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ABSTRACT

It has been 46 years since the end of the White Australia policy, and yet there still stands the question as to why so many ethnic minorities in Australia face discrimination. More specifically, I question why so many as a fifth of our ethnic students experience direct racism daily (State Government of Australia, 2019) despite how gentrified some of our suburbs have become. I question why that within the two decades in which I graduated and returned to a primary school as a teacher, the same sounds, looks and behaviours still exist. I wonder why my school leaders still approach these issues with the same nonchalant attitude. From a graduate teacher's perspective, I seek to discuss some problems and opportunities in sharing and talking about one of the most uncomfortable classroom and school issues -culture, ethnicity and heritage (Gerwin, 2003).

KEYWORDS

Racism; Australia; education; students; intercultural.

INTRODUCTION

The Australian curriculum contains two main components that address how we as teachers should build intercultural competence within our students. Firstly, there is the General Capability Strand of 'Intercultural Understanding' (Intercultural Understanding, N.D) . Then there are the Cross Curriculum Priorities - 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures', 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' and lastly, 'Sustainability' which contain key words referencing Interculturalism such as 'diversity', 'world views', 'social justice' and 'cultural practices' (Cross Curriculum Priorities , 2016). However, the document does not imply as to how cultural understanding will help build the knowledge of sustainability as found in UNESCO documents (Tilbury & Henderson, 2003; Cabedo-Mas, Nethsinghe , & Forrest , 2017). This leads Australian educators who may not yet have adequate knowledge of the goals for Global Sustainability to teach in a Western-centric manner. Focusing on scientific and empirical views of sustainability such as economic and environmental factors.

But even with the goals of our National curriculum, I question how many authentic opportunities students encounter in order to develop the capacity to become intercultural. I also question if our educators can recognise, let alone explicitly discuss with students these opportunities. After all, the goal is to produce students who are capable of self-assessment to examine how their cultural characteristics may affect other's lives (Tilbury & Henderson, 2003), and contribute to the dynamics of privileged and oppressed cultural groups. Can schools really be a place where, as the Victorian Multicultural Policy Statement (2018) suggests, a place where "Victorians can contribute and belong [in]" when teachers, let alone students may yet be able to navigate the complexities of multiculturalism?

Multiple studies have shown that schools and playgrounds are still some of the most common places for racism (Gross & Rutland , 2014; Mansouri & Jenkins, 2010; Sleeter as cited in, Williams, 2014), and as a graduate teacher in a school with 28% of students from LBOTE , I see that students point out differences more than similarities.

As an ethnic individual who grew up racially isolated in a middle-class white suburb, I recognise this because I have experienced it. In a country that is as diverse as our own, I propose that Australia needs students to not only be Asia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literate as the Cross-Curriculum prioritises, but culturally ready to interact with all members of our global society.

METHODOLOGY

As an artist, Chinese-Australian, teacher, and an individual who has always internalised the world to grow empathy to understand externally, I have located myself in the Interpretivist paradigm (Humphrey, 2013). Most fitting with my identities, I am also drawn to both methodologies of *a/r/tography* and auto-ethnography. The nature of *a/r/tography* having strong ties to autobiographical inquiry (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Pourchier & Holbrook, 2014; Coleman, 2017), lends itself to the Auto-ethnographic elements that grew naturally during writing stages. Nonetheless, it is necessary to disclose that I place *A/r/tography* as the leading methodology, and that Auto-ethnography is but a form of writing.

As a practising artist, I found it innate to work in an arts-based approach which would allow art-making to be central to the generation of data and understanding (Sullivan, 2010). *A/r/tography* requires the dissemination of three equal identities, artist/researcher/teacher (Irwin, 2004; Coleman, 2017), and allows narratives and stories to be in between past and present times as I remember, reflect and theorise to become one who is pedagogically more ready than her previous self (Humphrey, 2013; Hammersly, 2012). The nature of the Interpretivist paradigm locates me in that I believe in many truths and realities (Humphrey, 2013), and that ultimate truths may or may not exist, and this paper will contain only my present truths.

A/r/tography allows the incorporation of many creative practices such as, but not limited to; image-making, drama, music, poetry, and other forms of creative writing such as narratives (Pourchier & Holbrook, 2014), in which I work naturally as a multidisciplinary artist. In particular, I use Evocative Auto-ethnography as it focuses itself on narratives that will ideally, open conversations and evoke emotional and empathetic responses from readers to understand another's life (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008; Pitard, 2017). This approach comes second nature to the many writings I have completed as part of my artistry. In a Rhizomatic fashion, I take on the form of a living inquiry where I assemble knowledge and meanings (Irwin, 2013) in ways that are multiple, non-hierarchical, proliferating and non-dualistic (Guerin, 2018). In this manner, it mimics how I work as an artist where I read, write, and make, all simultaneously in order to become (Gouzouasis, Irwin, Miles, & Gordon, 2013) as I explore and understand. It is pertinent to express the freeing nature of *a/r/tography*. Just as there is no prescribed method for artist practices, *a/r/tography* too allows for the freedom of the artist-researcher-teacher to conduct, and present findings in ways that they believe best communicates a new level of understanding (Irwin, 2013; Coleman, 2017).

As an ethnic other from birth in Australia, my identity and experiences are also crucial to the ways I explore and write about multi and intercultural education. My personal recounts are not just participant in the racial phenomenon, but also an observer. I am situated as Participant-Researcher and also artist and teacher due to the nature of *A/R/Tography's* methodology, where I am constantly in between identities and borders (Irwin, 2004; Irwin, 2013). This, however, is not a limitation but rather, an opportunity to see a unique perspective on how my pedagogy is shaped due to these identities as I discover what it means to be Intercultural, and an active force in combatting racism for the future.

Ching Chong

When I was offered my first teaching position, I made a conscious decision that I would establish my art room as a multi-lingual and multi-cultural space. I made a decision that slowly, I would contribute to the growing Intercultural landscape of Australian education. But there were things that I had not anticipated, there were things that I had not yet discovered and there were things that I had forgotten. Within the first few days of being at the school during handover, I had introduced myself countless times. Because I knew full well of the number of Chinese students at the school, I had also introduced myself as knowing some Mandarin and being a native Cantonese speaker. I had never seen so many students that reminded me of me. It was all well until I heard the familiar words -

“Yeah well, I speak Chinese too! Ni hao, ching chong ling lao.”

Do I ignore it? Do I say something? How do I react? These are children in primary school.

The answer is – I ignored it. I didn’t say anything. I thought that surely; I wouldn’t hear it again. The students will figure it out.

Fast forward past the summer holidays. I’m excited. I had compiled lists of possible lessons, units and classroom habits. I was going to lead by example, show my passion and love for learning and listening to other people’s cultures, traditions and languages. I was going to make steps to change how we address the curriculum of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures in the art room. I was ready to speak in and out of languages. Most of all, I wanted to model that it’s okay to be a Non-White Australian. One of the ways was to play not only stereotypical Western pop music – but also the Taiwanese music that I love.

I was enthusiastic and sure to explain why I had included the songs. But I was met with resounding Ching Chong noises. I was met with “Why can’t we listen to normal music?”

What’s normal music?

“English music.”

Jump a few more weeks. I am teaching grade threes, and because I speak to some of my Chinese students in Mandarin and the school teaches Mandarin; it isn’t uncommon for me to hear the language in my room. Once again, I hear the words –

“Yeah! Well, I speak Chinese too! Ching Chong, Ling long – “

The girl retaliates in Mandarin. “No! It doesn’t sound like that!”

I turn around and I yell – I don't remember the words verbatim, but I remember saying that it was highly offensive, that I never wanted to hear anything like that in my classroom again.

The class goes on, I bring them back to their room for lunch. I usher everyone outside. The girl comes up to me.

"Miss Truong. Do you speak Chinese?"

"I speak Cantonese and some Mandarin, why?"

"Is that why you told him to stop?"

"Yes"

She hesitates.

"I didn't know what to say to him"

"Did you feel bad?"

"Yeah. It kind of hurt."

I get down so I'm eye level to her, my heart is broken. I don't remember what I said. But I remember the conflict that I felt – how do you explain racism to an eight-year old? How do you tell her, that the sad truth is that living in Australia - especially right now when there is an abundance of tension against Chinese, for political and social reasons such as the baby milk formula crisis and property buying – that Ching Chong noises are just the beginning?

RACISM AND MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA

In order to address any cultural or racial issue in Australia, it is pertinent to firstly discuss some relevant historical events. Australia as a White Nation was founded upon the genocide, and continued discrimination of our Indigenous people. Whiteness as belonging is premised on the dispossession of Indigenous land (Riggs, 2003). Furthermore, racial discrimination can be traced back in documents to as early as the 'Chinese Immigration Act' in 1855, the first colony law of its kind which restricted the migration of individuals based on appearance (National Archives of Australia, 2011). The Chinese, as one of the earliest migrants of this land since colonisation have been persecuted from the moment of their arrival, resulting in numerous race riots throughout early Australian history. Since then, all following migrant races have experienced similar feelings of hostility and aversion from the dominant population of this now White Nation. Colonisation, Whiteness, the White Australia Policy (1901) and Assimilation Policy (1937) resulted in effects which would affect not only our contemporary education system but various bodies nationwide.

Firstly, because White is related to race, we usually associate the word with those of Caucasian descent; however, in this review I refer to Whiteness as a state of power and privilege. Although it has relations to colour, it is important to remember that not all Whites are privileged equally, just as among any race there are issues of class. Here, Whiteness is a form of symbolic capital (Schech & Haggis, 2001), where one becomes more 'White'

by conforming to certain political and cultural ideals. In this sense, when referring to Whiteness; it is not to encompass all Caucasian descendants but rather individuals who have specific beliefs about this nation.

There are several theories which seek to inquire the roots of racism in Australia; many stemming back to colonial times and addressing the conception of Whiteness as superior. One major theory is White Paranoia which Hage (2002) elaborates as Whiteness being associated with privilege, and that racism stems from the fear of losing privileges. The idea of Whiteness and privilege in Australia is directly associated with ideas of classism which can be tracked back to British origins (Miles as cited in Hage, 2002). The ideals of classism were translated to race in Australia, where Whiteness dominated the hierarchy. Australia's case of racism throughout history is most prominent in its exclusion of individuals based on racial, religious, or cultural beliefs (Curthoys, 2003), its rejection based on presumption that migrants would pollute or corrupt White Australia. One group that has proven to be a continual perceived threat to White Australia are those of Asian descent, in particular the Chinese. The multiple waves of 'Asian Invasions' throughout Australia's history were always met with hysteria. The distaste for Asian migrants fuelled by the belief that they would over-populate and take sovereignty of the land (Walker, 2003), forcing the Colonial White Europeans out of power.

The idea of sovereignty over land is one to explore in order to understand why Whiteness holds superiority in Australia. Possession and ownership of items, whether symbolic or physical define and affirm our identity. Therefore, the ownership of land in colonizing projects is important, not only because it asserts ideas of belonging (Riggs, 2003; Walker, 2003), but because this ownership extends itself through to all the bodies within the space (Kamaloni, 2013). Possession of land thus means that the holder is now in power of all things within. The possession of Australian land and the refusal to return sovereignty to the Indigenous community can be interpreted as another way that White Australia continues the oppression of its Indigenous land owners (Quayle & Sonn, 2013). But this possession extends beyond just geographical elements of our country, it expands itself into language, culture, religion, education and more. Whiteness has seeped in and become a norm in our country.

“How do you tell her, that the sad truth is that living in Australia - especially right now when there is an abundance of tension against Chinese, for political and social reasons such as the baby milk formula crisis and property buying – that Ching Chong noises are just the beginning?”

Racism in Australia is constructed to sustain Whiteness as the position of command and dominance (Dunn et al., 2004). The attitudes prior to the Multicultural policy highlighting the fears and aversion that Whiteness had and continue to have; towards other races and cultures. The idea of buying into Whiteness, or to assimilate is to belong in this White Nation. Australia's struggle to leave its Whiteness to move towards Multi or Interculturalism can be seen in its unwillingness to identify nationally as one of creole nature (Schech & Haggis, 2001) where it is intricately mixed of various people from differing global locations. Despite the growing number of LBOTE students, schools remain predominantly monolingual places of education.

Therefore, Multiculturalism as a policy is a compromise, implemented when Australia realised migrants couldn't fully assimilate. Multiculturalism was born out of tolerance, and while it aims to inform equality and sameness amongst differences, it does not eradicate racism (Berman & Paradies , 2010). Schools can claim multiculturalism; and celebrate the chosen language and country which the school teaches. However, this interaction with a single aspect of a foreign culture doesn't prevent students from thinking or using insensitive language and, or behaviour towards native speakers. Multiculturalism also seems to be about celebrating migrant cultures (Berman & Paradies , 2010), and that Indigenous cultures seem to be categorised differently. Even amongst within our curriculum, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures (Cross Curriculum Priorities , 2016) are prioritised separately.

The teachers seem very interested in students' languages. They try very hard. I also hear words that I have heard countless times "I wish I could speak another language", and honestly, that did nothing for me but tell me I was different. I think students need to be able to see themselves in their teachers, they need to be able to relate.

Australian history is strongly interwoven with racism. Even in contemporary times; our days are filled with racial phenomena. Racism is not of the past, but rather something present residing parallel to Multiculturalism. Schools are one of the largest places of dissemination, yet I question what we as teachers are doing in these places to dismantle the hatred and mistrust of differing individuals based on race and culture (Blair, 2015).

ANTI-RACISM EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA – DOES IT EXIST?

Multiculturalism does not eradicate racism although it promotes Intercultural thinking which combats prejudice and discrimination (Tilbury & Henderson, 2003). Therefore, Anti-Racism needs to be taught in order to fully achieve multi and eventual Intercultural cohesion (Berman & Paradies , 2010). Along with the Intercultural Understanding Capability in the national curriculum, I propose teachers address, and teach Anti-Racism to combat the belief that racial discrimination doesn't affect our present or future.

The National Anti-Racism Strategy (2012; 2015) states that following the reviewed Multicultural Policy back in 2011, that an Anti-Racism strategy was needed to 'address racism' in Australia. The report detailed that 66% of their focus group expressed having experienced racism. Respondents also expressed that schools and educational institutions are amongst the most important spaces to address racism as they are also the place where racism is mostly experienced. However, Anti-Racism as a component of Australia's curriculum is yet to be found. Within the documents that promote Multiculturalism and Interculturalism, racism is not addressed, nor is the importance of communicating about the existing power relations due to racialized histories made evident. Even though it has been seven years since the release of the first National Anti-Racism Strategy, the education sector seems to be stuck in a time where racism is pushed into the same policy as bullying, only needing to be addressed if reported (Aveling, 2007) and taken seriously by school leadership members.

But there are things that you don't pick up on by pure awareness. There are things that you won't feel unless you have personal ties. It seems that Anti-Racist education is avoided. Culture is celebrated. But race related issues are hidden, brushed under the carpet. There is 'nothing the school can do' as my assistant principal stated.

Anti-Racism education not only needs to become evident in the curriculum, but schools need to become active advocates for anti-racism and act as a space for disseminating and dispelling myths that promote racist thinking or behaviour (Pedersen & Hartley , 2015). In order for this to occur, we must delve into understanding ways we can teach Anti-Racism.

In its most ideal form Anti-Racism education creates an environment which allows for dialogue, and the sharing of even the most confronting aspects of culture to be discussed (Blair, 2015). It provides a space where openness, acceptance and non-judgement exists for all parties. It is a space where all individuals including those who identify as White can be free from feeling personally attacked which can result in accusations of reverse racism (Sonn, 2008).

Anti-Racism talks about issues that go beyond superficial features of culture such as food, music and dance, it is aimed at talking, respecting and understanding the fundamental differences in our religious, societal and philosophical beliefs. It doesn't ask us to agree, but to show respect for different world views and knowledges. Through exploring these confronting aspects of race, ethnicity and culture we come to understand the balance, or imbalance of power between groups (Sonn, 2008). It is also important to educate the differences between individual and institutionalized forms of racism which may be more covert (Paradies, 2005). The differences between prejudice and racism also need to be defined (Pedersen & Hartley , 2015) as not all prejudices are racist in nature. In this sense, Anti-Racism and Intercultural Competence both work to neutralize prejudice views through the development of empathy and increased self-reflexivity.

Anti-Racism curriculums need to be structured as a course that helps individuals grow. Sonn (2008) documents his psychology classes in 'Exploring Race, Ethnicity and Culture' and how seminars, guest speakers, student-initiated discussions and reflective journals have helped his students to locate themselves in the hierarchy of privilege. His findings from these classes also indicate that there is a difference between those who know about racism, and those who have experienced it, making it crucial to form a space where individuals won't feel isolated. Even among the same ethnic population, not all will have the same experiences as a Chinese growing up in a middle-class White suburb will have encountered far more racist behaviours as opposed to another who grew up in a Chinese community in Australia.

To combat racism is also to promote bystanders and victims to report these offenses or to speak out. Bystanders in events of racism, like events of bullying; are sometimes the key persons in prevention. Interventions such as the Positivity Intervention in 2011 run by Pedersen, Paradies, Hartley and Dunn showed that there was almost a fifty percent increase in bystanders' willingness to speak out against racism after intervention. However, for these interventions to be implemented into schools, it is essential that the managers of schools, namely the principals, recognise racism as a serious problem. Anti-Racism policies have existed before the National Anti-Racism Strategy (2012), with a Racial Discrimination Act being in place since 1975. Yet, in a focus group of 35 principals 54% of responses indicated that they did not know about the Anti-Racism Policies and believed that there were no specific strategies to target racism (Aveling, 2007). Merely only a decade ago, school principals

neglected to realise that in order to combat racist behaviour, more was needed than to disclose in their School Values that acceptance, tolerance and diversity were important. Today, the issue remains.

Whiteness

One of the things I didn't notice about my school until I attended the first day, is that the teacher population doesn't reflect the student population. I'm not saying that there should be a diversity quota, nor am I saying that the school is discriminating. It was merely an observation that hit hard.

Out of more than 30 teaching staff, only 3 were of distinct non-white heritage. I didn't want to pay it attention. The principal seemed very aware of how cultural differences in families could affect the way a child did things. The school as a whole seemed very aware.

But there are things that you don't pick up on by pure awareness. There are things that you won't feel unless you have personal ties. It seems that Anti-Racist education is avoided. Culture is celebrated. But race related issues are hidden, brushed under the carpet. There is 'nothing the school can do' as my assistant principal told me.

If a school is willing to have specialists talk to students about sexuality and gender. If students can discuss sexual and gender-related discrimination, and if students can be aware to the point of asking if I have a 'partner' instead of a 'boyfriend' – shouldn't they also be capable of understanding racism too?

Are we avoiding racism?

Are we brushing Ching Chong off because it is racism's 'most childish form' as I'm often told?

Are we not going to talk about race and how it affects us?

Are we just going to talk about how beautiful it is to live in Melbourne where there is an abundance of differences?

What about when a child goes home and asks why their skin colour is different?

Or a child questions if they are inferior to Whites?

Or when a child no longer wishes to engage with their mother tongue because they are ashamed and afraid?

The teachers seem interested in students' languages. They try very hard. I also hear words that I have heard countless times "I wish I could speak another language", and honestly, that did nothing for me but tell me I was different. I think students need to be able to see themselves in their teachers, they need to be able to relate.

INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING IN AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION

Multicultural education is centred around educating for the tolerance and respect of cultural communities, whereas Intercultural Understanding aims to generate global citizenship with the goal of peace-building (Cabedo-Mas, Nethsinghe , & Forrest , 2017). Both are essential and need to be taught, often weaving in and out of each other, Multicultural Education being a precursor for Intercultural Education. In this section, I explore how Intercultural Understanding can be built into classrooms.

In order to avoid tokenistic forms of cultural explorations, it is essential to understand that cultural teaching can often be mistaken as intercultural. Cultural teaching can be seen as when the teacher delivers information to students in an outsider's or observer's perspective (Diaz, 2013), meaning that the teacher carries their own assumptions and understandings of the culture into delivery (Harrison, 2017). This carries risks such as teaching in an appropriated fashion or misrepresenting cultures. Cultural education is clinical and doesn't involve students delving any deeper beyond facts. Therefore, students perceive culture as other and exclusive. It is thus necessary for Cultural Experts or Insiders (Nicholls-Wunder, 2013; Joseph & Hartwig , 2015) to be involved. This not only guarantees professionals, but it also extends respect and acknowledgement to the cultures and gives schools opportunities to build differing community relationships.

Drawing from the Intercultural Citizenship Ambassador Program (ICAP), a curriculum for building Intercultural competency should include - the sharing of cultural definitions led by Cultural Experts such as artists, traditional cultural presenters or interfaith leaders, and personal cultural identity explorations by the students (Nicholls-Wunder, 2013). Through inquiry, students learn to examine differences, similarities and the importance of cultural preservation. Additionally, through interacting with Cultural Experts, any prejudices or assumptions can be clarified, aiding in the deconstruction of racist beliefs (Berman & Paradies , 2010; Nicholls-Wunder, 2013).

Other than inviting Cultural Experts into the classroom to deliver knowledge or run workshops, Cultural Immersion is also proposed. The case study of a rural school visiting Timor for the first time noted how students began to see their own Australian culture from new, and different perspectives (Walton, Paradies , Priest, Wertheim , & Freeman, 2015). Students reported learning not only how to communicate with Non-English speakers but also how the Timorese students were fundamentally philosophically different. These included cultural differences such as happiness being non-reliant on material things (Walton et al., 2015), in acknowledging this Non-Western perspective, students became aware of their own belief system as being only one in the world (Arrowsmith & Mandla , 2017), opening them up to become more accepting of other's perspectives. Authentic cultural immersions and interactions with Cultural Experts allow students to use real-life skills to interact and be with people who they are culturally unfamiliar with. This enhances their capacity to empathise and respect other's ways, propelling them to become more globally ready. But even without international travel, I propose that through the sharing and telling of stories that similar conclusions can be made.

Language is another aspect which can be easily introduced as an access point, which will ultimately lead to more intercultural opportunities. However, languages need to teach Intercultural Understanding in ways that it shifts how individuals associate and know origin of words (Harrison, 2017). It should look at language as storytelling and a method of passing on knowledge. In examining word origins and meanings, students would then venture deeper into construction of words and how they relate to the cultural, societal and spiritual belief systems of different people. Also opening up opportunities to discuss similarities and differences (Salter & Maxwell , 2018) based on linguistic grounds.

CONCLUSION

Intercultural education is definitely prevalent in Australia, through government and private initiatives. But it is still vital that we, as a teaching community strive in each of our own disciplines, to maximise our potentials in contributing towards what these initiatives have built. Intercultural Understanding is mostly seen active in primary year levels where more opportunities for interdisciplinary learning exist. In secondary year levels this responsibility seems to fall upon language teachers. In the Art curriculum, although there are explicit references to studying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' artworks; there seems little room for in-depth exploration beyond 'identify[ing]' and 'connect[ing]' features and purposes.

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