THE PATH OF EMPATHY: STUDENTS IMAGINING THE IMPACT OF RACISMAND RE-THINKING THEIR RACE-RELATED PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

There are many groups of people that experience racial and other forms of prejudice and discrimination. In Australia, racism toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, among other groups, remains prevalent. From the position that schools have the potential, and arguably the role, of interrupting prejudices young people may hold, this paper focuses on the perspectives of 12-14-year-old Australian Grade Eight students toward Aboriginal Australians. However, in Australia, in the National Curriculum there is next to no mention of racial or other forms of prejudice or teaching against it. However, there is mention of teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, and of developing the general capability of intercultural understandings, which includes empathy. A program of learning was co-designed with Aboriginal educators with the aim of countering stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples prevalent in Australia by showcasing to studentspositive images and messages about them, their cultures and their resilience and achievements amidst experiences of racism. Throughout their empathetic engagement in the program of learning, students started to reconsider what they had previously believed, and to develop more positive.thoughts and feelings toward Aboriginal peoples.

Key Words: Empathy, anti-racism education, anti-prejudice education, social-emotional learning, positive intergroup perspectives

1. INTRODUCTION

The need for Australian schools to teach against racism and other forms of prejudice is evident in the prevalence and impact of prejudice and discrimination on various groups of people, including Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. While many groups experience racial and other forms of prejudice and discrimination, the focus of this study is limited to one particular cohort of students' learning about Aboriginal Australians. A large proportion of the Aboriginal population of Australia, 58–79 percent, report having personally experienced racism more than occasionally (Gallaher, Ziersch, Baum, Bentley, Palmer, Edmondson & Winslow, 2009). Racism causes mental and physical health issues (Priest, Paradies, Trennerry, Truong, Karlsen & Kelly, 2012), and Aboriginal peoples have been reported to experience high levels of anxiety, sickness and social and fiscal exclusion from experiencing racism on a regular basis

(Larson, Gillies, Howard & Coffin, 2007). As a result of encountering racial discrimination in the past 12 months, Aboriginalpeoples are more likely than other Australians to be unemployed, not studying, untrusting of others, unable to access services and psychologically unwell (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

The importance of teaching against racism is also evident in the fact children are influenced by the racism they see and hear around them. Race-related discourse and its influence on children is largely a by-product of racist ideologies and systems in wider society that can be direct and obvious or subtle, unintentional and unwilling — and even unconscious (Priest et. al, 2012). Ideologies about the superiority of white people are prevalent in societies where white people comprise the majority of the population, with such ideologies leading to discriminatory behaviour (Priest, Walton, White, Kowal, Baker &Paradies, 2014). It has been found that from as early as birth, children are influenced by the race-related discourse and imagery they observe, with children's storybooks, films, nursery rhymes and other media presenting white people as the heroes and non-white people as villains, savages and tokenistic side-kicks (Christensen, 2017). York (2016) reports that children from as young as the early years (0-5 years of age) commence developing a basic understanding of race-related differences and power relationships and deploying these emerging understandings in determining who to befriend and who to exclude.

Various anti-racism educational initiatives have unearthed varying aspects of effective practice, including the value of students empathising with people who experience racism. Responding with empathy with victims of racism can move students to better understand the impact of racism, which Leonardo (2007) reports can comprise white students recognising the reality of white privilege and the related disadvantage experienced by non-white people. The development of empathy in middle school anti-racism classroom initiatives has been reported by Bigelow (2007) tomovestudents to develop a sense of moral indignation toward racism.

But despite such promising findings from anti-racism educational inquiries, the Australian national curriculum is quiet on countering racism and other forms of prejudice. It does however give large voice to the general capability of primary, middle and secondary school students developing intercultural understanding (Australian Curriculum, Accountability and Reporting Authority [ACARA] 2013a). Intercultural understanding comprises students building on the interests and experiences they identify they share with people of another cultural group, toward drawing connections between their own world and that of another person, and empathising with them. The general capability is about students developing a sense of solidarity with others through considering and identifying with their experiences and perspectives and imagining what it might be like to 'walk in their shoes' (ACARA, 2013b). From increasing their intercultural understanding, students may better understand how the identities of individual people, groups and nations are shaped, and perhaps reconsider their own beliefs and attitudes about other groups of people (ACARA, 2013b).

Defining empathy builds a platform from which to explore the ways in which students may empathise will other groups of people. Empathy is conceptualised by Rogers, Dziobek, Hassenstab, Wolf and Convit (2007) as being an innate response to another person, and by Hodges and Klein (2001) as being felt to varying degrees of intensity and, sometimes but not always, leading to actively caring for another person. There is consensus that empathy can be

cognitive or affective, or both(Decety& Jackson, 2004). Cognitive empathy can comprise someone attempting to take another person's perspective (Rogers et al., 2007),imagine themselves in their situation (Rogers et al., 2007), assess the causes of their distress (de Waal, 2008)and identify the other'sfeelings (Hodges & Klein, 2001). Affective empathy, on the other hand, can include feeling emotionsupon observing another's state of being (Hodges & Klein, 2001; Minio-Paluello, Lombardo, Chakrabarti, Wheelwright & Baron-Cohen, 2009) and, to an extent, experiencing similar emotions the other is experiencing, such as feeling upon someone who is sad(Hodges & Klein, 2001). Numerous of these expressions were evident throughout students' engagement in the program of learning.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

It was of initial importance to establish whether the 12-14-year-old Grade Eight students at an independent school in the lower socio-economic area of northern Adelaide held prejudiced perspectives toward Aboriginal peoples. Of greater importance was the ensuing exploration into just how they might engage in a positive discourse about Aboriginal peoples in a program of learning that wasco-designed with Aboriginal educators to counter racist stereotypes. From the outset of the study ethics clearance was obtained from the Charles Darwin University Human Ethics Research Committee, before consent was obtained from the independent school to conduct the study and allstudents with a guardiansigneda Consent Form to participate in it.

To first identify students' perspectives toward Aboriginal peoples, all studentscompleted a Likert-scale survey immediately prior to the commencement of Lesson 1. The survey asked them to select 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'unsure', 'agree' or 'strongly agree'in response to words describing Aboriginal peoples. The sentence starter 'I think Aboriginal people are …' was followed by a list of positive traits, including 'approachable', 'good parents' and 'clever', intermingled with negative traits antonymous to the positive traits (and common in stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples prevalent in Australian social discourse) including 'unapproachable', 'bad parents' and 'not clever'.

As well as producing written reflections at the immediate end of Lesson 16, students completed the same Likert-scale survey again, but this time taking into consideration what they have learnt about Aboriginal peoples over the course of the program of learning. The same survey was repeated a third and final time six months later, to identify if there was any medium-term effect of the program of learning on students' perspectives ofAboriginal peoples.

Immediately after completing the initial survey, students commenced engaging inthe program of learning(see Table 1). The lesson content aimed to increase students' appreciation for the cultures and histories of Aboriginal peoples, and their resilience amidst past and present social injustices experienced. The work of numerous Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators was drawn upon in developing the program of learning, including Sarra's (2009) moral or ethical agenda of introducing the ongoing impact of invasion on Aboriginal peoples toward countering prejudice and having students consider what a fairer Australia may look like.As Leach, Iyer and Pedersen (2006) report, the more that members of a privileged group, or 'in-group', recognise their own privilege, the more they are likely to feel indignation about it and support greater equality for the 'outgroup'. With an understanding that empathy negates prejudice (Pedersen,

Beven, Walker &Griffiths, 2004), moving students to empathise with Aboriginal peoples was considered to be key to having them rethink their opinions of Aboriginal peoples.

Unit, lesson and topic			Mode/ medium	Positive aspects emphasised	Task*
Unit 1: Cultures	1	Pitjantjatjarachildren's activities	Photographs	Fun-loving, team-oriented	1, 3
	2	Community activities	Documentary	Patient, interesting, wise	1, 3
	3	Kaurna technologies and language	Excursion	Generous, peaceful, advanced	1, 3
	4	Children's games	Excursion	Fun-loving, team-oriented	1, 3
Unit 2: Histories	5	Genocide	Excursion	Resilient, gentle, good parents	1, 3
	6	Forcible removal of children	Film	Resilient, good parents	1, 3
	7	National Apology	Text	Forgiving, gentle, Humorous	1, 3
Unit 3: Contemporary experiences	8	Aboriginal disadvantage	Worksheet	Resilient, good leaders	1, 3
	9	Resilience amidst racism	Visitor	Approachable, forgiving	1, 3
	10	Exposing racist myths	Worksheet	Advanced, beautiful spirits	2, 3
	11	Negative news reporting	News articles	Good leaders, resilient	2, 3
Unit 4: Contemporary achievements	12	Models	News articles	Humble, well-presented	2, 3
	13	Youth acting talent	Documentary	Talented, well-presented	2, 3
	14	War heroes	Stories	Good leaders, generous	2,3
	15	NAIDOC award winners	Website	Talented, responsible, wise	2,3
	16	Cultures and values	Visitor	Approachable, forgiving, humorous, loving, wise	2,3,4
* Tasks: 1 = Narrative writing from the imagined perspective of an Aboriginal person; 2 = Exposition writing; 3 = Lesson reflections; 4 = Program reflections					

Table 1   The program of learning

The program of learning introduced to students some aspects of the histories and cultures of the Kaurna people — the Aboriginal peoples local to the Adelaide Plains of South Australia where the school in this study is located. Students also learnt about some aspects of other Aboriginal communities across Australia, including the Pitjantjatjara. As the teacher and researcher (who is also the author of this paper) is not Aboriginal, the program of learning was designed in consultation withan Ngarrindjeri Elder and Cultural Educator from the nearby Coorong region in South Australia, Stef(pseudonyms are given to all research participants in this study). Consulting Stef was invaluable in backgrounding to students Aboriginal cultures, because, as Craven (2011) explains, a lack of context given to Aboriginal cultures often only further perpetuates students' misunderstandings and stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples. Stef also taught a lesson, which provided the opportunity for students to engage with an Aboriginal Elder and to learn aspects of Aboriginal histories and cultures she shared with them.

Co-designing the program of learning with Stef assisted in making the program of learning engaging and meaningful for students. This was evident upfront, in Unit 1, as students learnt about Pitjantjara children's activities, Kaurna community activities, Kaurna technologies and language and children's games. The focus on historical racism in Unit 2 included a look at the genocidal activities against some Aboriginal communities shortly after British arrival, or invasion, in 1788 (Craven, 2011). Craven (2011) explains that Australian students engaging in Aboriginal Studies are often shocked to learn of such race-relations in Australia's history. Unit 2 then looked at the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities by Australian state and territory governments from the turn of the twentieth century through to the 1970s (Craven, 2011). Delving into some aspects of contemporary racism included looking at the prevalence and impact of racist myths, biased news reporting and disadvantage in education, employment, health, housing and life expectancy (Sarra, 2009). It also involved meeting and interacting with Stef, who shared with students some aspects about her cultures and her experiences with racism.

A two-cycle qualitative action research approach over two years was implemented. Both cycles comprised a Grade Eight classroom; a total of 47 students in two classes. Throughout both cycles teaching practice and lesson content was reflected on and improved to enhance clarity and student engagement, by reviewing students' lesson reflections (written by students at the close of each lesson) and program reflections (written by students immediately after Lesson 16). After an initial review of students' lesson and program reflections to finesse pedagogy and lesson content, these reflections together with students' written expositions (presenting their new, critical learning) and narratives (written from the imagined perspective of an Aboriginal person — possibly with empathy)were kept for later analysis. In total, students produced four pieces of writing: 1. lesson reflections; 2. program reflections; 3. expositions; and 4. narratives, and these were analysed using a process of Thematic Analysis.

Thematic analysis involved coding and categorise students' written lesson and program reflections, narratives and expositions in order to identify thevarying components of students' learning(Guest, MacQueen &Namey, 2012) — or as Braun and Clarke (2006) put it, the repeated

ideas, common terms, analogies and similarities. The main themes that emerged include students': critical reflection on themselves and their society; cultural appreciation;changing perspectives; and, also, empathy with Aboriginal peoples.

RESULTS

The need to teach against racism was particularly evident when the Grade Eight students completed the survey immediately prior to the commencement of the program of learning. Students indicated they had not engaged in much Aboriginal Studies at school but haddeveloped their understandings about Aboriginal peoples from what they have heard from family, friends, television, radio and previous teachers. Their minimal prior engagement had been limited to hearing one or two Dreaming stories that detail the beliefs of some Aboriginal peoples about the creation of the land, sky and sea, but no cultural context had been given to these Dreaming stories by their teachers. Craven (2011) explains that failing to background Aboriginal cultures often only further perpetuates among students stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples.

Figure 1 presents student's levels of agreement in response to positive characteristics describing Aboriginal peoplein general at the commencement of the program of learning (the top bar) its conclusion (middle bar) and six months later (bottom bar). At the commencement of the program of learning, most students selected 'unsure', 'disagree' or 'strong disagree' in response to the positive characteristics describing Aboriginal peoples, and did the opposite (selected 'unsure, 'agree' and 'strongly agree') in response to negative characteristics antonymous to these positive characteristics. Later, at the immediate close of the program, students self-identified that their thoughts and feelings toward Aboriginal peoples before engaging in the program of learning had been 'prejudiced' or 'racist'. Students' initial responses reflected stereotypes and myths about Aboriginal peoples prevalent in wider social discourse in Australia, such as them being uncaring and absent parents, happily unemployed and alcoholics (Reconciliation Australia, 2018).

Over the course of the program of learning, all students except one showed an increase in their levels of agreement with the positive characteristics describing Aboriginal people, whereas their levels of agreement with negative characteristics decreased. The one student who was the exception took the consistent approach of selecting 'unsure' in response to all positive and negative descriptions at the commencement and conclusion of the program of learning, and again six months later. While his response could be interpreted as a stance to not judge Aboriginal peoples positively or negatively, it was more a case of him not wanting to disclose his beliefs when considered alongside the derogatory remarks about Aboriginal peopleshe had been heard making that same week.

To quantify in this predominantly qualitative study this shift in student's perspectives, scores were given to students' responses of strongly disagree (1.0) disagree (2.0), unsure (3.0), agree (4.0) and strongly agree (5.0). Figure 1 shows an increase in students' mean levels of agreement with the positive characteristics from immediately prior to the commencement of Lesson 1 (the 'pre-program') to immediately after Lesson 16 ('post-program') — from 2.99 (unsure) to 3.73 (close to agree). The largest increase in students' agreement with individual characteristics describing Aboriginal peoples were for 'approachable' (from 2.6 to 3.7 [a shift of 1.1]), 'beautiful' (2.7—3.8 [1.1]), 'peaceful' (2.8—3.8 [1.0]), 'humble' (2.8—3.8 [1.0]), 'wise' (3—

3.9 [0.9]) and 'well-presented' (2.6—3.4 [0.8]). Smaller shifts were evident in response to Aboriginal peoples being 'interesting' (3.4—4.0 [0.6]) and 'beautiful spirits' (3.4—3.8 [0.4]). Meanings of each of the positive and negative characteristics (that could describe anyone)had been discussed with students prior to their engagement in the program of learning to ensure they have a common understanding of these words.
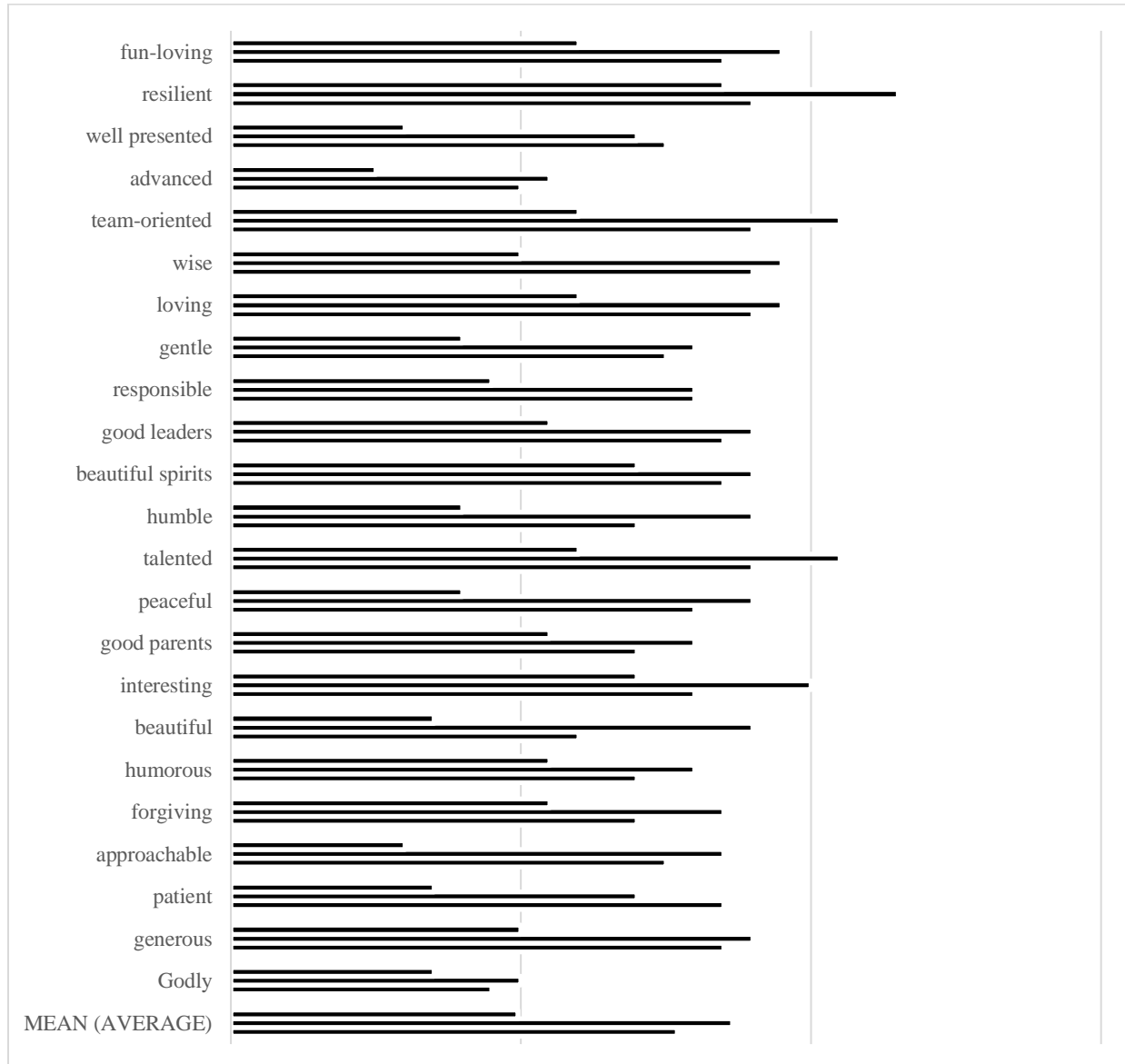
disagree (2.0)   unsure (3.0)   agree (4.0) strongly agree (5.0)

Figure 1   Students' initial (or pre-program - top bar), post-program (middle bar) and 6-month-post-program (bottom bar) levels of agreement to positive characteristics describing Aboriginal peoples

Six months after Lesson 16 ('6-month-post-program'), when students were asked for the third and final time what they now thought about Aboriginal peoples, a slight drop in students' post-program mean levels of agreement with the positive descriptions was recorded — from 3.73 to 3.54. However, 3.54 is sizably greater than the initial pre-program level of 2.99 (2.99—3.73—3.54). This trend of sizeable pre-program to post-program increases in students' levels of agreement followed by a slight decrease six months later was seen in response to the majority of students' responses to the positive characteristics, including 'approachable' (2.6—3.7—3.5), 'peaceful' (2.8—3.8—3.6) and 'humble' (2.8—3.8—3.4).

DISCUSSION

As the Grade Eight students engaged in the chronologically sequenced program of learning that celebrated Aboriginal cultures and commiserated with past and ongoing racism Aboriginal people have experienced, empathy with Aboriginal peoples was evident. As students learned about incidents of racism they had previously not known about they demonstrated appreciation, care and concern for Aboriginal peoples in their writing. Empathy was most seen in students' narratives that they creatively wrote from the imagined perspective of an Aboriginal person engaging in Aboriginal cultures and experiencing racism learned about over the first nine lessons. This imaginative narrative writing involved taking creative liberty of giving the Aboriginal character a personality and the community they are from aspects of Aboriginal cultures in relation to cooking, hunting, dancing and playing learnt about in class. Most students selected Aboriginal names for the character and communities in their narratives based on what Aboriginal words. Olivia, for instance, named her character Tathra, which she had learned is Pitjantjatjara for beautiful country. Peter introduced his character as being from the fictional town of Port Willabaroo, which sounds like the actual town that goes by the Aboriginal name of Wallaroo.

From early on, students demonstrated simple expressions of cognitive empathy as they learned about and imagined the life of Aboriginal peoples. They experienced what could be described as a foreign consciousness—an external awareness of knowing a world outside their own, as they developed a peripheral cognition of Aboriginal cultures and experiences, In this creative writing process, They had an ability, clearly seen in their narrative writing, to consider the diverse viewpoints of Aboriginal peoples and attempt to incorporate these into their writing. As they increased their willingness to see how Aboriginal peoples perceive various past and present social issues, students became increasingly cognisant of their own personal perspectives and position on these matters. Their willingness and enthusiasm to consider what they thought might be the perspective of an Aboriginal person was akin to Rogers and colleagues' (2007) conceptualisation of empathy as trying to imagine oneself in another person's situation. Dan, for instance, put himself in the shoes of an Aboriginal child, assuming the love the child has for his family, community and natural environment in his narrative writing:

> My people loved the land, the sea and all its creatures. We lived in this land for thousands of years. I would do many tasks for my family. They were very fun but also required me to be very responsible for my age. I would have had to do many things, like catching mud crabs for the tribe. This task is a very tiring because of the aggression that the crabs show when they protect themselves, as we similarly our little ones [*sic*]. But when it is done the whole tribe can enjoy a beautiful meal of mud crab.

To imagine themselves in an Aboriginal person's situation, students identified things they perceived they, at least to some extent, sharein common with them. For instance, one such thing was their love for the game hide and seek, which they learned Aboriginal children and youthplayedbefore and after British arrival in the continent (Craven 2011) and greatly enjoyed playing as a class during the excursion to a local nature reserve. The excursion was a particularly rich learning moment that moved many students to appreciate Aboriginal cultures that they learned shaped the lives of Aboriginal children and youth, including making tracks, throwing spears, basket weaving, dancing and cooking for the community. Students drew upon this newfound appreciation for Aboriginal cultures in their narrative writing, with Reg for example imagining himself as an Aboriginal adult reflecting on when as a child he had enjoyed playing games and engaging with family and community:

> Back when we were kids we would play lots of games together. We would have so much fun running down the big sand dunes. Our mothers would teach us the art of track-making [*sic*].… Every now and again we would sit with our fathers and other men and learn spear throwing skills. We would throw the spear at a paddy melon that we found somewhere. At the end of the day nearing dark we would sometimes perform a dance for everyone.

As lessons switched to looking at the impact of past racial discrimination, students demonstrated cognitive empathy in the form of trying to take the perspective of Aboriginal peoples(Decety& Jackson, 2004; Rogers et al., 2007).From learning about the forcible removal of children from their families and communities, in her narrative writing Faith, like othersof her classmates, demonstrated a willingness to try to take the perspective of an Aboriginal child forcibly removed from her parents:

> My mum quickly hid me and all the other mothers ran to get their children to hide them too. But it was too late, the men were already out the car and ran and took the other kids that weren't hidden. While I was hiding I could hear all the mothers screaming and the men shouting 'HAND THEM OVER!'

> It made tears run down my face hearing all this and I was shaking so much that even my legs couldn't stay still. I was terrified and scared they were going to find me.

> When they were gone we could see that I was the only kid left. All the mothers were bawling their eyes out and screaming. My mother was happy that I wasn't taken, but terribly upset for the other children and their parents. From then on we never heard from those children.

Faith and her classmates had not personally experienced the same ordeals they were learning many Aboriginal peoples have faced, but they were able to draw upon some of their own

upsetting experiences, such as being temporarily lost in a shopping mall, to identify how Aboriginal children, youth and adults to a very limited extent may have felt upon experiencing race-related injustices.

Trying to take an Aboriginal perspective helped students to better understand and appreciate the experiences of Aboriginal peoples, including as they considered the frustration many might feel upon experiencing racism in the twenty-first century. In response to learning about the greater disadvantage Aboriginal peoples face as compared to non-Aboriginal Australians in education, employment, health, housing and life expectancy, as she wrote her exposition Toni attempted to take the perspective of an Aboriginal person:

> My people die 17 year [*sic*] younger than other Australians. I have lost many brothers and sisters. I am tired of burying loved ones. In rural areas our unemployment levels are twice as high as those of anyone else. At work the other day I saw somebody treating my friend like they were a piece of dirt. When will all this end?

Cognitive empathy was also demonstrated by students in the form of what de Waal (2008) refers to as assessing the causes of another person's distress. Students perceived the impact of racism, withAlan for one identifying the 'heartache' and 'pain'he perceived Aboriginal peoples to have felt upon experiencing the forcible removal of children from their families, racist myths, name calling and physical attacks:

> My people the Aboriginals [*sic*] experienced lots of heartache in the past from racism and sadly it still continues today not in the form of our children being taken but in attacking us both in physical attacks and calling us names but still this can cause me and the other Aboriginals[*sic*] great pain. One of the more disgraceful things is the myths how[*sic*] they say we get advantages that we don't so people get angrier at us.

Such creative expressions by Faith, Toni, Alan and the majority of their classmates not only showed their attempts to take another's perspective and understand the cause of their distress, but also Hodges and Klein's (2001) conceptualisation of empathy as trying to know the other's feelings. David, imagined himself as an Aboriginal man, experiencing a gamut of strong emotions as he witnessed his wife dying:

> I awake to the scream of a female as the horror set in. I realised my wife was gone. I rush out of the bed and looked around, to see my wife on the ground bleeding. I rushed to her only to see that she was dead. I couldn't believe it, the love of my life is dead and I thought to myself if anyone else was hurt. I went around the camp only to Gordon, the only one there, sleeping. I awoke Gordon to tell him the news. He apologised for my loss and he aided to give her a proper burial. We dug her a grave and buried her. I couldn't hold back the tears. It felt like someone had driven a spear through my heart.

Catherine reflected on how she thinks she might have responded in a similar way to the Aboriginal peoples she learnt about if she encountered the same racial discrimination as them. She drew upon how in the past she had cried herself to sleep when upset, and creatively directed her lead Aboriginal character in her narrative to do the same upon experiencing forcible separation from her family:

> When the time came to close our eyes I would usually cry myself to sleep, but then remember the good times when my family and I would go and look for bush tucker and just play on the steep sand hills. To this day I desperately want to go back there.

Attempting to perceive the emotional responses of Aboriginal peoplesassisted students to better understand Aboriginal peoples. Before engaging in the program of learning, Jim had perceived Aboriginal peoples to be angry, but in response to learning about their daily experiences with racism he understood they are mostly upset or indignant about injustices experienced. Trying to take the perspective of an Aboriginal person, he wrote his narrative rather passionately as though he himself is angry at the racism Aboriginal peoples face:

> A very common type of racism occurs almost every day. When some people walk past they give you this type of stare that almost makes you feel like you have a tattoo on your forehead saying something like 'I'm a disgrace' or 'everyone look at me I'm ugly!'. It just really ruins your day, and you feel as though no one appreciates you for who you are.

Although a little harder to identify, some students also felt affective empathy with Aboriginal peoples, akin to Minio-Paluello and colleague's (2009) conceptualization of empathy as feeling emotions upon observing the other's state (see also Hodges & Klein, 2001). Most often these emotions students experienced were appropriate to the life events they observed, such as joy when learning about the bliss of Aboriginal cultures and community activity and sadness and upsetin response to oppression experienced by Aboriginal peoples. Jon, for instance, indicated in his program reflection that he felt "gutted and horrible" in response to learning about genocide against Aboriginal peoples. Britney reflected on how she wrote her story with deep emotion as she imagined how she might feel if she experienced the adversity Aboriginal peoples have:

> This story made me feel very emotional as I wrote [emotion] in the story very deeply … I felt what I wrote was what I would have done if I was her.

From engaging in the program of learning and writing narratives from the imagined perspectives of Aboriginal peoples, students started to respond with a range of positive emotions for Aboriginal peoples. Verma reflected on how she started to see that Aboriginal peoples are 'very much the same as we are' and experience 'warm' feelings toward them:

> But, as I found out in the lessons following, they are very much the same as we are. During the lessons I slowly started to warm up to them, feeling a change of sympathy [*sic*] and a special acceptance and affection[*sic*].

Although not overly evident,some students empathised with Aboriginal peoplesin a way Hodges and Klein (2001) refers to as experiencing emotions similar to those experienced by the other person. Clairefor one reflected on how she felt 'pain, hurt and love' as she empathetically wrote her narrative and exposition:

> I was able to express my creativity, while feeling the pain, hurt and love at the same time. I feel the same way about my exposition, being able to express my feelings and thoughts through words.

Such affective responses from Claire and others of her peers were heart-felt and appropriate. Students did not simply write their narratives and expositions as tasks they merely needed to do,

but as exercises they wanted to do, to articulate the new feelings they were developing for Aboriginal peoples and against injustice. In their writing they showed their care or concern for the issues, and often expressed in this their desire to do something to help them or to stop racism. Robert, for instance, not only attempted to take an Aboriginal perspective in his exposition writing in relation to disadvantage faced in terms of health and employment outcomes, but voiced his desire for the government to do something about it:

> It's time the government takes action. Did you know my people and I are three times more likely to get a heart disease, seven times more likely to receive Hep A [*sic*] and five times more likes to receive Hep B [*sic*]? This is scary for my people. Also in our rural area our employment rate is twice as less [*sic*] as non-Aboriginal peoples. I believe some of these things are caused by racism.

Such support for change was the students' own initiative. Like Robert and others of their classmates, Rosa expressed a desire to 'do something' about the racism she learnt Aboriginal peoples experience:

> I think they were treated with disrespect and violence just because they looked different many people receive racism and it makes them feel angry and upset [*sic*]. I wish I could do something to change this.

CONCLUSION

Students developing empathy with victims of racism and forming more positive opinions of them constitute essential anti-racism learning outcomes. In this study, creative narrative writing was found to most empower students to develop and demonstrate cognitive and affective expressions ofempathy.There remains a worldwide need for educational initiatives to tackle other forms of prejudice in order for other cohorts of students to rethink their preconceptions by learning positive aspects about other groups of people. Further research into innovative and reflexiveanti-racism and other anti-prejudice educational initiatives wouldassist in further identifying the capacity of primary and secondary school students to empathise with victims of prejudice and discrimination, and to drop prejudices and adopt more positive opinions about other groups of people. Also, of value would be further research into how to maintain student's newly formed empathy with and positive perspectives of the group of people learnt about after a program of learning has been completed and students spend considerable time in environments where they may have had initially adopted prejudiced perspectives. Anti-prejudice outcomes associated with students advocating for victims of prejudice and discrimination would also be welcome to teachers and schools the world over seeking to move students away from building walls between "them" and "us", toward students only seeing an "us" and recognising we are all somewhat fantastic.

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