Telling it like it is: Children's perceptions on cultural belonging

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In this article, primary-aged students from a mainstream class and from a New Arrivals Program (NAP) class share their thoughts on inclusion, engagement and wellbeing during and following the process of collaboratively producing a hip-hop CD. This teaching intervention was designed to bring together two distinct social contexts, whose members were observed to have little inter-class association. It allowed students to explore the ability to form and develop relationships with those who would not ordinarily be in each other's social networks.

Through the use of focus group interviews students from established Australian communities and from emerging African communities were provided an interpersonal space to interpret and critically reflect on events, conditions and behaviours in the "Hip Hop Hooray" sessions and construct meaning through the interaction. This article focuses on just one of a number of themes that emerged: stereotypical thinking.

Both mainstream and NAP students were confronted with mannerisms which were unlike those they had attributed and internalised as "the norm". Misunderstood practices or mismatched interpretations were revealed and were found to interfere with relationship building. Left unquestioned, these interpretations can contribute to categorical thinking about entire groups of people, racial stereotypes in effect. A discussion on the mental processes that lead to stereotyping is structured through selected examples of impression formation found in the very rich conversations with children.

Introduction

The rapid and unexpected growth, in recent times, of a number of New Arrivals Program Centres in South Australian metropolitan primary schools was a direct result of the Commonwealth Government's approval of Refugee/Humanitarian visas beyond expectation. Many of these were for young people from Africa.

The high level of educational needs of humanitarian-entrant children from African countries is well documented. In addition to little prior schooling, these students have experienced significant trauma, arising out of hunger, poor health, persecution, civil discord and dislocation and some have witnessed death and/or torture. The diversity of humanitarian entrants from Africa adds to the complexity, with wide variations in culture, ethnicity, values, social systems, languages spoken, educational experiences and language of

education. Constant disruptions, including the need to flee and find safe haven means that the sum of their educational experience often amounts to a Year 2 or 3 standard, or less.

At the site of this particular inquiry, the settlement trend was compounded by its location in a low socio-economic area with more affordable housing. The sudden expansion impacted on the entire school community and especially on children. Space was at a premium. There was less yard space and classroom space and greater demands on physical resources, including use of the basketball court, soccer and football fields, shelving for schoolbags, seats on buses, wet areas, classroom computers, sports equipment. Tensions existed between children as they struggled to understand each other, or, much more common, avoid each other. Yard time outs for NAP children escalated as they sought to restore justice in conflicts around possessions and use of resources. Inappropriate behaviours ranged from non-compliance and low-level provocation to racial and sexual harassment to aggressive exchanges and violence. The hostilities existed between NAP students of various cultures and between NAP and mainstream students.

As an attempt to address this situation, a cross-cultural teaching intervention, the "Hip Hop Hooray" Project was set up. This required a group of Year 6/7 students to draw on their life histories to create hip hop, a popular music sub culture with which many Western youth identify. There were thirty-eight students who were part of this process, 25 from a mainstream class and 14 from a NAP class.

At regular weekly sessions, students in teams or "crews" of five, led by a local community youth worker, and supported by the NAP teacher and a bilingual school assistant, were assisted in identifying what things were of significance to them at school, at home, in a friend and in the future. Their ideas were transferred into hip hop lyrics and students rehearsed and recorded their songs to a backing track provided by the youth worker. The process took longer than expected due to nervousness, but was one in which the students experienced significant success and so was pivotal in uniting members.

At a celebratory party following the completion of the project, each child received a copy of the CD, a tangible outcome for their input. The youth worker put his graphic design skills to

use and their lyrics and crew photos were featured on the CD cover, giving the final product a professional touch.

Research participants and data generation

Data for this paper are drawn from 14 mainstream students and the 11 African humanitarian/ refugee entrants with whom they were teamed in the "Hip Hop Hooray" project (henceforward HHH). The African students' educational backgrounds varied from nil, to refugee camp schools to continuous schooling with minimal disruption, or alternatively with interruptions of up to 2 years while in transit countries. The length of time spent in Australia at the start of the enquiry ranged from 6 to 18 months. All had had refugee experiences and because of this, were eligible to remain in a New Arrivals Program for an extended period of time, up to 2 years. None of these students lived in the local community, using a chartered bus service or catching public transport to and from school. The significance of this is that outside of school hours, there were few opportunities for incidental networking with students in the mainstream, who all by and large, lived in the local area. Within school, students in both classes spoke of minimal contact with members of the other class other than the weekly choir in which 12 students were participants.

The principal tool used to collect data from the above intervention was the focus group – a discussion with a group of 4-7 participants, designed to obtain perceptions in a permissive non-threatening environment. The focus group sessions were guided by the researcher to allowing participants to explore and moderate their understandings through open discussion, thereby providing the interviewer with maximum insight. The key questions guiding these sessions were fine-tuned in response to en-route signals in the environment. The focus group data collected in this study were digitally recorded and the data transcribed using pseudonyms throughout.

Most students participated at least three times in two different cohorts, 1) homogenous, where group members were in the same class, either mainstream or NAP, and 2) heterogeneous, where focus group members were a "crew", coming from both classes. Krueger (2000) makes the point that the focus group "should be characterised by homogeneity but with sufficient variation among the participants to allow for contrasting opinions" (p 71). In this study, homogeneity, in Krueger's terms of having something in

common, was provided by the experience of the Hip Hop workshops, while variation was provided in the homogenous groups by their diverse crew membership, and in the heterogeneous groups by their socio-cultural diversity.

The enquiry design was in response to the question as to what we, as educators, can do to facilitate cross-cultural interactions that redistribute inequitable power among such participants. The use of focus group discussions provided a forum for students with a disparate range of skills and status to interact with each other, and to construct and negotiate meaning through the interaction. In processing their learning in such a critically reflective way, a deeper understanding about themselves, their identities, was encouraged. There is a significant connection between this social learning and Vygotsky's (1978) "zone of proximal development" (ZPD). Vygotsky described the ZPD as an instructional zone where students come to new understandings only through the mediation or assistance of more informed others. Similarly, students in the focus groups learnt from the available resources in the group, to negotiate and renegotiate their understandings about self and others in relation to themselves. To some extent, categorical thinking, or stereotypes which were already being used to further interpret traits or actions, were apprehended and questioned.

Critical to the quality of discussion was the constitution of the focus groups. The nature of the data gathered in the homogenous group (either NAP or mainstream) differed markedly from the data gathered in the heterogeneous group (mixed classes).

The data gathered in the heterogeneous focus groups, i.e. the individual crews, which took place following a HHH session tended to be a recount of the events with some evaluative reflection, but not as rich as in the homogenous groups. In the crews who appeared to be working without conflict, there was little digression yet there also appeared to be an unspoken approval that the mainstream students lead the discussion. Within these groups, the NAP students' complicity was reinforced as there was little disagreement about the events. These students were careful not to contradict the group consensus although for some, their more private journal entries reflected a different perspective.

Within the homogenous class groups, where it could be said that students' sense of self was more aligned with a group consciousness in terms of membership of either a new emerging

community (NAP students) or an established more powerful community (mainstream), the focus group discussion offered more insights into their perceptions of the other group. Without the fear of offending others not in their more familiar social network, the discussion was more candid.

Most of the following extracts were from the homogenous class groups, all African or all Australian. Had African and Australian students' perspectives been shared with each other outside of the insular focus groups, another forum for correcting or refining opinions around identity would have been created. Krueger (1998) states that one of the most useful strategies in focus group interviews is to compare and contrast data across groups to find non-supportive indications, unearth more patterns and enrich the evidence.

A framework for data analysis
The fullness of the data reflects the complexity and diversity of the interactions and the learning that took place in the HHH workshops and in the later debriefing sessions. The uniqueness of each child's experience is rich data in itself and the following extracts provide evidence of both collective views and deeply personal ones.

A dominant theme that emerged from the data is stereotypical thinking, and I have chosen to use the work of Quinn, Macrae & Bodenhausen (2003) to provide analytic tools. These authors present and summarise comprehensive research into the mental stereotyping processes people use when constructing an impression of a person. The development of an impression is a complex process wherein a classification or categorisation is 1) *non-consciously* activated and 2) applied to interpret the characteristics or behaviour of the target; also, with a measure of control, the impression or stereotype can be 3) *consciously* moderated.

Impression formation begins with noticing characteristics of the subject or target person which may be observed regularly or identified repeatedly in other members of the same social group. This process of **categorisation** allows perceivers to rapidly deal with a vast amount of information in the social world, by simplifying and selecting patterns and adding these to an existing category. Once categorical thinking is activated, it allows an observer to

process expected material effortlessly. Any unexpected data can then receive fuller attention (p. 18).

Whereas the categorisation process of forming an impression refers to classing a person as a member of a particular *group***,** the **characterisation** process uses this information to evaluate and form an impression of the *person.* Thus, the stereotype associated with the category is drawn on to interpret and influence the meaning of the individual's behaviour and traits. The perceiver constructs an image of the subject through the concepts contained in the social category (e.g., ethnicity, sex, age). In other terms, the categorisation stage is where the stereotype is activated and the characterisation process is where the stereotype is applied.

At the **correction** stage, perceivers make a conscious effort to prevent the use of stereotypes in impression formation. The research shows that counteracting this bias by detecting unwanted thoughts requires considerable effort, practice and motivation. A more spontaneous approach is to draw on personal internalised ethics and norms to moderate stereotypes. Stereotype suppression is affected by the emotional state of the perceiver, e.g. feelings of guilt or sadness, and the presence of others so that perceivers, for example, may restrain judgements and avoid giving voice to any biases.

Categorisation among the HHH participants

In the focus group discussions, a number of deterrents or disincentives to building relationships emerged when the question was asked, "What stops you from getting to know someone?" Students identified such things as communication (language) difficulties, differing interests, manner and appearance, including skin colour. In particular, skin colour and manner are explored further here as they contributed to stereotypical thinking around ethnicity.

The following discussion with a mainstream focus group exposes early categorisation of the African students with whom they had had minimal contact. Despite this "stranger" relationship, impressions still formed as they made sense of their observations of others in the schoolyard and in the wider community

> *What was it about them that made you block?*
> D: Um, I don't know.
> *Does anyone else feel the same way as D? That before this*
> *opportunity you....*
> D: Maybe because of the skin colour?
> *What is it about the skin colour?*
> D: Um just….I don't know.
>
> *Tell me about the skin colour.*
> D: I didn't even feel comfortable around them.
> *Why was that?*
> D: I don't know. I just don't feel comfortable
> *….How did you overcome that block?*
> D: Just trying to talk to them. And get to know them.
> *This teaching program gave you an opportunity?...*
> E: Yeah. Got us to know each other. We had to work as a team.
> D: We got to know that not all people are bad.

There is a clear association between skin colour and uneasiness (not comfortable) and character (bad) which interferes significantly with the desire to build relationships. Quinn, Macrae & Bodenhausen (2003) refer to a number of studies which show that "stereotypes associated with social categories are automatically activated in the mere presence of a triggering stimulus" (p. 4). For example, they cite Devine (1989) who proposed that "racial stereotypes are indeed activated automatically upon detection of a person's group membership" and that these involuntary biases begin during childhood socialisation.

A shared interpretation among mainstream students of the manner of the largely African community gradually emerged. It appeared that the physicality and mannerisms of the newest community members inhibited interactions because it was not a shared repertoire of behaviour. It was not understood and because of that, it was to be avoided or even feared.

> *Do you feel like you can join in on the games that they play?*
> S: No, I don't know them that well.
> *And what stops you from getting to know someone?*
> V: Uhh…. Probably when I see how they play, cos they're like
> jumping everywhere and they play a little bit rough, and…You say "I
> don't think I'm gonna be safe and I won't join that group."
> E: You're probably scared.
>
> *What about the way they talk to each other?*

Sa: It's like they fight they all the time. Like, they think it's OK because like, we,..they know they're only playing but they kind of fight all the time and say bad,.. bad… they've got bad language. Because I think, in their country, that's the bad language that happened there. Like some of them came over because of war and stuff.
S: Yeah I just look at them and they're really fighting. Like, it looks real bad.
Verbal?
S: Yeah and verbal as well. Both. It can be verbal and physical. They just do it in their language and stuff. Like, the way they talk. They swear.
How do you feel when you see that?
S: Scared

The style of interaction and the means of expression which indicate to these students a certain solidarity within the African community include gestures, actions, words, symbols (such as hairstyles) and routines. Such shared practices as knowing laughter, local lore, jargon and shortcuts to communication signify "membership" to the cultural community (Wenger 1998). The members share a common practice, concern or passion and learn from each other as they engage regularly in the practice. Community coherence, he says, is developed through a shared repertoire of behaviours and concepts, and ways of knowing which the members have produced in the course of their existence and which they practice. When an alternative practice is encountered, Wenger presents it as a resource to negotiate new meanings.

While their perceptions did not alter, in fact these behaviours were experienced more immediately and the perceptions were reinforced, the mainstream students, over time, were able to accept the behaviour as less challenging, less of a barrier to forming relationships. The repertoires of practice which belonged uniquely to each community became shared as a history evolved. By the time of the focus groups, students were more comfortable with the mannerisms, appearance and language of the African students which became more familiar over the course of the project. While there will always be uncommon elements amongst the participants in any community of practice, an indicator that a more common understanding had developed was these students' ability to assess behaviours and know that they were still safe. Through sustained engagement, the students built up a personal set of references and

events experienced within their group, which moved them out of foreign territory onto more familiar ground.

Friendly and unfriendly behaviours are points of reference which students use to form impressions which may have been inaccurately inferred. That is, the meaning or intent of the behaviour may not match the perceived meaning. In forming an impression, a person's characteristics may be reduced to a manageable and coherent category which is immediately accessible and used to further interpret behaviours (Quinn, Macrae and Bodenhausen, 2003, p. 3). Prior to the project, interactions with participants of unlike cultural heritage, may have contributed to inferences or categorical thinking that may not have been moderated by the process of correction which the HHH project offered. In designing another context for negotiation of meaning, the focus group discussions, these perceptions of others, perhaps formed through limited exposure, may have been confronted or questioned.

Characterisation

The focus group discussions also offered insights into how interpretation of an *individual's* behaviour is influenced by prior categorisation. In the schoolyard, the physicality of the African students described above, is further construed in the extract below, as dominant and exclusive. Further questioning may have shifted this thinking from being harmful and unconstructive, to an acknowledgement of physical prowess. As it was left untapped, from a mainstream perspective, NAP students were observed to largely associate only with each other at play times. Even if included in recess and lunchtime games, these two students felt on the outer.

> S; I've played with some of the New Arrivals children like Andrew
> and James. When I'm playing basketball with them and …yeah.
> K: Sometimes when they include you in the game, it doesn't really
> feel like you're included, but you just play.
> *Alongside them rather than with them?*
> K: Yeah alongside them.
> *So they invite you to be part of the game?*
> K: Yeah sometimes we ask and they say yes. And it feels like
> we're on the bench when we play.

Importantly, when counter-stereotypic information is encountered, the inconsistency between the predicted behaviour and the current reality needs to be resolved (Quinn, Macrae and Bodenhausen, 2003, p. 19). Cognitive processes then focus on the unexpected material and perceivers make sense of it by attributing it to the individual's personal identity, rather than to their group membership, in other words they characterise rather than categorise.

Quinn, Macrae & Bodenhausen (2003) also make reference to emerging evidence that motivational factors influence what stereotypic information is attended to and what is ignored (p. 15). There is greater allowance for stereotype-inconsistent behaviour when there is an incentive or gain to be had. In the following extract, a motivational factor such as seeking or maintaining attention through the use of humour, positioned both the target and the perceiver in a position of interdependence on each other, making the exchange a rewarding and successful one. Neil from Congo and Andrew from Liberia gained considerable status amongst their NAP and mainstream peers through their use of humour which, because it often relies on a degree of language sophistication, was not closely associated with NAP students. Humour leaves people feeling positive and a certain amount of appeal or credibility can be linked to the deliverer, as felt by Neil. Alternatively, Andrew's self effacing humour presented him as humble and accessible to the mainstream class.

> N: Me, I just stand there and do something like it's funny here in this class(pointing to last year's classroom) and do something funny to them and sometimes they get really….mmmm… learn at knowing me. Sometimes they be my friend, they talk to me and that's when they sometimes they come to me and they chat a little bit.
> A: Yeah, me too. I don't know how to, for some time I don't know how to say, Mrs Pompakedis and I say Mrs Ponkapedis
> And the classroom, they laughing at me.
> *And how did you feel when they laughed with you?*
> A: I feel good….. Because I just make them to laugh.

The use of humour to find common ground and unite people in a shared moment of joy is an inclusive act which, to an extent, serves to equalise status. Stereotype attribution is moderated when there is personal relevance or importance to the perceiver, such as

contentment as felt by the following group of girls Ada refers to, who previously had a history of hostile emotions.

> *At what point did you start thinking, "Oh this is alright. I can work with these new girls..."?*
> A: When we was writing… about the song and then they was talking about something and we laughed and we just forget about everything. And we were the same group, we did something together.

Many newly arrived students encountered practices which they found surprising. In the act of describing the friendliness of the established school community, Ruon indicated that this was an unexpected response to his anger. The friendly behaviour did not align with his expectation, it did not fit in with his categorical thinking, which allows effortless processing of expected material. His attention was now drawn to unanticipated information and directed to process and remember this anomaly.

> *So you're feeling connected and close because of an invitation to join?*
> K: Yeah with room 11, we're close.
> R: Because they get to know…they ask our name. We ask their name. Sometimes, if we're feeling angry, they tell us to smile. To smile. They tell you smile.

This example reflects the view that an "ability to deal with the unexpected is conducive to successful social interaction" (Quinn, Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2003, p. 18). Once again, when confronted with an inconsistency, the students below attributed the behaviour not to the "way" or mode of the group, but to the characteristic of the individual, Vincent. In order to incorporate this new understanding of others, they had to break out of categorical thinking.

> J: We learn each other's feelings, like say something like
> (inaudible)
> A: Knowing Vincent
> R: By getting to know other people, how they communicate.
> *How do they communicate?*
> R: By smiling at you or talking to you.
> *Is that something new to you?*
> Yeah
> *How did you feel?*
> R: Happy
> A: I felt blown away.

Correction

"Stereotyping is a largely automatic, conditioned process, but… it can be overcome by effortful processes if people are sufficiently motivated" (Quinn, Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2003, p. 22). These authors say that to date the research around monitoring stereotype use and avoidance is disheartening as it requires considerable mental control. Within the transcribed data, there are only vague indications that students modified their thinking, bearing this out. The motivation to correct stereotype activation, ideally is grounded in principles of social justice. Where stereotyping confronts personal standards of fairness and equality, the correction process may be more principled and intrinsic.

Stereotype correction was evident when perceivers were placed in a position of dependence on or interdependence with the target (eg, in the HHH recording studio when cooperation and collaboration was key to a successful recording). More effort was invested in not "jumping to conclusions" when there was mutual reward.

It may be that the expression of categorical thinking was seen as a social taboo and so a person may moderate their perceptions, particularly in the presence of others. Accountability, or at least the appearance of being accountable for their judgements, may be the motivating factor here. The Australian girl below, speaking in a homogenous focus group appears to be acutely aware of correcting notions of stereotyping and radically inverts categorical thinking.

> K: They think they're better than you…Yeah (inaudible)
> *What did you say?*
> M: I can't exactly say because it might sound a bit racist.
> M: Because we're white and they think they're better than us because
> we're white. And because they come from somewhere else… and
> they know more about some things and they, they have something we
> don't.

The focus group interviews allowed students to realise that other choices were available, when in conflict with others or to feel less hostility towards unknown others.

> *J, Have you learnt anything about yourself?*
> J: I don't just like say "I'll punch you" and you don't know how (inaudible) feels.
> *Sorry, I didn't understand that.*
> J: Like don't just keep like "I'll punch you" and you don't know how they're gonna feel or like say something….like…
> N: Something bad?
> J: Yeah
> *You stop yourself from saying something bad?*
> J: Yeah like Last time (Before) I say, I don't know somebody, I say "I'm gonna punch you" and then I think like…
> *You feel less aggressive? Do you know what aggressive is?*
> J: Yeah, angry.
> *Do you still feel aggressive in this group?*
> J: No
> *Did you feel aggressive in the beginning?*
> J: Yes
> *What about you, N?*
> N: Same.

Jean's need for ego defence has lessened as relationships with crew members developed. While this may not necessarily be stereotype correction, he has corrected or moderated his approach to situations of conflict.

Connection

A sense of belonging is an essential aspect for successful participation in the practices of a community. Being valued and respected as a member of a group encourages further contribution and engagement in the group's activities. Without this attachment or connection, relationships do not develop, non-participants are marginalised as they do not engage in what is valued and learning is affected as there is limited opportunity to negotiate meaning when communities do not overlap or merge.

> P: I think that being African here has stopped me from going among them. Because they are not African and when you go among them maybe, they will not want to be friends with you.
> *So going among them is difficult? Because…*
> P: Because maybe they do not want to be friends with you and you don't want to force yourself on them to be friends.
> T: Australian children, they just want to be with their friends. They don't want to make another friend again. That's what I noticed from that.

This profound insight into Primrose's identity and her perception of self in relation to others provides us with a vision of the barrier she senses and links to the key purpose of the HHH intervention … to move students from the edge of engagement into a more central / equal position of power. The boundary encounters which happened incidentally and daily in the schoolyard, or at choir practice, or in daily fitness, were enriched through the provision of a program which encouraged connections and built a history of engagement over a sustained period of time. The learning about self in relation to others was unique to each individual as a result of their negotiations with others. For Primrose, and for Tina, both newcomers to Australia, there was a significant distance to travel from the periphery to the inside. Making a practice available was one way to influence the trajectory on which they were transported

Steven, Seth and Kyle, all long established insiders, also offered critical reflection on the boundaries that separate them from the newcomers.

> St: I don't think I know the New Arrivals children well enough for
> them to let, for me to like, be out, on the weekend, like not yet.
> K: You have to feel a bond.
> St: Maybe start small.
> Se: So if we do like … lots of these tasks with all different students,
> then we might be able to just jump in and smash the wall down.
> St: And they just come in.
> K: Like the wall would just crumble, and move out of the way for
> you to come in.
> Se: It's like two different worlds separated by a wall. And when that
> wall is gone, the bond is open and it will stay open.

These students' comments suggest the importance of maintaining connections, rather than one-off events. Sustained engagement in a practice, such as the HHH Project builds familiarity and competence and as the participants build up a history of interactions, they can draw on that personal set of incidents, references and memories to incorporate new understandings about themselves and what they can and cannot yet do or be or use or like or understand.

Conclusion

When given an opportunity to discuss and reflect on their learning, children can provide us with powerful insights into their thoughts, including what they notice and about their world and what is left unnoticed. As educators, these perceptions can provide us with an opening

to allow children to explore thinking further, and with sensitive guidance, modify or deepen their understandings. The focus group interviews were a forum for the exchange of perspectives and for deeper reflections on a changing identity. Through collaborative reflection in homogenous or heterogeneous groups, a new dimension for the negotiation of their identities was made available.

The enquiry design was partly in response to the question as to what we, as educators, can do to facilitate cross-cultural interactions that redistribute inequitable power among such participants. The use of focus group discussions provided a forum for students with a disparate range of skills and status to interact with each other, and to construct and negotiate meaning through the interaction. In processing their learning in such a critically reflective way, a deeper understanding about themselves, their identities, was encouraged. There is a significant connection between this social learning and Vygotsky's (1978) "zone of proximal development" (ZPD). Vygotsky described the ZPD as an instructional zone where students come to new understandings only through the mediation or assistance of more informed others. Similarly, students in the focus groups learnt from the available resources in the group, to negotiate and renegotiate their understandings about self and others in relation to themselves. To some extent, categorical thinking, or stereotypes which were already being used to further interpret traits or actions, were apprehended and questioned.

Cummins (1996) states that in expanding the ZPD to construct opportunities for disempowered groups to have a voice, deeper and reciprocal learning about identity formation is enabled. "If the process is arrested…. (as it is in most classrooms), the knowledge will remain inert rather than become a catalyst for further exploration" (1996, p. 53). The focus groups had potential for greater agency, greater action, had there been opportunities to reveal and explore the collective thoughts of the African focus group with the mainstream focus group and vice versa.

In a discussion on educational design, Wenger (1998) describes the difference between teaching, *planned,* and learning, *emergent,* and asks the question "How can we honour the emergent character of learning?" In the Hip Hop Hooray project, the greatest learning was not as a result of the teaching. It came about as a consequence of the research design. The focus group discussions enabled transformative experiences that changed students'

understandings of themselves and their capacity to move among practices which were not previously accessible. Without them, the learning would have been limited to a project, which suggests an end point with parameters which contain the learning to transactions. As it was, the deeper learning about others as human beings and not just members of social categories contributed to their own sense of identity and their capacity for connection and inclusion. In allowing participants to validate their knowledge, to "tell it like it is", not through a mainstream filter, but in all its reality, other "ways of knowing" are made available and while these may be contradictory or add multiplicity, with the guidance of an alert teacher, they can enrich and empower.

The need for socialisation to schooling and Australian social practices means that in addition to intensive English language provision, programs which address well being needs must be embedded into the curriculum. Cross-cultural teaching interventions provide strategic two-way access to other people and other ways of knowing, which may or may not otherwise occur. In orchestrating such a union, students at least gain admittance to other worlds. How far they enter is not only dependent on the individual and the teaching design but also the responsive choices made by the teacher.

The existence of an "integration policy" or the implementation of a cross-cultural program is simply rhetoric or tokenistic if it does not translate to the increased participation of students or an improved sense of wellbeing and belonging. How a teacher responds to the learning that emerges is crucial to further comprehension of the culture including what is valued and what is ignored. It is in the teacher's principled attention to the discourse and the choices that are made about what is explored and what is left untouched, that the learning is honoured.

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Erika von Aspern, an Assistant Principal of a Primary New Arrivals Program, recently
inquired into the effects of participation in a collaborative enterprise by students in a
mainstream class and a New Arrivals class with a high number of refugees. Her ESL
teaching career of 18 years has been with ESL new arrivals, predominantly with Year 6/7
students.