Unknown and unknowing possibilities: Transformative learning, social justice and decolonising pedagogy in Indigenous Australian Studies

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Introduction

> Decolonisation is not a metonym for social justice.
> (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 21)

> There are always vacancies: there are always roads not taken, vistas not acknowledged. The search must be ongoing; the end can never be quite known.
> (Greene, 1995, p. 15)

Decolonisation is a concept which takes on different meanings across different contexts –it simultaneously evokes a historical narrative of the end of empire, a particular version of postcolonial political theory, a way of knowing that resists the Eurocentricism of the West, a moral imperative for righting the wrongs of colonial domination, and an ethical stance in relation to self-determination, social justice, and human rights for Indigenous peoples enslaved and disempowered by imperialism. Indigenous scholars frame decolonisation in both congruent and contested ways. Smith (1999) argues that decolonisation necessarily empowers Indigenous people to re-claim, re-name, re-write and re-right and in a similar vein Fanon asserts that decolonisation is not a formal administrative term, but rather a "restructuring of subjects of history into agents of history" (Kohn & McBride, p. 69) whereby the colonised emerge from the fog of the colonial imaginary as liberated people. Wilson and Yellow Bird expand on this and suggest "decolonisation is the intelligent, calculated and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies and lands" (2005, p. 2). Others such as hooks have turned their attention more intensively to the prospect of decolonizing minds as a powerful move to "militantly confront and change the devastating psychological consequences of internalized racism" (1994a, p. 205). Battiste (2000) similarly emphasise the need to decolonize Indigenous minds from "cognitive imperialism, our cognitive prisons" (2000, p. xvii) and suggests that this can be accomplished by "harmonizing Indigenous knowledge with Eurocentric knowledge" (2000, p. xvi).

In the context of education, thinking about decolonization is historically and perhaps most readily evoked in the Australian context in critical pedagogy discourse. Grounded in the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1972), work of scholars such as Giroux posit critical pedagogy simultaneously as a "theoretical resource and as a productive practice" for interrogating and resisting how power works and is deployed as dominance, and for developing a "vocabulary in which it becomes possible to imagine power working in the interests of justice, equality and freedom" (2011, p. 5). Critical pedagogy asserts "every educational act is political and that every political act is pedagogical" (Giroux, 2011, p. 176) and through responsible and self-reflective practice (2011, p. 6), "illuminates how classroom learning embodies selective values, is entangled with relations of power, entails judgments about what knowledge counts, legitimates specific social relations, defines agency in particular ways, and always presupposes a particular notion of the future" (2011, p. 7). In decolonizing discourse linked to critical pedagogy, the emphasis is placed upon the ways that education operates as a site for colonial power, whereby classrooms, curricula and educational communities are "deeply implicated in the reproduction of colonial hegemonies" (Gatimu, 2009, p. 67). Of significance to our discussion, is the common ground that critical

1

pedagogy and decolonization discourse finds in concepts of transformation. Giroux suggests that central to any critical pedagogy project is the need to "actively transform knowledge rather than consume it" (2011, p. 7) and Battiste (2000, p. xvi) contends that if decolonization is to achieve its primary goals of healing, restoring dignity and applying fundamental human rights to Indigenous peoples, then it must necessarily entail a "complex arrangement of conscientization, resistance and transformative praxis" (p. xxi). Here we can see the influence of Freire with the implicit reference to and explicit use of the concept of "conscientization" – a process of developing not only consciousness, but a consciousness which is understood to transform reality and provoke social change – on the political projects of both decolonization and critical pedagogy. It is here too that we see a link with one of the basic principles of transformative learning, that is, transformative education is teaching and learning which effects a change in perspective and frame reference (Mezirow 1996) and thereby places increasing emphasis on shifts taking place ontologically as well as epistemologically, so learners become actively engaged in new avenues for social justice (Garde-Hansen & Calvert, 2004). We are keenly aware that both critical pedagogy and theories of transformative learning are not unproblematic when linked to talk about decolonization – both are movements constructed by white, not of color and non-Indigenous people, and represent discourses which at least historically, have tended to ignore white race and colonial power and privilege (Allen, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Leonardo, 2002). In this sense, theorising around anti-racist pedagogy and anti-colonial (Sefa Dei, 2006, 2008) approaches in education might seem to be more relevant given that both arise from the struggles of racial minorities against the forces of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism (Rezai-Rushti, 1995, p. 6). Further, our reading of the literature tells us that the relationship between discourses of anti-racist, anti-colonial and critical pedagogy are variously entangled and untangled by scholars and each finds itself inextricably in dialogue with the other, whether we like it or not. The terms are sometimes used synonymously or sometimes as a point of departure, and the social-cultural-historical-political-pedagogical-personal locatedness of the researcher and research itself sometimes determines which is preferred. At the heart of this paper however, is a concern to respond to Allen's (2004, p. 122) provocation for critical pedagogy and transformative learning to address the problem of whiteness and white supremacy by teasing out the ways transformative learning, when linked with a critical pedagogy *and* critical race agenda, performs within and against the parameters of a decolonizing project in the context of Indigenous Australian studies.

For us and many other non-Indigenous academics working with and alongside Indigenous peoples, communities and scholars, decolonising discourse in education has held much promise. With emphasis in critical pedagogy on unveiling inequalities, deconstructing power relations, and reflection and action as pathways to change, we have taught and learnt in this vein confident that our efforts will result in a reconciled future – one where our history and complicity as members, beneficiaries and children of the colonial project can find a certain kind of peace and resolve. In classrooms and curricula, we frequently use words like "reconciliation", "hope", "action" and "social justice" as panaceas to the on-going impact of colonialism on the daily lives of Indigenous peoples and our knowing collusion in it. We have felt comfortable using these words as non-Indigenous people working in Indigenous Australian Studies and education because they provide us with a place of belonging – a place where the performance of our identities as White settler colonials has value, worth, authority and power. They provide us with "immunity", as Youngblood Henderson (2000, p. 32) contends, from recognising and responding to ourselves as part of the problem. In our naivete, we have ignored the white settler colonial imperatives behind our use and performance of the language and tools of critical pedagogy and transformative learning, and

have consistently seen ourselves as the educators "doing decolonizing good" – those who proudly wore their anti-racist, social justice and reconciliation politics on our invisible White sleeves and weren't afraid to call racist *praxis* in education, research and the academy for what it was, where and when we saw it.

The recent arrival of the journal *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society*, however, demanded us to take pause. In the opening article, Tuck and Yang provide us with the stark reminder that decolonisation requires the return of Indigenous lands and does not equate to social justice, (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 21). Decolonisation, they assert, is "not converting Indigenous politics to a Western doctrine of liberation; it is not a philanthropic process of 'helping' the at-risk and alleviating suffering; it is not a generic term for struggle against oppressive conditions and outcomes. The broad umbrella of social justice may have room underneath for all of these efforts" but this is not decolonisation. All of a sudden, our talk about decolonisation as linked to social justice, transformative learning and pedagogy in Indigenous Australian Studies has become awkward – exactly as Tuck and Yang intended. Their words are harsh, and there are more to come. Tuck and Yang are critical of the way in which decolonising discourse is too easily adopted into education "without mention of Indigenous peoples, our/their struggles for the recognition of our/their sovereignty, or the contributions of Indigenous intellectuals and activists to theories and frameworks of decolonization" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 3). In this guise, it becomes nothing more than a metaphor and Tuck and Yang stress that "kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 3).

In this paper, we take up Tuck and Yang's concerns about decolonization discourse into the terrain of transformative learning and pedagogical practice in Indigenous Australian Studies. Our desire to do so stems from our work as non-Indigenous scholars in the realm of Indigenous Australian Studies, our commitment to social justice in education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and our belief in the potential of transformative learning to enact hope-as-action-as-social change. However, we also feel it is time to address the growing unease we hold that what we are in fact doing as non-Indigenous educators, is nothing more or less than colonizing decolonizing discourse, which appeases and sustains the "possessive logic of White sovereignty" (after Moreton-Robinson, 2004a). As settler colonial academics, we are implicated in decolonization – as Phillips and Whatman (2007, p. 6) contend, "because we are all products of a shared colonial history, we are *all* subjects of the enquiry" – but at this present moment we are unsure of what that role might look, feel, sound and be seen as. Following Moreton-Robinson's call for a critical analysis of the role of disciplines, in this case, Indigenous Australian Studies in "reinforcing the prerogatives of White possession" (2006, p. 391), we first position ourselves personally, professionally and politically as non-Indigenous educators in the context of Indigenous Australian Studies in higher education and introduce the transformative learning environment of "PEARL" (Political, Embodied, Active, and Reflective Learning) in which we are currently involved. We then explore in more detail PEARL's relationship to critical pedagogy, critical race theory and decolonization as praxis in the context of Indigenous Australian Studies. Ultimately we enter into this discussion in a spirit of "unknowing" to question previously held assumptions about the transformative, socially-just and decolonizing potential of our educational praxis in Indigenous Australian Studies while at the same time exploring the possibilities, as Maxine Greene encourages, of decolonized vistas in this field as yet

"unknown".

Positioning ourselves within the context of Indigenous Australian Studies, research and relationships

Variously described as interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and cross-disciplinary Indigenous Australian Studies in higher education today exists to provide Indigenous and non-Indigenous students with an understanding of the "knowledge, cultures, histories and contemporary concerns of Australia's First People" (Nakata et al., 2012, p. 121), and equipping them with cultural competencies for working and engaging in a culturally responsive and appropriate way with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.[i] Ma Rhea and Russell recall that Indigenous Australian Studies in the academy has its disciplinary roots in anthropology whereby a "focus on Aboriginal culture and knowledge were a feature [of such departments] in the period after the 1890s" (2012, p. 19) and Indigenous Australian Studies academics today can find themselves housed in Arts faculties, schools of Social Science, in departments of Education and/or nestled within Indigenous education and student support centres. One of the historical and contemporarily contested characteristics of Indigenous Australian Studies is the construction of disciplinary knowledge *about* rather than *with* and *by* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. While Indigenous Australian Studies is clearly the "study of and about Indigenous people" (Nakata, 2006, p. 267), questions have long been and continue to be asked about the inadequacies of Western paradigms and non-Indigenous people in the portrayal of Indigenous realities and Indigenous ways of knowing (e.g., Bell, 1994; Cowlishaw, 1993; Langton, 1993; Mackinlay, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2000, 2004b; Nakata, 2006); the role and reinstatement of Indigenous and peoples in the production, legitimation, reproduction and dissemination of Indigenous Australian Studies (e.g., Nakata, 2007a; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009); and, how Indigenous Australian Studies is taught, who should teach it and for what purpose (Craven, 2012; Chalmers, 2005; Ma Rhea & Russell, 2012). Similar questions are asked about who and what kind of student should be allowed and is allowed to study Indigenous Australian Studies. Central to these debates is the interrogation of the disciplinary power and control colonialism still holds in Indigenous Australian Studies in terms of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are understood and represented (e.g., Nakata, 2006) vis-à-vis the invisibility of Whiteness and white race power and privilege as mechanisms to sustain such authority (e.g., Moreton-Robinson, 2006). These are the features of Indigenous Australian Studies that are perhaps most readily associated with processes of decolonization. Of equal importance is discussion in and around the possibility of opening up a disciplinary "third-and-in-between-space" in Indigenous Australian Studies which connects colonized and colonizer with individual agency, historical processes, resistance and political action, and a post-colonial imaginary (e.g., Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006; Harrison, 2005; Nakata, 2007; Phillips & Whatman, 2007).

Certainly, one of the difficulties in writing this paper and entering into this discussion is that both of us are non-Indigenous academics. Already we have engaged in a dangerous act of representation, one where the potential silently lies for us to continue to use our White race, power and privilege in theoretical, epistemological and pedagogical ways as part of the on-going colonial project. This is one of the central concerns we hold, that is, the roles, responsibilities and rights of non-Indigenous peoples to enter into discussion about decolonization. Liz is a non-Indigenous woman who grew up on Watharung country in Western Victoria. She began her academic career in ethnomusicology in 1994 working with Yanyuwa, Garrwa, Mara and Kudanji people in the remote town of Burrulula in the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria in the Northern Territory of Australia, and found herself in the

position of teaching in the field of Indigenous Australian Studies soon after. Liz is married to a Yanyuwa man and is mother to their two children. Her PhD in ethnomusicology combined with higher education teaching experience, led her to embark on a second PhD, this time in education where she explored the performativity of power, race and relationship in Indigenous Australian Studies. Over time then, her research focus has turned to her positioning as a non-Indigenous woman in relation-to and in relation-with Indigenous peoples, knowledges and cultures. Liz's work has increasingly focused on issues of social justice and education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (e.g., Mackinlay, 2008, 2011) and in recent years she has become passionate about the power and privilege that non-Indigenous educators have to enact a "pedagogy of the heart" (Mackinlay, 2011) which is ultimately about empowerment and self-determination for Indigenous Australians. She now describes much of her work as "applied" in the sense that it is undertaken in collaboration with Indigenous community and driven by their needs and agendas (Mackinlay, 2010). Her work in this area became the inspiration behind our PEARL research - that is, to explore whether or not problem-based learning is as transformative as we think it is in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies.

Like Liz, Katelyn's background is in music and Indigenous studies, and she completed a PhD working with Indigenous women performing contemporary music in 2006. Since then her research has shifted to a collaborative framework and she has undertaken a number of research partnerships with Indigenous researchers and colleagues (see Barney, 2012). One project was with Lexine Solomon, a Torres Strait Islander performer and researcher about how Torres Strait Islander women express their identities through contemporary music (Barney and Solomon., 2010); and another with Monique Proud, an Aboriginal researcher exploring the contemporary music making in her own community of Cherbourg in Queensland, Australia (Barney and Proud., 2010). Kate has also worked on number of teaching and learning projects as part of her role in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at The University of Queensland. The PEARL project has given her space to further collaborate with Indigenous colleagues. From Kate's perspective, collaborative research between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people holds the potential to help bridge the gulf, to allow non-Indigenous and Indigenous people to work equally together, to learn from each other and resist oppression of Indigenous people through inclusion as co-researchers. Both of us had been using Problem-Based Learning processes in thier Indigenous Australian studies classrooms at the University of Queensland for a number of years, and had seen, experienced and felt the transformative learning potential of this pedagogy.

Introducing PEARL

"PEARL" grew out of an Australian teaching and learning research project entitled "Exploring Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as Transformative Education in Indigenous Australian Studies" (www.teaching4change.edu.au). Funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (now the Office for Learning and Teaching), the study began in 2010, involved both Indigenous non-Indigenous researchers, and took place in five centres: The University of Queensland, Monash University, University of Technology Sydney, Charles Darwin University and University of Newcastle. Our research aimed to understand the relationship between problem-based learning, transformative education, and how Indigenous pedagogies redefine PBL as transformative learning. We had been using the term "PBL" to describe our teaching and learning approach for many years. Indigenous Australian Studies, sometimes framed as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, is an expanding discipline in universities across Australia (Nakata, 2004) which aims to teach students about Australia's

colonial history and benefits both non-Indigenous and Indigenous students by teaching them about Australia's rich cultural heritage (Craven, 1999, pp. 23-25). Teaching and learning Indigenous Australian Studies necessarily addresses emotionally-difficult topics related to race, history, and the ongoing power of colonialism. It involves both students and lecturers crossing boundaries between self and other to understand our identities as Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in contemporary Australia. Problem-Based Learning (PBL), because of its emphasis on transformation through dialogic, embodied and experiential learning, is a pedagogical tool used by teachers in many Indigenous Australian studies classrooms at tertiary level in preference to other methods (see Mackinlay & Barney, 2010, 2011, 2012).

In its broadest sense, PBL can be defined as a "method of learning in which the learners first encounter a problem, followed by a systematic, student centred enquiry process" (Schwartz et al., 2001, p. 2). Often linked to the work of social constructionist pioneer John Dewey (Savin-Baden 2000, pp. 88-89), PBL as we know it today was first implemented in health science and medical education curricula in Canada's McMaster University Medical School in the late 1960s (Schwartz et al., 2001, p. 2). PBL courses and curricula are now found all over the world, including Australia (Schwartz et al., 2001, p. 2). Developed out of research that demonstrates that adult learners understand material better and retain it for longer if they engage with it actively, the popular appeal of problem-based learning is not surprising. Active engagement usually entails the student taking on the responsibility to work through some real-life problem or accurate simulation. Described by Savin-Baden as a "student centred" approach to pedagogy, she explains that PBL offers students opportunities to "explore a wide range of information, to link the learning with their own needs as learners and to develop independence in enquiry" (2000, p. 3).

An essential feature of PBL is that students work in small groups with a lecturer or a tutor who facilitates discussions and learning (Schwartz et al., 2001, p. 2). The real-world focus of PBL combined with its emphasis on self-directed learning assists students to learn how to learn, to link learning with their own interests and motivations, and to focus their explorations (Savin-Baden, 2000, p. 5). In many ways PBL group work enables the class to build a "community" of learners, joined by a shared commitment and desire to know, which hooks maintains is essential to create a climate where openness, intellectual rigor and personal transformation can happen (hooks, 1994b, p. 40). PBL thus does not allow students to remain passive participants in a classroom and in practical terms what this means for many students is that they engage in a way of working that they may not have encountered at university before. For many students both the topic and the teaching approach are unknown territory, and it is not unusual for them to initially experience enormous resentment, conflict and resistance to the shift in emphasis and responsibility from the lecturer or faculty member as expert to a classroom which "acknowledges both teachers and students as creators and holders of knowledge" (Ross & Hurlbert, 2004, p. 81).

There is much social, linguistic, political, spiritual and cultural diversity amongst Indigenous Australian peoples and this extends to teaching and learning philosophies and practice. However, it is possible to identify pedagogical characteristics common to both Indigenous groups locally and globally, and the approach and goals of PBL. The autonomous, embodied and experiential nature of teaching and learning is a striking attribute of Indigenous cultures. Hooley contends that Aboriginal pedagogies begin "with the culture and understandings of learners, enquiry emphasises a unity of practice and theory and of so-called academic and practical knowledge, without privileging one over the other" (2000, n. p.). In this sense,

Indigenous pedagogy brings together the intellectual and the personal – it is both empirical and normative in that it embraces and allows for interplay between the circumstances in which people find themselves and their beliefs about those circumstances (Battiste 2002, 19). Nakata asserts that this positioning is an essential aspect of Indigenous pedagogies, particularly in relation to Indigenous Studies and suggests that "we might teach ourselves and our children about our 'locatedness' or 'situatedness' in relation to what is around us, in this case, not environmental elements, but knowledge systems" (2004, 12). Cooperative learning styles are also considered central to many Indigenous pedagogies, whereby students and teachers "look after, learn from, and teach each other" (Davison 1998, 8). Alongside dialogue and interaction with peers however, Indigenous pedagogy allows students to assert independence by "observing, listening and participating with a minimum of intervention or instruction" (Battiste 2002, 15). Battiste summarises the distinctive features of Indigenous pedagogies as, "learning by observation and doing, learning through authentic experiences and individualized instruction, and learning through enjoyment" (2002, 18). The similarities between Indigenous pedagogies and PBL are clear and thus the use of PBL as an approach to engage students in the philosophical, personal and practical realities of working with Indigenous peoples seems highly appropriate.

While we started with the term "PBL", it became clear as the project progressed that the terminology we were using was not politically or pedagogically appropriate. As the data began to reveal, the research team became increasingly uncomfortable with the colonial underpinnings and associations of the term "Problem-Based Learning" and began to explore the possibility of redefining what we do as something else entirely. Students noted that one of the reasons for this was the colonial underpinnings and associations of the term "problem-based learning" and the negative ways Indigenous people have historically been framed as "problems". These views were shared by Aboriginal artist Denise Proud who painted the piece "Spreading your wings" for the project (www.teaching4change.edu.au). She too emphasised that she did not like the term PBL because of these negative connotations. As data collection progressed, the project team acknowledged the need to find a more suitable term for the approach; the external evaluator for the project Carmen Robertson from the University of Regina stated clearly, "The connotations of 'problem' are problematic!"

Students also agreed with the need to find a new term and during focus group discussions with them, a number of suggestions were made for a different term to replace PBL. These included: "action orientated", "issues focused" and "issue-based learning", "collaborative-based", "reflexive and personal", "inquiry-based", and "hands-on" learning. In discussions with leading Australian PBL scholar David Boud, he noted that the terminology of "problem-based learning" had also been a problematic issue in social work education because of the negative connotations of viewing clients as problems. After much debate, during the final Reference Group meeting, a decision was made to move away from the term "problem-based learning". PEARL was suggested as a new acronym to encompass the political, embodied, active, and reflective aspects of this teaching and learning approach and we would now like to introduce this pedagogy in more detail.

The well-known phrase "pearls of wisdom" goes some way in explaining why the analogy/acronym of PEARL was chosen. Both pearls and wisdom take a long time to grow, both may seem small but are extremely valuable and they both develop from a substance, which is irritating, unwanted and unremarkable. It is the way in which a pearl is made which perhaps best clarifies why the metaphor is appropriate for pedagogical processes in Indigenous Australian Studies. Like teaching and learning, a pearl is a gemstone that is

created by a living creature – it is organic and grows in relationship to events and others around it (see Pearl-Guide, 2011). The pearl itself is formed when a foreign object such as dirt or a small piece of stray food gets inside the shell of an oyster (or other mollusc) by mistake. To protect itself, the creature covers the intruding object with the same substance that its shell is made of, a mineral known as nacre. The oyster or other mollusc continues covering the object with multiple layers of nacre, eventually forming a pearl. Pearls come in many shapes, colours and sizes. No single pearl is perfect or the same and nor does every oyster always produce a pearl. The stages of pearl development – the intrusion of something new, strategies that are put in place to cope with the intrusion, and then the resulting growth – are similar to the transformation that takes place in this teaching and learning approach. Together the project team and Reference Group then developed the following description of PEARL as a teaching and learning approach in Indigenous Australian studies:

P (for political, performative, process, place based): We bring our experiences, knowledge and practice to the place where the current learning process occurs. We reflect and respond to the agency of the space and the elements of the place where our teaching and learning takes place. We perform our learning, embody the process and recognise the inherent political nature and knowing that we move through. We know that we will move in and out of the place and back again to influence the places where teaching and learning occurs.

E (for embodied, experiential, explorative, engaged, emotion, empathy, experience): A holistic exploration that engages mind, body and emotion in empathetic dialogue. A transformative process based on equal collaboration.

A (for active, anti-racist, anti-colonial, active): Theoretical imperatives relate implicitly to anti-racist/anti-colonial discourses. Practically we view PEARL as aiding students to shift from reflection to action through agency and awareness. The shift to action is a critical element of transformation and enables students to become agents for change and decolonisation.

R (for relational, reflective, reflexive): Through reflection on particular structured learning activities, student's experiences are transformed into knowledge and deeper wisdom, which they apply to their personal and professional lives.

L (for lifelong learning): Learning in PEARL is learning for life, for change, for empowerment, for hope, for knowledge, to lead, to let go of assumptions, to liberate and to lustre – to shine!

In our description of PEARL, the principles of transformative learning are everywhere. Transformative learning or transformative education holds that "learning is understood as a process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162). This resonates with Sefa Dei's (2002, p. 124) insistence that in transformative learning, the self - indeed a spiritual, emotional and embodied self - must be reconnected to community and such reuniting in and of itself actively works against imperial and colonial forms of education. Drawing upon the work of O'Sullivan, Morrell and O'Connor (2002, p. xvii), transformative education can further be defined as teaching and learning which involves: a deep structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions; a shift of consciousness that alters our way of being in the world; understanding ourselves, our self-locations, and our relationships with others in the world; understanding relations of power in interlocking structures of race, class and gender; and, envisioning alternative approaches and

possibilities for social justice. In other words, transformative education is teaching and learning which effects a change in perspective and frame reference (Mezirow, 1996). Mezirow (1997, p. 7) strongly believed that "critical reflection on the assumptions upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based" is central to such transformations. In the context of Indigenous Australian Studies and PEARL, the political frame of reference is emphasised. Transformative learning as *praxis* begins from within the frames of Whiteness and white race power and privilege, and critically engages with social, political and legal discourses which frame, locate and determine what it means to be an Indigenous person historically and today, and to reflect on students' own positioning "in relation to". While Brookfield (2003, p. 142) suggests that an "act of learning can be called transformative if it involves a fundamental recognition, questioning, and reordering of how one's thoughts or actions are forged by *capitalism*", the bigger "c" word in Indigenous Australian Studies is "colonialism".

PEARL as critical + race + pedagogy

We now turn to consider the ways in which PEARL enacts what might be described as a both a critical pedagogy and a critical race agenda.[ii] As McClaren (2009, p. 61) notes, the practice of critical pedagogy is as diverse as it many adherents but there are a number of overarching characteristics of critical pedagogy which we can see at play in PEARL. The work of Freire informs the broad theoretical framework of PEARL in the sense that we aim to educate students to be "truly humanized social (cultural) agents in the world" committed to social justice, democracy and freedom from oppression (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2009, p. 9). The emphasis in PEARL on the employment of critical theory for dialectical understanding, or teases "out the histories and relations of accepted meanings and appearances" (McClaren, 2009, p. 61) and enables examination of the "underlying political, social, and economic foundations of the larger society" (McClaren, 2009, p. 63). PEARL, like critical theory, asks "how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others clearly are not" (2009, p. 63). In the context of Indigenous Australian Studies, PEARL's critical theory approach enables teachers and learners to consider the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander epistemologies are represented, sidelined and/or excluded across disciplines, to interrogate the ideologies that make such inequities possible, and to deconstruct unequal relations of power between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the past and present. Importantly, PEARL privileges the Freirean concept of *praxis*, that is, the on-going interaction of reflection, dialogue and action in order to "illuminate" human activity and "provide a better understanding of the world as we find it and as it might be" (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2009, p. 13). Praxis in PEARL pedagogy deliberately awakens students to "break with the given, the taken-for-granted—to move towards what might be, what is not yet" as Greene (2009, p. 83) to ask questions about the possibility of social justice, self-determination and sovereignty for Indigenous people in Australia.

Such questioning leads to further interrogation of a critical kind into the uncomfortable landscape of race. By necessity then, PEARL extends its critical pedagogical lens to encompass a critical race agenda. Dialogue in and around the on-going realities of colonisation and the unresolved issues of Indigenous sovereignty are difficult conversations to have and a critical race theory perspective enables PEARL to insist that "race still matters" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 18). Critical race theory refuses students the option to walk away from, deny or silence the understanding that "race is always already present in every social configuring of our lives" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 19). Non-Indigenous students are

confronted with their complicity in processes of colonization and see the ways in which they knowingly or unknowingly enact, sustain and benefit from their white power and privilege. Critical race theory further enacts a civil rights and social justice platform that provides an opening for students to envisage how they might begin to transform a world suffering under the "albatross of racial hegemony" (Barnes, 1990, p. 1864-1865, in Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 21). PEARL engages critical race theory to reveal the power of whiteness and colonialism, and personalize and politicize Indigenous Australian Studies in a way that will open a space where sweeping change might be possible. Certainly, recent learning journal reflections from students participating in a PEARL process during an Indigenous Australian Studies class suggest that an unveiling of 'something' to do with race, power and privilege is happening.[iii] For example, one student admitted, 'I didn't realise until this [PEARL] just how much history has been produced, reproduced and transmitted from a colonial mentality' and questioned how this happened, how she can challenge it, and importantly, how she can contribute to anti-racist practice and positive change. Another challenged her sense of entitlement to 'know' and therefore 'dis/possess' Indigenous Australian people as someone from colonizing culture and asked 'How or has this changed at all and how am I inadvertently perpetuating this?' Similarly, one student wondered, 'How do we know when we are talking outside of colonial discourses – is this even possible?' But the questions we are left with are: what do students actually *do* with such questioning that might look like decolonizing practice? Is questioning colonialism, power and privilege enough in this way actually what decolonising practice in classrooms means? Does PEARL pedagogy really decolonize?

Conclusion: Why PEARL may not be decolonising practice

Up until now, we have been firmly convinced that PEARL pedagogy enacts a powerfully transformative educational agenda, which changes hearts and minds, reconciles *with* as opposed *to* (see Nicoll, 2004), and thereby ultimately works towards a more socially just Australia. PEARL's premise has always been that teaching and learning for transformation, social justice and reconciliation is "good enough" to be decolonising. In light of Tuck and Yang's argument, we cannot help but question this basis, precisely because talk of Indigenous sovereignty is nowhere in our pedagogy. Have we avoided engagement with Indigenous sovereignty as central to PEARL, in the same way as it is to decolonization because we know, as Fanon suggested, that "decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder … it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding" (1963, p. 36)? Have we desperately sought PEARL to be decolonising, because, as Tuck and Yang suggest, we are looking to enact "settler moves to innocence…attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1)? If we were to think about decolonisation, land and Indigenous sovereignty as central to PEARL, what would PEARL become? How do we shift PEARL away from settler colonial imperatives when we ourselves occupy that subject position? What would a completely decolonising version of PEARL look like as teaching and learning in Indigenous Australian Studies classrooms and why do we *want* to enact a decolonising pedagogy?

We do not have any answers to these questions, but they matter a great deal. They matter to Liz because of her positioning in relation to Indigenous Australian people. She is at once white-researcher-educator-family-kin-wife-mother in relation to Yanyuwa, Garrwa, Mara, Kudanji, Wadaman and Gagadju people from Burrulula, Katherine, Darwin and Kakadu in the Northern Territory. Being in relation has always meant being in ethical relation with Aboriginal people as a white settler colonial woman and she has always held that

decolonisation is a moral imperative all non-Indigenous Australians must take on board if we are to move towards a future which is self-determining for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. PEARL represents our responses to that imperative. However, as her partner, constantly reminds her, what decolonisation wants is land and Indigenous sovereignty – the words spoken by Wirdajuri elder Donna Ingram as a welcome to country at the opening to the recent Australian Association for Research in Education conference, "This is, was and always will be Aboriginal land", are testament to this. Nakata (2004, pp. 2-3) emphasises the importance of opening "difficult dialogues" in order to restructure Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships and for Kate, PEARL creates a space where these dialogues can take place. It allows for both non-Indigenous and Indigenous students and teachers to reflect on what decolonisation means in the context of Indigenous Australian studies. Yet her continuing collaborative research relationships and friendships with Indigenous people emphasise to her that this journey is not simple for either Indigenous or non-Indigenous and there are many discomforts to negotiate.

How then are we to respond as non-Indigenous educators to claims and calls for sovereignty by Indigenous people in our classrooms, curricula and educational communities? Is it our role to respond as non-Indigenous educators to calls for decolonisation and if so, how do we avoid slipping into the kind of us versus them content that Nakata et al. (2012) warn us of? How do we get the balance right between interrogating history, whiteness and race relations and engaging in thinking about our thinking as settler colonials in relation to and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this country with Indigenous sovereignty firmly on our minds? Whose transformation and liberation is privileged in PEARL, remembering once more the white ground on which discourses of critical pedagogy and transformative learning are built, and how do we ensure that the White possessive logic which Moreton-Robinson speaks of does not continue to disavow Indigenous sovereignty? How do we avoid decolonisation becoming nothing more than a metaphor, which appeases our white guilt and anxiety? Is the 'E' in PEARL really about empathy or is it a convenient excuse for the ways in which white possessive logic seeks to hide colonial responses of pity for and disgust of the colonised, while at the same time 'stealing the pain of others' (Razack, 2007) under the mask of a pedagogy of compassion (Zembylas, 2013)? Performative and political, embodied, anti-racist, reflective and reflexive, and liberatory it may be, but PEARL, as we know it now, could not and should not be described as decolonising pedagogy. As Maxine Greene reminds us however, "there are always vacancies: there are always roads not taken, vistas not acknowledged. The search must be ongoing; the end can never be quite known (p. 15)", and we hold onto the potential PEARL holds for introducing something as yet unknown, unwanted and unremarkable into Indigenous Australian Studies teaching and learning as a decolonised space and thereby remain a "location of possibility" for transformation to happen.

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Notes

[i] Words associated with race and racial discourse linked with matters of Indigeneity in contemporary Australia are messy and complicated. In this paper, we adopt the terms 'Indigenous' and 'non-Indigenous' to make a distinction between the first peoples of Australia and those of us who are not. The term non-Indigenous includes those who might elsewhere be described as 'non-white'.

[ii] We are aware of the work of Brayboy on 'tribal critical race theory', however, in the Australian context, the term 'tribal' is not used by Indigenous Australian peoples because of the association it has with the colonial 'possession', 'capture' and 'construction' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and cultures by anthropologists. Critical race theory remains the preferred term by Indigenous scholars (c.f., Moreton-Robinson, 2004a, 2004b, 2006).

[iii] These student reflections are drawn learning journal entries gathered during a research project we undertook in 2013 with pre-service teachers studying Indigenous education at the University of Queensland. The use of student learning journals for research purposes was given ethical clearance from the University of Queensland Ethics Committee. At the time of writing, we were in the process of collating and analyzing this data and our thinking here is a reflection of the beginning stages of our understanding in relation to what is actually happening in terms of decolonization processes and transformative learning.