experience with citizenship education.

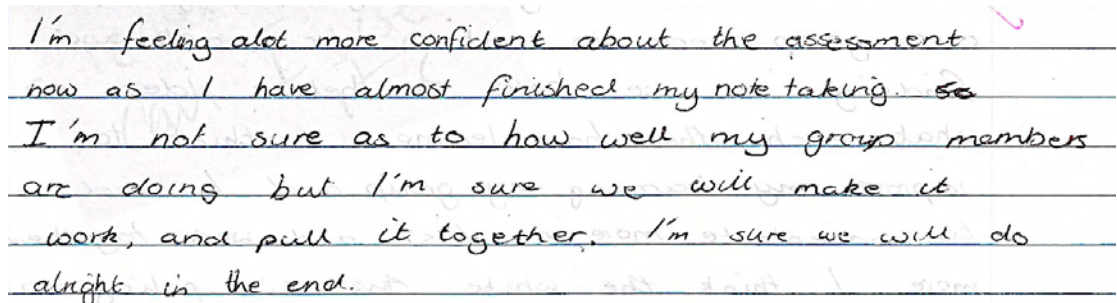
Teachers are resistant to considering alternative pedagogies because there is opposition to it (O'Sullivan, 2008). This opposition comes in the form of

1. The opposition of the powerful to schools being converted into centres of potential resistances.
2. The influence of the dominant ideology on the teacher.
3. The ill preparedness and lack of support felt by teachers who are inclined to teach critically.
4. The constraints upon any social action that exceeds the bounds of making charitable donations.
5. The fact that the globalisation from below movement is just in its very early stages. (O'Sullivan, 2008, p. 61)

The points that O'Sullivan (2008) raises in his paper *From the Margins to the Mainstream* aligns with Sleeter's (2005) ethos on teachers' work and democratic engagement.

Engaging students in democratic decision making appealed to most of the teachers...learning to do this takes time and is not part of most standards based curricula. Most teachers cannot simply shift from teacher-centred to student-centered, democratic pedagogy without help or support. (Sleeter, 2005, pp. 180-181)

Smyth et al. (2008) note from conversations they had with teachers that in order to facilitate and encourage teachers to create the spaces necessary for critical democratic engagement that “collaboration, reflection and planning played a pivotal role in facilitating the development of productive student-learning experiences” (p. 135). The one point I learnt from the students in response to this dilemma is that, if teachers are willing to give it a go, then eventually the students will trust you and take on board the journey you want to explore with them. Sophia, who was originally hesitant about the project, realised this, and reflected on it in her journal.



I'm feeling alot more confident about the assessment now as I have almost finished my note taking. ~~so~~ I'm not sure as to how well my group members are doing but I'm sure we will make it work, and pull it together. I'm sure we will do alright in the end.

Sophia's optimism, in the sense that she believed “we will make it work and pull it together,” is at the very heart of the work I was doing with the students. Because, I strongly believed, that if I had more time with the students to work on their projects, that they would have been “alright in the end”.

Teacher's are indeed under pressure to get their jobs done and, as a result, the students are too. With increasing demands placed on them (teachers) from the system and schools, how can critical democratic engagement take place, without the support and training necessary to do so? Sleeter (2005) raises this issue, “while teachers have varying degrees of agency to construct multicultural curriculum, teachers also work in systems that institutionalise particular concepts of the curriculum, learning, teaching,

and relationships... I am mindful of constraints teachers face” (p. 179). Smyth et al. (2008) also highlight this problem, “whilst we witnessed many innovative and engaging practices, we do not wish to gloss over the difficulties teachers and students experience on a daily basis” (p. 135). The pressure a canonical system of education places on students to perform to expected targets is hindering their schooling success (Sleeter, 2005; Smyth et al., 2008). This environment makes it even more difficult for teachers, such as myself, to challenge students to consider other points of view and engage teachers in meaningful conversations in order to ‘give it a go’.

A statement by Freire (1997) sums up my argument really well “without a vision for tomorrow, hope is impossible” (p. 45). If teachers do not envisage what the future will be like for their students, if they do not make learning authentic for them, then, in the words of Freire (1997) teachers “tired and anesthetised, in need of everything, ... [become] easy prey for aid and assistance policies that further immerse them in a mind narrowing daily existence” (p. 45).

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This chapter highlights the struggles I faced as a teacher-researcher trying to engage students in a critical democratic curriculum, and trying to encourage my colleagues to take part. The aim of the curriculum was to challenge the stereotypes and prejudices students held towards people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Six themes have been discussed at length to highlight these struggles. Samples of student work and my reflective writings were used as evidence to demonstrate this. Although a lot was written about the struggles, it is also important to point out, that this



experience, from my point of view, was successful. Six of the twenty-five students managed to complete the research assessment that asked them to critically analyse their values and beliefs in relation to their community by completing a documentary. Although the other nineteen opted to write an essay, they still produced some work that recognised their ability to think critically about their learning when given the opportunity to reflect. The next chapter outlines how teachers can continue to work for change in an increasingly standardised environment, and encourage other teachers to embark on the journey I have.

## **CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION**

### **FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN THE REALM OF TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE - IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter moves beyond the findings raised in this study, to an examination of the future directions and implications that this study raises for teachers trying to “teach against the grain”. The central goal of this study was to challenge the stereotypes and prejudice my students carried with them in order to help them better navigate their way in the world. This was done through an examination of the kind of education and learning experiences they had received in order to suggest how teachers could address this issue in their classroom. The curriculum package I developed, “Australian Immigration,” became the avenue by which I was able to document how changes in student learning occurred, particularly through the learning activities they took part in, their learning journals where reflections were recorded and a five week group assessment task. The evidence that has been presented demonstrates how I, as a teacher-researcher involved in an action-research study, struggled to engage students in a democratically orientated curriculum, that asked the students to question their own values and beliefs. However, the evidence is also demonstrative of how teachers can work for change. In my case, when six students completed the group assessment task, and three others were able to engage critically and reflect on their learning, it demonstrates how, when challenged to consider “other histories” that “spectacular things can happen along the way” (Shultz, 2008).

## **6.2 Transforming learning**

This study proposes three avenues by which teachers can work for change in order to implement a critical democratic curriculum.

### ***6.2.1 Transforming learning through critical pedagogy***

Firstly, this study proposes, that teachers who work for change need an understanding of critical pedagogy. Fidyk (2008) writes, “understanding ‘critical pedagogy’ as a way of transforming consciousness, to provide teachers and students with ways of knowing that enable them to know themselves better, to know ‘difference,’ and to live in the world in a more engaged manner seems a necessary step for democracy and social justice in education” (p. 139). This idea, of recognising that students are different and, will have different ways of ‘knowing,’ is not new. In fact, Dewey (1910) was promoting these ideas a century ago,

educators should also note that the very great individual differences that exist; they should not try to force one pattern and model upon all. In many (probably the majority) the executive tendency, the habit of mind that thinks for purposes of conduct and achievement, not for that sake of knowing, remains dominant to the end... no good reason appears why education should esteem the one mental habit inherently superior to the other, and deliberately try to transform the type from practical to theoretical. Have not our schools... been one-sidedly devoted to the more abstract type of thinking, thus doing injustice to the majority of pupils? Has not the idea of a “liberal” and “humane” education tended too often in practice to the production of technical, because overspecialised, thinkers? (p. 143)

The idea that a philosopher and educational reformer was writing of a “liberal” and “humane” education one hundred years ago (Dewey, 1910), makes me question the direction in which the education system in Australia is headed in the twenty-first

century. The literature has demonstrated that the education system in Australia is unjust (Down, 1994; Reid, 2005). The evidence I have presented from my study has demonstrated that teachers who work for social justice face obstacles and barriers (Bigelow, 2003). This section lends itself to a discussion on how teachers, who strive to implement a critical pedagogy in their classroom through a curriculum that asks students to question the world, that it can indeed challenge the current context of education in Australia.

The findings of this study demonstrate that teachers have the capacity to transform their pedagogy in order to implement a socially just curriculum (Kincheloe et al., 1992; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; O’Sullivan, 2008). Student learning can be transformed from one of rote-based memorisation to one of engagement, where students’ “lived experiences” become the basis by which teachers transform the curriculum (Moll et al., 1992; Shor, 1996; Gonzales & Moll, 2002)

Vetter (2008) asserts, “the issues of discrimination, inequity, and marginalization are too far-reaching in their social implications for one solution” (p. 93). The literature used throughout this study supports this assertion. Teachers who work for change will face problems (Beane, 2005; Sleeter, 2005). The struggle my students faced collaborating with one another (this is one of the major findings of this study and elaborated on in section 5.2.4) when they were completing their group assessment task is demonstrative of this struggle. It further highlights, that when students have been “brought up” in an education system that standardises their experiences and learning (the dominant existing views of education) that it is “promoting an exclusionary mentality” (McMahon &

Portelli, 2004, p. 59) and, therefore, affecting their ability to participate in citizenship education (Fidyk, 2008).

This study proposes that teachers need to work for change by raising their voices and, also raising the voices of their students in order to award every student equality of educational opportunity through a socially just curriculum.

### ***6.2.2 Transforming learning through students' lived experiences***

Secondly, this study argues that teachers need to incorporate students' lived experiences into the curriculum in order to transform student learning. It became apparent to me, that when I organised the curriculum to meet the needs of the students, in my case to help them understand Australia's past, that it transformed their understanding of it. In an environment where student success is equated to how well they are "performing" (McMahon & Portelli, 2004), it was difficult to do this. Many of the students I taught were unable to make connections with what I have phrased "big picture" ideas. I noted that students carried with them misguided representations of the past. So, I sought to find ways to challenge the perceptions they had of Australia's past. I did this by finding alternative ways to 'teach' concepts and actively involving them in their community through the use of surveys.

The community in which the students live is very "white" (see Chapter Two) and I discovered that many of the students in my class thought that Australia's past was 'uncivilized', at least until the arrival of the convicts! McInerney and McInerney (2002)

argue that a student's understanding of the world is shaped by their social and cultural background. This led me to question the validity of the perceptions that my students were advocating in their work. Especially considering what Cox (1995) argues, "social capital should be the pre-eminent and most valued form of capital as it provides the basis on which we build a truly civil society" (p. 17).

I demonstrated through the student work samples that my students had misguided representations of the past. The literature helped me decipher that it was a combination of the community in which the students lived and the education system that they had experienced, that were both contributing factors in this perception. Kincheloe et al. (1992) explore the need for teachers to create a student-centred curriculum that helps them develop the skills necessary to become, what they phrase "post-formal thinkers" (p. 30). They argue that when teachers shift their perspectives, and teach against the grain, that the opportunity arises for students to become "critically conscious" of their experiences (Kincheloe et al., 1992). As the previous section suggested, this can be done through the implementation of a critical pedagogy. This study also suggests that to engage the life of the learners in a classroom that teachers need to do more than just shift their perspectives. Teachers need engage students with discourse and research that is relevant to their lives (Moll et al., 1992).

The findings of this study demonstrate that when a teacher uses the community in which the students live as the basis for building a curriculum and ask them to become ethnographic researchers of their community, that they are more likely to be engaged in the content (McMahon & Portelli, 2004). I discovered that the students in my class

approached the reflective writing process with honesty and, this was a very powerful tool, which made me realise that the students I taught had not been taught to engage critically with content and question the world. The reflections written by the students enabled me to improvise and provide them with learning experience that would allow them to do this (this is elaborated on in section 5.2.3).

It is important for me to mention that I experienced “alienation and resistance” from students when I was trying to implement a critical democratic curriculum that asked them to question the world in which they live (Smyth et al., 2008). Smyth et al. (2008) believe that there is a process of unlearning that needs to take place before students begin to trust an education system that has failed them in the past. I struggled to connect with some students throughout the course of this eleven-week program, and I believe strongly in what is advocated by Smyth et al. (2008). Aside from the six students who followed through with and completed their documentaries, I struggled to engage the other nineteen with “big picture” ideas. These nineteen students opted to complete an essay based on the topic, rather than work together with their peers to produce a documentary.

Along with the process of “unlearning”, I strongly support the ideals advocated by Meier (2002). It is the power of trust that “makes these schools run and makes them educative” (Meier, 2002, p. 400). I found that the relationships I had built with the students in my classroom as being one of the most powerful elements in implementing a critical democratic curriculum. As Greene (1995) suggests, “we must want our students to achieve friendship as each one stirs to wide-awakedness, to imaginative action, and to

renewed consciousness of possibility” (p. 43). Teachers must want their students to be the change they want to see in the education system, and this can only be achieved through trusting relationships. It is such relationships, such a curriculum built on the premise of creating a better world that will scour the tainted education system in Australia, to one of “imagining alternatives” (Smyth et al., 2008) that seeks to break down the social injustices that it so promotes through such measures as NAPLAN and *My Schools*. Teachers “must put a high priority, therefore, on growing social capital by offering opportunities for trust and cooperation” (Cox, 1995, p. 16)

The findings show that teachers have the capacity to transform their curriculum in order to transform student learning. From one of rote-based memorisation to one that engages students with the content by using their “lived experiences” as the basis for learning (Moll et al., 1992)

### ***6.2.3 Transforming learning through multicultural education***

Thirdly, this study suggests that through the implementation of multicultural education, teachers can transform student learning (Neito, 1999). I was alarmed by the racism, as evidenced by the student work samples throughout Chapter Five, that existed amongst the students at my school, to the extent that I changed the way I delivered the curriculum to them, in order to help them connect with “big picture” ideas. I was privileged enough to be given the opportunity to do this. Sleeter (2005) argues, “scripted curriculum packages in fact structure curriculum quite extensively, leaving only small spaces for a teachers own judgment about what to teach” (p. 62). No sooner than having completed



this action-research study into alternative ways to teach students about stereotypes and prejudice, that Phase One of the Australian Curriculum was released by ACARA, which proscribes to teachers what must be covered in the content areas of History, English, Mathematics and Science (Phase One). I believe, that under this system, teachers will be pressured even more into teaching content over teaching for social justice.

It is clear that teacher and student voices have been traditionally suppressed (Sleeter, 2005; Vetter, 2008), and that fear exists amongst teachers about implementing a curriculum that has “dangerous topics” (Neito, 1999; Sleeter, 2005). The evidence from my research indicates that many students are also scared to move in a direction that challenges their position the world. I struggled to engage my students in a critical democratic curriculum because they had been subject to traditional and dominant narratives that had suppressed their ability to express themselves (Neito, 1999). This was demonstrated through the independent direction that nineteen of my students chose. Only a small minority of the class (six) chose to continue with the collaborative project and push the boundaries necessary for them to engage with “big picture” ideas.

It is clearly evident, both through my action-research study and the literature that teachers need to be the driving force for change, that, reforming the education system must start in the classroom (Kincheloe et al., 1992; Shor, 1992). Otherwise, the case for democratic schooling, will dwindle even further away into the human subconscious than it is already (Smyth et al., 2008). Smyth et al. (2008) make this case in *Critically Engaged Learning: Connecting to Young Lives*, “contemporary moves towards uniform curriculum, standardised testing and national benchmarks are more likely to inhibit

debate and stifle creativity...we contend that these top-down instrumentalist policies serve to deny the histories, cultures, voices, interests, dreams, and aspirations of those students, families and communities excluded from the mainstream economic, social and civic life” (p. 164).

Sleeter (2005) advocates that “visionary pragmatism” offers teachers a way forward in this field. She asserts, “visionary pragmatists recognise what is possible to accomplish in a specific context, but at the same time, see beyond that context. Visionary pragmatists reach for what may seem unattainable, seeking ways to turn the impossible into the possible” (pp. 181-182). Vetter (2008) espouses, “a classroom that encourages opportunity for engagement in societal issues and welcomes the diverse discourses of the classroom, even in the primary grades, takes a major step toward creating an equal platform from which all students can expand their critical literacy skills, broaden their thinking on issues of social consequence, and inaugurate actions that demonstrate proactive global citizenship” (p. 93). Kincheloe et al. (1992) argue, “by going beyond the goals of modern education we are empowered by our own understanding of what relating the knower to the known means” (p. 217). The final remark that is important to highlight in relation to the power that multicultural education offers to the future of education as a way of transforming student learning comes from Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997), when they argue that: “critical multiculturalism with its power literacy, social vision, pedagogical imagination and radical commitment to democracy and justice, can build a new curriculum for both the educational and political spheres in the dangerous new times Western societies face” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 252).

### **6.3 Conclusion**

This thesis has tackled three interrelated problems that led me to design and implement a critical democratic curriculum. Firstly, this study explored how students I taught engaged with a democratic curriculum I developed, “Australian Immigration,” and how, in the past, they had been constrained through curricula (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997), to accept the world for what it was without critically questioning it. It further highlighted how the transition to a national curriculum in Australia will serve to support the dominant narratives already in operation in Australian schools. Secondly, this study considered how teachers can work for change by implementing a curriculum derived from their students’ “fund of knowledge”. The literature has emphasised the need for teachers to facilitate the development of social capital by asking students to question the world in which they live. The goal of the curriculum program I implemented centred on asking students to question the stereotypes and prejudice they held towards people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Thirdly, given my methodology and attempt to incorporate other teacher’s experiences into my study, that it is hard for them to find the space and time necessary to engage in critical thinking about pedagogy, when they have so much else to do, and are content teaching the traditional way. It is hoped this study will help inform the future direction that teachers need to tread in order to make education a more socially just experience for all students. It is also hoped that this study will serve as inspiration for teachers striving to implement a curriculum that asks students to question the world in which they live by building a curriculum around students’ lived experiences. It seems ever appropriate to close this study with a quote that is at the heart of this research, “I cannot help him [sic] learn unless I know why he got the incorrect answer, and I have to know that young man [sic] well enough to know that there is a pattern to that error, whether the error he [sic] made was simply a chance,

goof, or whether in fact he fundamentally misunderstood the idea, I cannot teach a person I do not know well” (Sizer, 2012).

## REFERENCES

- Aplet, L. & Lingard, B. (1993). Public schooling reform in Australia: In whose interests? *In Journal of Educational Administration*, 31(3), pp. 59-62.
- Aronowitz, S. (2008). *Against schooling: For an education that matters*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS]. (2012). *2006 census: Quickstats*. Retrieved 23 February 2012, from <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/ViewData?action=402&documentproductno=POA6171&documenttype=Main%20Features&order=1&tabname=Summary&areacode=POA6171&collection=census&period=2006&producttype=QuickStats&javascript=true&textversion=false&navmapdisplayed=false&breadcrumb=PL&>.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] (2013). *Australian population by country of birth*. Accessed on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2013 from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/84074889D69E738CCA257A5A00120A69?opendocument>.
- Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority [ACARA]. (2011a). *My school – Fact sheet*. Retrieved 18 April 2011, from [http://www.acara.edu.au/myschool/more\\_information.html](http://www.acara.edu.au/myschool/more_information.html).
- Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority [ACARA]. (2011b). *Guide to understanding student gain*. Retrieved 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011, from [http://www.acara.edu.au/myschool/more\\_information.html](http://www.acara.edu.au/myschool/more_information.html).
- Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority [ACARA]. (2012a). *My school*. Retrieved 19 February 2012, from <http://www.myschool.edu.au/MainPages/SchoolProfileRep.aspx?SDRSchoolId=430000001406&DEEWRId=15338&CalendarYear=2010&RefId=Auqw2uBmDtqTp5560hjbF8UENSgx23kK>.
- Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority [ACARA]. (2012b). *Phase 1 – The Australian curriculum*. Retrieved 26 July 2012, from [http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/phase\\_1\\_the\\_australian\\_curriculum.html](http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/phase_1_the_australian_curriculum.html)
- Aveling, N. (2004). Critical whiteness studies and the challenges of learning to be a ‘white ally’. *In Borderlands e-journal*, 3 (2), pp. 1-10.
- Ball, S. (1998). Big policies/small world: An introduction to international perspectives in educational policy. *In Comparative Education*, 34 (2), pp. 119-130.
- Bahruth, R. E. & Steiner, S. F. (1998). Upstream in the mainstream: Pedagogy against the current. In Chavez R. C. & O’Donnell, J. (Eds.), *Speaking the unpleasant: The politics of (non) engagement in the multicultural education terrain*. Albany: State University of New York, pp. 127-147.

- Baron, D. (2008). Learning from looking at student work. *Principal Leadership*, (9)1. Academic Research Library, p. 66.
- Beane, J. & Apple, M. (1999). The case for democratic schools. In Beane, J. & Apple, M. (Eds.), *Democratic Schools*. Buckingham: Open University Press, pp. 1-29.
- Beane, J. (2005). *A reason to teach: Creating classrooms of dignity and hope*, Portsmouth, NH: Heineman.
- Bednall, J. & Buonocore, J. (2012). *Tranby college board: Building the senior school administration building*. Perth: Tranby College.
- Berlak, A. (2008). Challenging the hegemony of whiteness by addressing the adaptive unconscious. In Lea, V. & Sims, E.J. (Eds.), *Undoing whiteness in the classroom: Critical educultural teaching approaches for social justice activism*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, pp. 47-66.
- Bigelow, B. (2003). Once upon a genocide: Columbus in children's literature. In Christensen, L. & Karp, S. (Eds.), *Rethinking school reform: Views from the classroom*. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, pp. 89-102.
- Blackmore, J. (1994). Devolution and the new disadvantage. In Deakin Centre for Education and Change, *Schooling what future? Balancing the education agenda*. Geelong: Deakin University.
- Bowe, R., Ball, S. & Gold, A. (1992). *Reforming education and changing society: Case studies in policy sociology*. London: Routledge.
- Bournot-Trites, M. and Belanger, J. (2005). Ethical Dilemmas Facing Action Researchers. In *The Journal of Educational Thought*, 39 (2), pp. 197-215.
- Brennan, M. (2001-2). Community, knowledge, action: Rethinking schooling. In *Educational Links*, 63, pp. 15-18.
- Bruner, D. R. (2000). *The Role of the student in the case method classroom*. Retrieved 16 February 2012, from <http://faculty.darden.virginia.edu/brunerb/case-student.htm>
- Butler, M. (1998). Negotiating place: The importance of children's realities. In Steinberg, S. & Kincheloe, J. (Eds.), *Students as researchers: creating classrooms that matter*. London: Flamer Press, pp. 94-112.
- Carr, W. & Kemmis, S. (1986). *Becoming critical: Education, knowledge and action research*. Victoria: Deakin University.
- Cox, E. (1995). *A truly civil society: Boyer Lectures*. Sydney: ABC Books.
- Curriculum Corporation. (2007). *Curriculum and assessment - Statements of learning*. Retrieved 27 October 2007, from <http://www.curriculum.edu.au/ccsite/default.asp?id=17706>.

- Curriculum Council. (1998). *Curriculum framework for kindergarten to year twelve education in Western Australia*. Osbourne Park: Curriculum Council.
- Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage Publishing.
- Department of Education and Training [DET]. (2007). *Rationale for the Society and Environment achievement targets in year 7 and 9*. Retrieved 18 May 2007, from <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/curriculum/cip2/docs/se.pdf>.
- Derman-Sparks, L., (1998). Educating for equality: Forging a shared vision. In Lee, E., Menkart, D. & Okazawa-Rey, M. (Eds.), *Beyond heroes and holidays: A practical guide to K-12 anti-racist, multicultural education and staff development*. Maryland: McArdle Printing, pp. 2-6.
- Dewey, J. (1910). *How we think*. Boston: DC Health and Co.
- Down, B., (1994). Human capital theory and secondary education. In *Unicorn*, 20 (3), pp. 54-61.
- Down, B. (2009). Schooling, productivity and the enterprising self: beyond market values. *Critical Studies in Education*. 50 (1). pp. 51-64.
- Duncan-Andrade, J.M.R & Morrell, E. (2008). *The art of critical pedagogy: Possibilities for moving forward from theory to practice in urban schools*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Education Department of Western Australia [EDWA]. (1999). *Local management of schools*. Perth: EDWA.
- Elden, M. & Levin, M. (1991). Cogenerative learning: Bringing participation into action research. In Whyte, W.F. (Ed.), *Participatory Action Research*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Ellsworth, E. (1989). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. In *Harvard Educational Review*, 59 (3), pp. 297-324.
- Environmental Protection Agency [EPA]. (2013). Climate change: Basic information. Retrieved 23 May 2013 from <http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/basics/>.
- Fidyk, A. (2008). Democracy and difference in education: Interconnectedness, identity and social justice pedagogy. In Lund, D. E. & Carr, P.R. (Eds.), *Doing democracy: Striving for political literacy and social justice*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, pp. 139-158.
- Fletcher, A. (2004). The youth voice movement. In *Generator*, Spring, pp. 22-23.

- Freire, P. (1997). *Pedagogy of the heart*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition). New York: Continuum.
- Gale, T. & Densmore, K. (2003). *Engaging teachers: Towards a radical democratic agenda for schooling*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Gillard, J. (2010). My school website launched. In *Ministers media centre*. Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved 23 April, 2011, from [http://www.deewr.gov.au/ministers/gillard/media/releases/pages/article\\_100128\\_102905.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/ministers/gillard/media/releases/pages/article_100128_102905.aspx).
- Goodman, J., & Kuzmic, J. (1997). Bringing a progressive pedagogy to conventional schools: Theoretical and practical implications from Harmony. In *Theory and Practice*, 36(2), 79-86.
- Gonzalez, N., & Moll, L. (2002). Cruzando el puente: Building bridges to funds of knowledge. In *Educational Policy*, 16(4), pp. 623-641.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays in education, the arts and social change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Boss.
- Gruenewald, D. (2003). The best of both worlds: A critical pedagogy of place. In *Educational Researcher*, 32(4), pp. 3-12.
- Grundy, S. (1982). Three modes of action research. In *Curriculum Perspectives*, 2(3), pp. 23-34.
- Grundy, S. (1995). Journeying through action research. In *Action research for professional development*, pp. 9-17, Murdoch University Innovative Links Project.
- Gunter, H. (1997). *Rethinking education: The consequences of jurassic management*. London: Cassell.
- Hattam, R., Shacklock, G., & Smyth, J. (1998). Doing critical cultural studies – An antidote to being done to. In Smyth, J., Hattam, R. & Shacklock, G., (Eds.) *Schooling for a fair go*. Leichhardt: The Federation Press, pp. 97-114.
- Hayes, T. (2007) English teaching and the national curriculum agenda: works in progress but to what ends?. In *Professional Voice*, 5 (1), pp. 21-25.
- Hendricks, C. (2009). *Improving schools through action research: A comprehensive guide for educators (second edition)*. New Jersey: Pearson Education.
- Hinchey, P. H. (2004). *Becoming a critical educator: Defining a classroom identity, designing a critical pedagogy*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.



- Irving, M.A. (2006). Practicing what we teach: Experiences with reflective practice and critical engagement. In *White teachers/diverse classrooms: A guide to building inclusive schools, promoting high expectations and eliminating racism*. Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing.
- Kincheloe, J. L. (2008). *Critical pedagogy (second edition)*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Kincheloe, J. L. & Steinberg, S. R. (1997). *Changing multiculturalism*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Kincheloe, J.L., Steinberg, S. R. & Tippins, D. J. (1992). *The stigma of genius: Einstein and beyond modern education*. Durango, Colorado: Hollobrook Publishing.
- Kroll, C. (2008). Imagining ourselves into transcultural spaces: Decentering whiteness in the Classroom. In Lea, V. & Sims, E.J. (Eds.), *Undoing whiteness in the classroom: Critical educultural teaching approaches for social justice activism*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, pp. 29-46.
- Langer, G.M., Colton, A. B. & Goff, L. S. (2003). *Collaborative analysis of student work: Improving teaching and learning*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Lauder, H. & Hughes, D. (1999). *Trading in futures: Why markets in education don't work*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Lea, V. & Sims, E. J. (2008a). Transforming whiteness through poetry: Engaging the emotions and invoking the spirit. In Lea, V. & Sims, E.J. (Eds.), *Undoing whiteness in the classroom: Critical educultural teaching approaches for social justice activism*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, pp. 47-46.
- Lea, V. & Sims, E. J. (2008b). Imaging whiteness hegemony in the classroom: Undoing oppressive practices and inspiring social justice activism. In Lea, V. & Sims, E.J. (Eds.), *Undoing whiteness in the classroom: Critical educultural teaching approaches for social justice activism*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, pp. 185-202.
- Lincoln, Y. S. (2001). Engaging sympathies: Relationships between action research and social constructivism. In Reason, P. & Bradbury H. (Eds.), *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice*. London: Sage, pp.124-132.
- Lund, D.E. & Carr, P.R. (2008). Introduction: scanning democracy. In Lund, D.E. & Carr, P.R. (Eds.). *Doing democracy: striving for political literacy and social justice*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 1-29.
- Ministerial Council on Education, Employments, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA]. (2009). *National assessment program: Literacy and numeracy – background*. Retrieved 29 March 2009, from

[http://www.naplan.edu.au/about/national\\_assessment\\_program-literacy\\_and\\_numeracy.html](http://www.naplan.edu.au/about/national_assessment_program-literacy_and_numeracy.html).

- McInerney, D.M & McInerney, V. (2002). *Educational psychology: Constructing learning (third ed)*. Frenchs Forest: Pearson Education Australia.
- McInerney, P., Smyth, J., & Down, B. (2011). 'Coming to the place near you?' the politics and possibilities of a critical pedagogy of place-based education. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(1), pp. 3 – 16.
- McMahon, B. & Portelli, J. P. (2004). Engagement for what? Beyond popular discourses of student engagement. In *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 3 (1), pp. 59-76.
- McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2006). *All you need to know about action research*. London: Sage.
- Meier, D. (2002). *In Schools we trust: Creating communities of learning in an era of testing and standardisation*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. In *Theory into Practice*, XXXI(2), pp. 132-141.
- Morley, I. & Rasool, N. (1999). *School effectiveness: Fracturing the discourse*. London: Falmer Press.
- Morrell, E. (2004). *Becoming critical researchers: Literacy and empowerment for urban youth*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Neito, S. (1999). Multiculturalism, social justice and critical teaching. In Shor, I. & Pari, C. (Eds.), *Education in politics: Critical teaching across differences K-12*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook Publishers, pp. 1-20.
- Nelson, J.L. & Pang, V.O. (2001). Racism, prejudice and the social studies curriculum. In Ross, E.W. (Ed.), *The social studies curriculum: Purposes, problems and possibilities [revised edition]*. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 143-162.
- O'Sullivan, M. (2008). From the margins to the mainstream: Global education and the response to the democratic deficit in America. In Lund, E. & Carr, P.R. (Eds.). *Doing democracy: Striving for political literacy and social justice*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, pp. 51-70.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods (third edition)*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Pope, D. C. (2001). *"Doing School": How we are creating a generation of stressed out, materialistic, and miseducated students*. Yale University Press.

- Prunty, J. (1985). Signposts For a critical educational policy analysis. *In Australian journal of education*. 29 (2), pp. 133-140.
- Rea, J. & Weiner, G. (1998). Cultures of blame and redemption – when empowerment becomes control: Practitioners’ views of the effective school movement. In Slee, R. & Weiner, G. (Eds.), *School effectiveness for whom?* London: Falmer Press. Chapter 3.
- Reid, A. (2005). *Rethinking the national curriculum collaboration: Towards an Australian curriculum*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Sammel, A. & Martin, G. (2008). “Other-ed” pedagogy: The praxis of the critical democratic education. In Lund, E. & Carr, P.R. (Eds.), *Doing democracy: Striving for political literacy and social justice*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, pp. 85-102.
- Schweitzer, Albert. (1968). *The Wisdom of Albert Schweitzer*. New York: Philosophical Library.
- Shor, I. (1992). *Empowering education: Critical teaching for social change*. Chicago: the University of Chicago Press.
- Shor, I. (1996). *When students have power: Negotiating authority in critical pedagogy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Shultz, B. D. (2008). *Spectacular things happen along the way: Lessons from an urban classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Simon, R. I. (1992). *Teaching against the grain: texts for a pedagogy of possibilities*. New York: Bergin and Garvey.
- Sizer, T. (2012). I cannot teach a child I do not know. In *Australian National Schools Network: In memoriam - Theodore Ryland Sizer (Coalition of Essential Schools)*. Retrieved 21 April 2012, from [http://www.ansn.edu.au/in\\_memoriam\\_theodore\\_ryland\\_sizer](http://www.ansn.edu.au/in_memoriam_theodore_ryland_sizer).
- Sleeter, C. E. (2005). *Unstandardising the curriculum: Multicultural teaching in the standards-based classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Smith, G., (2002). Place-based education. In *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(8), pp. 584-595.
- Smyth, J. (1994). *Schooling for democracy in economic rationalist times*. Adelaide: Flinders University of South Australia.
- Smyth, J. (2004). Social capital and the ‘socially just school’. In *British Library of Sociology in Education*, 25(1), pp. 19-33.
- Smyth, J., Angus, L., Down, B. & McInerney, P. (2008). *Critically engaged learning: Connecting to young lives*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

- Stout, C.J., (2006). With all due respect: A second look at action research. In *Studies in Art Education*. 47 (3), pp. 195 – 197.
- Tatum. (1992). Talking About Race, Learning about Racism: The Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom. In *Harvard Educational Review*, (62), pp. 1 – 24.
- Theobold, P. & Curtiss, J. (2000). Communities as curricula. In *Forum for applied Research and Public Policy*, 15(1), pp. 106-111.
- Thompson, P. (2002). *Schooling the rustbelt kids: Making the difference in changing times*. Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin.
- Thrupp, M. & Willmott, R. (2003). *Education management in managerialist times*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Topsfield, J. & Rood, D. (2006). Libs call for national curriculum. In *The Age*. Retrieved 28 October 2007, from <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/lib-calls-for-national-curriculum/2006/10/05/1159641461872.html>.
- Topsfield, J., (2007) Teachers ‘shut-out’ of school history debate. In *The Age*. Retrieved 15 September 2007, from <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/teachers-shut-out-of-school-history-debate/2007/09/10/1189276638997.html>.
- Torrance, H. (1997). Assessment, accountability and standards: Using assessment to control the reform of schooling. In Halsey, A.H., Lauder, H., Brown, P., Stuart Wells, A. (Eds.), *Education: Culture, economy and society*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 21.
- Tripp, D. (1995). *Action inquiry*. Perth: Murdoch University.
- Tupper, J. A. (2008). Interrogating citizenship and democracy in education: The implications for disrupting universal values. In Lund, D. E. & Carr, P.R. (Eds.), *Doing democracy: Striving for political literacy and social justice*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, pp. 71-84.
- Vetter, D. M. (2008). Toward a critical stance: Citizenship education in the classroom. In *Brock Education Journal*, 17, pp. 87-94.
- Water-Adams, S. (2006). *Action research in education*. Retrieved 1 April 2012, from <http://www.edu.plymouth.ac.uk/resined/actionresearch/arhome.htm>.
- Watkins, C. (1999). Personal-social education: Beyond the national curriculum. In *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, Cambridge, 27(1), pp.71-85.
- Welch, A. (1996). *Australian education: Reform of crisis?*. St Leonards: Allen and Unwin.

- Westheimer, J. & Kahne, J. (1998). Education for action: Preparing youth for participatory democracy. In Ayers, W., Hunt, J. & Quinn, T. (Eds.), *Teaching for social justice*. New York: Teachers College Press, pp. 1-20.
- Winter, R. (1998). Finding a voice - Thinking with others: A conception of action research. In *Educational Action Research*, 6 (1), pp. 53-68.

## APPENDICIES

### Appendix One: Curriculum Package

#### Year 10 Society and Environment

#### “AUSTRALIAN IMMIGRATION”

#### Focus topics (or big picture ideas) for this program:

- 🌐 Stereotypes and Prejudice;
- 🌐 Australia and its relations with the Asia-Pacific region;
- 🌐 Australian Immigration History.

#### Why study Australian History?

Understanding Australia’s past helps us make sense of the present and explain continuity (consistent existence) and change. Learning Australian history provides you with a context to help you understand your identity and who you are.

It helps you understand the story of people who have created the community of which you are apart. You will come to learn and understand more about yourself and the community you live in, especially peoples values and beliefs from the past that are constantly being challenged as Australia enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In coming to know the Australian story, you will learn something more about yourself and reflect on the society that Australia should become.

#### The study of Australian history will help you:

- a) Enquire into, know, understand and evaluate the development of the nation in which you live;
- b) Develop an understanding of the history of Australia within a global context; and
- c) Foster an interest in lifelong learning about Australia’s past.

If you are an indigenous or a recent migrant to Australia you will acquire an understanding of your identity in context to Australia’s past and the contribution your forbearers have made to Australia’s history.

You are encouraged to incorporate a range of perspectives into your study of the different topics. These perspectives assist in appreciating the diversity of Australia’s historical experience and in the development of analytical and writing skills through the extended consideration of change and continuity over time.

Perspectives to be considered include:

- a) Regional and Global
- b) Biographical
- c) Beliefs and Values
- d) Everyday life

- e) Gender
- f) Local

**You will develop:**

- a stronger understanding of how stereotypes and prejudice are formed and the impact they have on/to the community
- analytical and research skills including internet research skills.
- critical literacy skills, particularly in relation to representations of issues central to immigration

**Why study Australia in a global context, especially the Asia-Pacific region?**

Australian's modern perceptions of Asia can be dated back to as early as the 1850s during the Australian gold rushes. In order to examine Australian values and beliefs towards Asian's it will be necessary to establish Australia's historical connection to the many countries that make-up this vast continent, the relationship Australia has with Japan is of particular importance; the development of this relationship has been a rocky one, especially when Australia was fighting against Japan in World War Two.

From the connections you draw between Australia and Japan, it will open a window into how stereotypes and prejudice have formed and developed into modern day representations of cultures.

To assess Australia's values and beliefs towards immigration and immigrants you will need to investigate your community and Australia's immigration history and share your findings with the class in order to answer the following question, which forms apart of your final assessment piece:

*How have immigrants made an impact on the Australian way of life, and can Australian perceptions of Asian immigrants and immigrants from other countries be seen as an accurate representation of their culture and way of life today?*

**Links with the West Australian Curriculum Framework:**

**INVESTIGATION, COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION:** Students investigate the ways people interact with each other and their environments in order to make informed decisions and implement relevant social action:

- Students will be investigate aspects of their own community and apply it to the knowledge they learn in class.
- Skills of critical inquiry and ethical decision-making will be required in order to make informed judgments.
- Plan an investigation.
- Conduct your investigation and identify sources of information and use a range of techniques to collect, organise and evaluate information.
- Synthesise the information you have, identify cause and effect, patterns, trends, and similarities and differences.

- Formulate our own conclusion based on the investigation you have conducted, share your findings.

**TIME CONTINUITY AND CHANGE:** Students understand that people’s actions and values are shaped by their understanding and interpretation of the past:

- Studying people and events from the past can help you understand the present and make informed judgments about the future.
- Ideas and values are influenced by the actions and values of those who came before us.
- Groups can value certain aspects of the past and this can change over time.
- People have attempted to change or preserve certain aspects of society.
- There is a dynamic relationship between continuity and change.
- Historical knowledge is tentative and interpretation may be subjective and may need to be applied with some caution – this will become increasingly important as the students uncover the values and beliefs held within their own community about another culture.

**CULTURE:** Students understand that people form groups because of their shared understandings of the world, and, in turn they are influenced by the culture so formed:

- Way of life influenced by values and beliefs.
- Values and beliefs represented in ethics, codes and rituals, cultural practices, ideas and symbols.
- Culture has significant influence on individuals; this influence can extend over a long period of time.
- Cultures are diverse and cohesive (e.g. different cultural groups in Australia).
- Cultures can coexist, some are dominant, and others are marginalised.

#### **Useful Websites:**

Face the Facts – Chapter 2 – Questions and answers about migrants and multiculturalism  
[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/education/face\\_facts/index.html#3](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/education/face_facts/index.html#3)  
[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/education/face\\_facts/index.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/education/face_facts/index.html)

#### **Links to the Curriculum**

<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/education/curriculum.html>

#### **Voices of Australia – Educational Resource**

[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/racial\\_discrimination/voices/index.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/racial_discrimination/voices/index.html)

#### **Making Multicultural Australia – Online activities – Quizzes on Multicultural Australia**

<http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/>

<http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/activities/index.php>

#### **Racism. No Way!**

<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/>



## TERM OVERVIEW

Week	UNIT CONTENT/HISTORICAL NARRATIVE	KEY ACTIVITIES/RESOURCES FOR SUPPORT	ASSESSMENT
1	<p><b>PERCEPTIONS OF CULTURES: PREJUDICE, RACISM AND STEREOTYPES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How stereotypes are formed</li> <li>● Australian perceptions of Asia</li> <li>● Asian perceptions of Australia</li> <li>● Cultural comparisons</li> </ul> <p><b>“WHITE” AUSTRALIA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Introduction to concepts of diversity and anti-discrimination</li> <li>● Learning about each other</li> <li>● Migration</li> <li>● White Australia</li> </ul>	<p>Reflective writing in learning journals.</p> <p>Questioning.</p> <p>Voices of Australia (VOA) Activities 1-3</p> <p>Clickview: Living with Difference (Optional) Growing up in Australia 1788- 1901</p> <p>DVD: Communicating Between Cultures</p>	<p>ONGOING REFLECTIONS IN LEARNING JOURNALS</p> <p>(These can be both electronic and paper based)</p> <p>HISTORICAL INQUIRY – ONGOING</p>
2-3	<p><b>“WHITE” AUSTRALIA (Cont’d)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Immigration Restriction Act of 1901</li> <li>● Impact of the IRA on immigrants and Australian society</li> <li>● Link back to stereotypes and prejudice covered in first week.</li> <li>● Listen to immigrant stories</li> </ul> <p><b>IMMIGRATION POST 1945 ASSIMILATION - MULTICULTURALISM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ben Chifley and Arthur Calwell</li> <li>● Abolition of Dictation Test</li> <li>● Introduction to multi-culturalism</li> <li>● Abolition of WAP</li> <li>● Whitlam</li> <li>● Vietnam War and influx of immigrants</li> <li>● Refugees and ‘boat’ people</li> </ul> <p><b>HISTORICAL INQUIRY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Research</li> <li>● Construction of Survey’s</li> <li>● Construction of Class Survey</li> </ul>	<p>Society and Environment: Atlas (to help build geographical understanding)</p> <p>Cow based lesson:</p> <p>Introduce students to the National Archives of Australia <a href="http://vrrroom.naa.gov.au">http://vrrroom.naa.gov.au</a> Let students search the database for documents and see what they find Get them to print off a document and write a reflection in their journals about it.</p> <p>VOA Activity 4.</p> <p>Hieneman Humanities to support their learning.</p> <p>Clickview: The White Australia Policy.</p> <p>Survey development.</p> <p>Group work.</p> <p>Scaffolded inquiry.</p> <p>Reflective writing</p>	

<p>4-5</p>	<p><b>AUSTRALIA'S PLACE IN THE WORLD (FOREIGN POLICY)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Australia's Place in the World</li> <li>● Overseas relations and foreign policy</li> <li>● Australia's Relationship with Asia</li> <li>● Cultural Perceptions – Link back to content covered in weeks 1-3</li> </ul> <p><b>IMMIGRATION POST 1945</b></p> <p><b>HISTORICAL INQUIRY</b></p>	<p>Heinemann Humanities 4 - Chapter 1 (to support student learning).</p> <p>Conduct survey's.</p> <p>Reflective writing.</p>	
<p>6-7</p>	<p><b>HISTORICAL INQUIRY</b></p> <p>Students are to use this time to spend in their groups on their inquiry projects – i.e. filming for their documentaries, working on group presentations.</p>	<p>COWS (technology lesson).</p> <p>Reflective writing.</p> <p>Compilation of survey results.</p> <p>Interviewing.</p>	<p>Historical Inquiry</p>
<p>8</p>	<p><b>AUSTRALIA AND THE WORLD INTERPRETING POLITICAL CARTOONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The process</li> <li>● Power, Politics and Propaganda</li> </ul> <p><b>WORLD WAR TWO – PEARL HARBOR AND THE BOMBING OF DARWIN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The path to war</li> <li>● War in the Pacific</li> <li>● Pearl Harbor</li> <li>● Bombing of Darwin</li> <li>● Look at generational stereotypes and prejudice – What do POW's think of the Japanese?</li> <li>● Link to results received in class survey</li> </ul>	<p>Heinemann Humanities 4 - Chapter 2.</p> <p>World Wide Web.</p> <p>The Bombing of Darwin: History Mysteries 2: DVD.</p> <p>The World at War: Banzai – Japan Strikes 41-42.</p> <p>Perspectives – Analysis of survey results in context to what happened in the past.</p> <p>Reflective writing.</p>	
<p>9-11</p>	<p><b>AUSTRALIA AND THE WORLD (Cont'd)</b></p> <p><b>POST WW2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Treaties and Alliances (Anzus &amp; Seato)</li> <li>● International Obligations (UN)</li> <li>● Aspects of increasing global connectedness in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century – tie unit together</li> </ul>	<p>World Wide Web.</p> <p>Group Work.</p> <p>Popular culture – e.g. Japanese Anime.</p>	<p><b>HISTORICAL INQUIRY PRESENTATIONS</b></p>

## OTHER EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

- Pearl Harbor – Film
- Australia – Film
- Hoepfer, B. (et al), 2005, Global Voices: Historical Inquiries for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Jacaranda, Milton.
- Inserra, R., 2004, Immigrant Women 1946-1960, Heinemann, Port Melbourne.
- Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, Australian Prisoners of War Package (Topic 6, 7 & 8)
- Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, Australia and the Vietnam War. (Topic 7)
- Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, Defence 2020: Is the Australian Defence Force A Responsible Citizen, An Educational Multimedia Resource. (defence2020.info) (pp.19-50)
- National Museum of Australia: Behind the Lines: Exploring political cartoons from 2003  
[http://www.nma.gov.au/education/school\\_resources/civics\\_and\\_citizenship/behind\\_the\\_lines/](http://www.nma.gov.au/education/school_resources/civics_and_citizenship/behind_the_lines/)
- Face the Facts – Chapter 2 – Questions and answers about migrants and multiculturalism  
[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/education/face\\_facts/index.html#3](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/education/face_facts/index.html#3)  
[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/education/face\\_facts/index.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/education/face_facts/index.html)
- Links to the Curriculum  
<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/education/curriculum.html>
- Voices of Australia – Educational Resource  
[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/racial\\_discrimination/voices/index.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/racial_discrimination/voices/index.html)
- Making Multicultural Australia – Online activities – Quizzes on Multicultural Australia  
<http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/>  
<http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/activities/index.php>
- Racism. No Way!  
<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/>

## Appendix Two: Five Week Group Assessment Task

Year Ten Society and Environment  
“Australian Immigration”  
Group Assessment Task  
Historical Inquiry

Your task is to produce a documentary around the following question:

*How have immigrants made an impact on the Australian way of life, and can Australian perceptions of Asian immigrants and immigrants from other countries be seen as an accurate representation of their culture and way of life today?*

### **How to tackle the assessment:**

Step One: Complete a “Research Organiser”. This means following the steps below:

**Step 1: Define the task**

**Step 2: Develop an hypothesis statement**

**Step 3: Formulate questions to help interrogate your hypothesis**

**Step 4: Locate resources, select and record evidence (you can use a variety of sources, especially interviewing people and your survey results)**

**Step 5: Reference resources**

**Step 6: Organise information**

**Step 7: Evaluate your hypothesis and complete your checklist**

**Step 8: Communicate findings—Documentary**

Step Two: Survey’s:









In groups develop a set of questions for a survey that will enable you to evaluate this essay question. (i.e. questions you could ask somebody about their opinions on Australian immigration)

Step Three: As a class use the questions developed in groups to make a survey for the whole class to use.

Step Four: Conduct your survey. (Get four people from the four different age groups to complete a survey)

- Step Five: As a class combine all the survey results together and look for trends and patterns.
- Step Six: Conduct research into the topic.
- Step Seven: Compare and contrast your survey results to the information you researched in your groups.
- Step Eight: Create your documentary.

**Points you should consider in your production (documentary):**

-  Class survey statistics
-  Community Perspective
  - What are your communities' values and beliefs?
-  Changing Australian perspectives over time (Start before the Second World War)?
  - Has there been any change in Australian's points-of-view over time towards the migrants?
  - Why have these changes taken place?
  - Are these changes for the better? (both for Australians and the Migrants)
-  Migrant perspectives:
  - Why they moved to a new country
  - What life became like for them once they had settled
  - ...50 years on...?
-  A timeline/Chronological History of Australia's immigration history may help you recognise trends. This will be useful when looking at the statistics from your survey.
-  An examination of the impact that immigration has on/to Australia and your local community.
-  An examination of the White Australia Policy:
  - What has changed over time?
-  Consider a "case study" of the impact a certain culture has had on Australia:
  - Consider popular culture (e.g. Japanese Anime, fashion, technology)

Throughout your research you need to keep an updated learning journal. Each week it will be your responsibility to record reflections based on the following questions:

1. What research/activities have you done in class this week? How do you think these activities have helped you develop knowledge of Australia's immigration history?
2. What are your thoughts on the history you have researched?
3. Do you think there is anything you can do to improve your learning/help your learning?

Questions to consider as you complete your research:

4. What are your thoughts on the White Australia Policy?
5. What similarities or differences can you see in beliefs from 1901 compared to today?
6. What are your reflections on new migrants' experiences in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries?
7. What are your views on how the political leaders handled immigration over the years?
8. What lessons should your generation learn from the story of the White Australia Policy?
9. Is history repeating itself?
10. In your video, weblog or written journal, include links or references to websites and other resources that you find interesting and useful in helping people understand what you are thinking and wanting to say.

## Assessment Marking Guide

**Task:** In a group investigate the following premise:

*Can Australian perceptions of Asian immigrants and immigrants from other countries be seen as an accurate representation of their culture and way of life today?*

Criteria	Excellent 16-20	Good 13-15	Satisfactory 9-12	Limited 0-9	Not Demonstrated
<b>Research Organiser</b>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task has been defined in own words</li> <li>• A series of questions (focus and supporting) have been developed enabling investigation of the research question</li> <li>• Questions have been researched and investigated fully, with paragraph length responses</li> <li>• Bibliography/Reference List Framework has been completed with at least three different sources used</li> </ul>					
<b>Learning Journal</b>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your views and predictions have been expressed</li> <li>• Displays proficiency in evaluating content to develop a judgement on the topic</li> <li>• Learning has been demonstrated through the use of examples</li> <li>• Entries have incorporated the use of reflective questioning (development of your own questions on the topic that have come about because of the research you have conducted, you may not be able to answer these)</li> <li>• Own personal experiences are interwoven into reflections</li> <li>• Able to modify and translate concepts from class discussions/activities and research into possible areas to investigate further – this links to reflective questioning</li> <li>• Are substantial length to develop the above points</li> </ul>					
<b>Group Production / Documentary</b>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please refer to the attached document for an elaboration of the marking guide.</li> </ul>					

Comments

## Group Production / Documentary Marking Guide Elaborations

Limited (0-8)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Activities and events in individual lives can differ</li><li>• Aspects in immigrants lives change</li><li>• People belong to different cultural groups</li><li>• Culture can be expressed differently</li><li>• People have roles and responsibilities in community</li></ul>
Satisfactory (9-12)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Events, people and individuals occur at different times in the past</li><li>• Various factors cause change in immigration history</li><li>• Immigrants have their own perspective on the past</li><li>• There are both traditional and non traditional aspects in a cultural group</li><li>• Groups in communities act differently</li><li>• Groups influence individual identity</li></ul>
Good (13-15)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is a sequence to history</li><li>• Change in the past is reflective if individuals/groups in a society</li><li>• Perspectives are based on beliefs and heritage</li><li>• Beliefs and traditions influence change</li><li>• A culture can influence a persons identity</li></ul>
Excellent (16-20)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Australia's present identity has been shaped by the past</li><li>• Immigration occurs in different forms and rates</li><li>• Over time people's perceptions change</li><li>• Contemporary cultures reflect change in beliefs and traditions</li><li>• Cultural groups adapt to change</li><li>• Core values in a society influence individual and group identity</li></ul>