A transformative pedagogy to challenge the dominant
discourse about asylum seekers in Australia

By

Kathryn Jane Choules
B Juris (Hons) LLB (Hons) (UWA)

This dissertation is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Murdoch University
School of Education
2005
I declare that this dissertation is my own work except where stated to the contrary and that it is not substantially the same as any other dissertation that has previously been submitted for a degree at any other university.

Kathryn Jane Choules
Abstract

By the end of the 20th Century a major global social issue had become the movement of people fleeing countries affected by war, religious persecution, ethnic tension, political repression and poverty. Large numbers of people were claiming asylum under the international Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951). Since the mid-1990s the Australian government progressively hardened its attitude to asylum seekers and implemented one of the harshest responses in the Western world. Although the policies implemented have been held to breach a variety of international human rights conventions, they have received popular support. The dominant discourse about asylum seekers in Australia was characterised by fear, ignorance and rejection.

This research challenges the dominant discourse and is an expression of my commitment to social justice. It involved the design and implementation of a 6-week community education programme on asylum seekers for Australian residents. Through the project I explored how a diverse group of Australian residents experienced and responded to a pedagogy that went against the grain of the dominant discourse about asylum seekers. Using critical pedagogy, critical postmodernism, cultural studies, popular education and feminist pedagogies, I sought to create a transformative pedagogy. Through the empirical data generated I developed situated theory that would be of use to social change educators. The research embodies the cyclical process of action and reflection/practice and theory informed by the tradition of critical social research.

The participants in the research who attended the community education programme were largely from the dominant cultural group (White, Anglo-Celtic Australians) but their attitudes to asylum seekers and refugees covered the broad range found in the community. Their participation in the programme thus resulted in a wide range of responses. To locate and describe the participants I created three categories based on the competing ideological positions held: monoculturalist, multiculturalist and globalist.
The notion of pedagogical space created through the transformative pedagogy was theorised under the categories of safe, social, dialogical, democratic and empathetic spaces. The dissertation highlights the importance of self-awareness, reflexivity and listening in all of these spaces. It moves on to examine how the participants responded to the new knowledge that was generated through ideology critique. The significance of challenging the ‘commonsense’ of the dominant discourse through credible alternative sources of information emerged from the data. However, the monoculturalist participants actively resisted the challenge implicit in the pedagogy. The ways in which this resistance occurred are analysed. Notwithstanding the resistance, their levels of fear, misinformation and acceptance of the harsh treatment of asylum seekers decreased through their participation. For those participants already challenging the dominant discourse, the ways in which they used the experience of the community education programme to strengthen their position are analysed. How they acted as agents to engage in a more profound way with the issue emerged during the programme.

The research concludes with two important theoretical developments. The first is located within the tension that exists between the pedagogy’s striving for greater moments of freedom and the normativity of all pedagogical processes. It explores the question of whether social change educators should discuss their social justice vision and ideological positions within the educative process. The second theoretical development comes from using the notion of ‘privilege’ to analyse the social justice issue of asylum seekers. The notion of globally privileged citizenship is developed as a way forward and a tool that can be used by social change educators.
Acknowledgements

I am grateful to many people for their support:

Much gratitude goes to my insightful and hard working supervisors (in order of appearance): Dr James Bell; Prof. Jan Currie; Prof. Barry Down. Other academics in the School of Education at Murdoch University have also been generous in providing me with their time and expertise: Assoc. Prof. Irene Styles and Assoc. Prof. Guanzhong Luo, in particular.

To the collaborative team, a group of outstanding individuals whose commitment and skills in social change processes enriched this work, I am very grateful for their time and energy: Rod Mitchell, Helen Errington, Murray Masters, Donna Bannister, Sonja Zivek and Karen Fowler. The community education programme was supported by a number of guest presenters who shared their expertise and/or life experiences. I thank most sincerely Matthew Howard, Ileana Collins, Mohammed Al Bhadily, Carolina Ferreira and Ramatullah Zobair.

Working with the participants in this project was a unique and rewarding experience. I thank them for their interest and engagement in this research project.

Dr Bronwyn Mellor is in the category of angel from heaven. She generously engaged on a theoretical and ethical issue which caused me some consternation, helping me clarify my position and at the same time manage the angst.
Throughout the project, different critical friends lent me an ear and provided me with useful suggestions: Dr Joan Squelch, Sama Bruce-Cullen, and Patrick Fox chief amongst them. A number of post-graduate students were important in supporting this work: Sally Knowles – who not only organised lifesaving writing retreats but who also was a wonderful and supportive colleague. Jo Green, Madeline Burgess and Sue Roberts all ‘chewed the fat’ with me from time to time, letting new ideas emerge as we spoke.

Others got caught up in the project by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. I thank Peregrin Wildoak for his encouragement, intelligent engagement with my ideas and belief in me. Ashley Carruthers, I thank for being naïve enough to offer to read a draft of the dissertation but intelligent enough to give valuable suggestions. Greg Thompson, was similarly generous in offering to read a draft – thank you.

My parents were also important in this project. My mother I thank for the delicious biscuits and cakes she made for the community education programme and my father I thank for not grumbling too much as he helped proof the final draft.
# Table of Contents

Declaration ............................................................................................................................ i  
Abstract ............................................................................................................................. ii  
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................... iv  
Table of Contents .............................................................................................................. vi  
List of Tables .................................................................................................................. x  
List of Figures ................................................................................................................ xi  
Glossary of terms and abbreviations .............................................................................. xii

Chapter 1 Introduction ..................................................................................................... 1  
  Research aims and questions ............................................................................................. 2  
  Original contribution ......................................................................................................... 3  
  Importance of this research ............................................................................................... 4  
  Language ........................................................................................................................... 5  
  Some key concepts and understandings ......................................................................... 7  
Overview of dissertation .................................................................................................. 12  
  Chapter 2 - Asylum seekers in Australia: A social justice issue ..................................... 12  
  Chapter 3 – Towards a transformative pedagogy .......................................................... 12  
  Chapter 4 – Creating a transformative pedagogy ........................................................... 13  
  Chapter 5 – Methodology: A case study of critical reflective practice ......................... 13  
  Chapter 6 – Participants in the transformative pedagogy ............................................... 13  
  Chapter 7 – The embodied transformative pedagogy ..................................................... 14  
  Chapter 8 – Pedagogical spaces ..................................................................................... 14  
  Chapter 9 – Challenging and being challenged ............................................................. 14  
  Chapter 10 – Reflections on a process of change ......................................................... 15  
Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 15  
  Caveats ............................................................................................................................ 15

Chapter 2 Asylum seekers in Australia: A social justice issue ........................................ 17  
  Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 17  
  Why asylum seekers? ..................................................................................................... 19  
  The dominant discourse about asylum seekers ............................................................. 20  
  Situating the dominant discourse ................................................................................... 20  
  Economic issues ............................................................................................................. 30  
  Language and culture ................................................................................................... 31  
  ‘Our way of life’ .......................................................................................................... 33  
  Silence/invisibility ....................................................................................................... 37  
  Changes in the dominant discourse .............................................................................. 38  
  Reflection ....................................................................................................................... 39

Chapter 3 Towards a transformative pedagogy ............................................................. 41  
  Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 41  
  Theory exists in the detail, in the big picture and in the places in between .................... 42  
  Sources of theory .......................................................................................................... 43  
  Context and situatedness ............................................................................................... 46
Chapter 7  The embodied transformative pedagogy ........................................................139
Week 2 ..........................................................................................................................145
Week 1 ..........................................................................................................................140
The collaborative team..................................................................................................134
The multiculturalist: Commitment to multiculturalism .............................................128
The globalist: Community without nation .................................................................124
The monoculturalist: When in Rome . . ...................................................................118
The monoculturalist: When in Rome . . ...................................................................118
The globalist: Community without nation .................................................................124
The multiculturalist: Commitment to multiculturalism .............................................128
The collaborative team.................................................................................................134

Chapter 6  Participants in the transformative pedagogy ..................................................113
Introduction...................................................................................................................113
The participants.............................................................................................................113
The broader community ............................................................................................115
Ideological positioning...............................................................................................117
The monoculturalist: When in Rome . . ...................................................................118
The globalist: Community without nation .................................................................124
The multiculturalist: Commitment to multiculturalism .............................................128
The collaborative team.................................................................................................134

Chapter 5  Methodology:  A case study of critical reflective practice...............................87
Introduction...................................................................................................................87
Critical social research ...............................................................................................89
A case study of critical reflective practice ....................................................................91
Values and knowledge ...............................................................................................96
Data collection ...........................................................................................................99
Data analysis ..............................................................................................................105
Reporting of participants’ words and actions.............................................................107
Ethical issues .............................................................................................................108
Reflections ..................................................................................................................110

Chapter 4  Creating a transformative pedagogy.................................................................69
Introduction...................................................................................................................69
Collaborative team .....................................................................................................69
Logistics .......................................................................................................................71
Participants ....................................................................................................................73
Development of curriculum and pedagogical processes .................................................75
Pedagogical principles and values ..............................................................................75
Multiple approaches .................................................................................................77
Openness, critique and reflexivity ...............................................................................80
Social interaction ..........................................................................................................82
Fostering radical democratic practices .........................................................................83
Dialogical processes .................................................................................................84
Reflections ....................................................................................................................86

Hegemonic discourses and ideology critique...............................................................49
Conscientisation ..........................................................................................................52
Social difference .........................................................................................................54
Power, agency and facilitation ....................................................................................57
Pedagogy of oppression and privilege ........................................................................62
Freedom ......................................................................................................................64
Reflections ....................................................................................................................66

Commentary...............................................................................................................144
Individual identity ......................................................................................................142
Getting started ............................................................................................................140
Commentary ..............................................................................................................144
Week 2 ..........................................................................................................................145
The power of listening: Your thoughts about asylum seekers ...................................145

Social interaction..........................................................................................................82
Openness, critique and reflexivity ...............................................................................80
Social interaction ..........................................................................................................82
Fostering radical democratic practices .........................................................................83
Dialogical processes .................................................................................................84
Reflections ....................................................................................................................86
List of Tables

Table 2.1: Number of refugees, asylum seekers and other people of concern worldwide

Table 2.2: Region where asylum-seekers, refugees and others of concern to UNHCR were hosted at the end of 2003

Table 5.1: Overview of major steps in research and data collection

Table 5.2: Crystallisation of research approach

Table 6.1: Socio-economic indicators of the participants
List of Figures

Figure 3.1: The major theoretical influences on my transformative pedagogy

Figure 5.1: Praxis cycle of this research

Figure 6.1: Religious affiliation – Victoria Park SLA

Figure 6.2: Educational qualification – Victoria Park SLA

Figure 6.3: Income – Victoria Park SLA
Glossary of terms and abbreviations

Abbreviations

ABS – Australian Bureau of Statistics
ASIO – Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
CARAD – Coalition for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees
CEP – Community education programme
DIMIA – Department of Immigration Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
SLA – Statistical Local Area
R&SL – Returned and Services League
TPV – Temporary Protection Visa
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UN – United Nations
WTO – World Trade Organisation

Asylum seeker: A person who is outside her or his country of nationality and seeks to have refugee status accorded under the Refugee Convention.

Collaborative team: The team of people who collaborated in the development and implementation of the community education programme.

Community education programme: The education programme about asylum seekers for Australian residents created for this research project and implemented over a six-week period during winter 2003 in East Victoria Park, Western Australia.

Productive: ‘Productive’ refers to pedagogical processes and outcomes that are consistent with, and conducive of, social justice.
**Problematise:** This term is used in two distinct senses. Firstly, it is the notion of making problematic the commonsense of the dominant discourse, of examining its social construction and rendering the ordinary, extraordinary. Secondly, it is the pedagogical technique of problem posing.

**Programme:** The community education programme.

**Reflexivity:** Reflexivity is the deliberate reflection on actions or thoughts. It is a second level of consciousness or awareness in which we stand back from an experience or thought process and consciously reflect on it.

**Refugee:** A person who has been accorded refugee status under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951). That is, a person who:

> owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (Article 1A(2) Refugee Convention)

**Social change pedagogy:** Pedagogy that seeks the realisation of a society characterised by social justice.
Chapter 1

Introduction

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness . . . And if we do act, in however small a way, we don’t have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.

Howard Zinn (2004, html document)

The treatment of asylum seekers\(^1\) is one of the major social justice issues facing Australia at the beginning of the 21\(^{st}\) century. Within the dominant discourse, asylum seekers have been positioned as a threat to Australian society. As a result, the federal government’s\(^2\) harsh and punitive responses to them have generally received public support. In this research I developed a community education programme for Australian residents that problematised Australia’s response to asylum seekers. Through my own experience as participant researcher and investigating the experiences of the participants in the community education programme, I sought to better understand educational processes that go against the grain of the dominant discourse.

This research is political because it is concerned with issues of power, truth and knowledge within society. It seeks to question and challenge the status quo and explore alternative ways of responding to asylum seekers by making the dominant

---

\(^1\) This research is primarily focused on Australia’s response to asylum seekers. However, many of the same issues confront refugees. In addition, the media and general public often conflate asylum seekers with refugees. Thus, references in this dissertation to asylum seekers often include people who have met the legal definition of a refugee. Where it is important to distinguish, I use the terms refugee and asylum seeker separately.

\(^2\) Australia is a federation of states in which the federal government has constitutional power to legislate and administer matters relating to international treaties, citizenship, immigration, aliens and other areas which relate to asylum seekers and refugees.
discourse more transparent. Significantly, it advocates radical democratic responses by engaging with local processes.

The starting point for the research was to create a transformative pedagogy. The major aim of this pedagogy was to provide participants with alternative ways of understanding the dominant ‘commonsense’ discourse about asylum seekers. Although I was hoping that the participants might also challenge the dominant discourse, it was not part of this research to judge them for the choices they made. As Joe Kincheloe and Peter McLaren (2000) state: “as critical inquirers who search for those forces that insidiously shape who we are, we respect those who reach different conclusions in their personal journeys” (p. 282). My only caveat is that those conclusions do not violate human rights.

**Research aims and questions**

This study investigates the processes and spaces created at the intersection of a controversial social issue and pedagogy. There are three key aims in this research:

1. to understand how education can be part of a social change process;
2. to explore the dynamic of working with groups of adult learners in a social change context; and
3. to describe people’s experiences of transformative pedagogy.

The central research question the study seeks to answer is:

> How do adult learners understand, experience and respond to a transformative pedagogy about asylum seekers, which seeks the construction of a critical sensibility consistent with an inclusive social justice framework?

From this question I developed various sub-questions. They are grouped here for convenience under the three aims identified above. This is, to some extent, an arbitrary grouping given the interrelated nature of some of the sub-questions.

1. Education as part of a social change process.
   - What is the dominant discourse about asylum seekers in Australia?
   - How can a transformative pedagogy facilitate a greater understanding of the dominant discourse about asylum seekers?

---

3 p. 9 has a definition of ‘critical sensibility.’
• How can a transformative pedagogy heighten a sense of agency – a belief that the dominant discourse can be changed – and engage people to act?

2. The dynamics of working with groups of adult learners in a social change context.
• What are the dynamics of bringing together a self-selected community education group and what is learned from this in relation to transformative pedagogy?
• What are the implications for transformative pedagogy of working with adults situated comfortably within the dominant discourse?

3. The experiences of transformative pedagogy.
• What role does reflexivity play in both the transformative pedagogy and in a person’s engagement with social justice?
• What are the transformative pedagogical approaches that assist in the development of critical sensibility?
• How does a person’s positionality influence her/his engagement with transformative pedagogy?

As part of a personal commitment to social justice and to creating a human rights culture, this research project uses education as a tool to deconstruct and reconstruct dominant discourses. In seeking to problematise discourses that work to exclude, marginalise and demonise asylum seekers, this research project endeavours to build alliances with others who are working towards a broad social justice vision. This work considers pedagogical links between diverse social justice movements such as peace, anti-neoliberalism and anti-racism. As described by Chantal Mouffe (1988b), there is no automatic allegiance between different struggles against oppressive discourses, rather they need to be deliberately pursued:

If the task of radical democracy is indeed to deepen the democratic revolution and to link together diverse democratic struggles, such a task requires the creation of new subject-positions that would allow the common articulation, for example, of antiracism, antisexism, and anticapitalism. These struggles do not spontaneously converge. (p. 42)

**Original contribution**

This research is unusual in the area of critical pedagogies, given that the theoretical tradition is often abstract and conceptual. Breaking somewhat with this tradition I apply the well-developed, but still abstract and conceptual, pedagogical theory to a particular social justice issue and develop a transformative pedagogy around it. The transformative pedagogy, enacted at a local site, is then unpacked to obtain a better
understanding of the lived pedagogical experience. The empirical information from this process is then fed back into the theory in search of more grounded theoretical development. Facilitated by this linking of lived experiences with abstract theory, the research makes an original contribution by furthering our understanding of:

- how the pedagogy of Paulo Freire can be adapted to a Western context working with groups that include members of the dominant culture;
- how adult learners experience, understand and respond to a social change pedagogy;
- the tension within critical pedagogy between the normativity of the pedagogy and the freedom aspired to;
- the interplay between levels of awareness and reflexivity, and a person’s engagement and action on social justice issues;
- some of the possibilities and limitations of a transformative pedagogy; and
- how messy, unknowable, and uncertain are the characteristics of pedagogical endeavour.

This research also contributes to the field in an original way by developing an understanding of:

- pedagogical spaces – safe, dialogical, democratic and empathetic spaces – their limitations and possibilities; and
- the privilege of citizenship of a safe, stable and materially comfortable country.

Finally, this research makes an original contribution by developing a practical application of how a controversial social topic can be approached from a social justice perspective in an educational setting.

**Importance of this research**

In a world where opportunities for furthering human rights and social justice are threatened by global economic and political developments, research that goes against the grain can provide an important alternative voice (Kincheloe, 2001). It provides an unusual example of adult education which “breaks with narrow, instrumental and vocational understandings of education,” instead seeing learning as a function of social relationships (Crowther, 2000, p. 481). Research such as this project is important in helping build a counter-hegemonic discourse based on social justice principles. This research is designed to support other work going on in the wider community, facilitating links and alliances with social groups that have similar visions (Kincheloe, 1991). Although this research is particularly useful to social
change educators and advocates, its relevance is intended to extend further. Through the development of the notion of pedagogical spaces, it develops theory relevant to all educational processes. Similarly, through its extension of the analysis of privilege, a multidisciplinary tool used in critical social science, this research is significant to other social science fields such as sociology and cultural studies.

**Language**

Language, and its use, is important to this research in many ways. Language has been used very effectively as a tool to help create and maintain an exclusionary discourse fuelled by fear about asylum seekers. Further, the language of social justice is often appropriated by dominant interests and re-employed to further those interests. This phenomenon has been discussed by Margaret Ledwith (2001) in the context of state welfare:

> The New Right hijacking of a language of liberation (‘empowerment’, ‘participation’, ‘active citizenship’) not only cleverly diluted this radical tradition, but it transformed rights into responsibilities by transferring the collective responsibility of the welfare state to the individual, the family and the community as a moral responsibility. (p. 171)

Language is used strategically to position people negatively and disempower those who challenge the dominant discourse. Likewise, language is used for particular ends by those who seek to create alternative visions of society. Questions of language also raise issues of who can speak and how they are heard within this discourse. Because of the ways language is used, deliberately as well as non-deliberately, consciously as well as unconsciously, within the discourse about asylum seekers and social justice, it is necessary to be as explicit as possible about my use of language.

Many terms are commonly used by people having very different political positions. Terms like ‘democracy’, ‘feminism’, ‘peace’, ‘critique’ and ‘empower’ can have significantly diverse connotations depending on who employs them. In a similar vein to Ledwith, McLaren (1995) states:

> Unfortunately, the New Right has naturalized the term “critical” by repeated and imprecise usage, removing its political and cultural dimensions and its analytic potency, leaving only a sense of “thinking skills.” (p. 35)
Within the dominant discourse in Australia in 2005, many potentially radical terms are used in a passive, acritical and minimalist sense, a sense that does not question the basic socio-economic structures of our society. From a position that challenges dominant discourses and seeks an alternative vision, I use these terms in an active, radical, and counter-hegemonic sense, a sense which rejects significant aspects of the existing socio-economic foundation of our society. Cornell West\(^4\) describes the different ways that concepts are used as having either a \textit{thick} – counter-hegemonic – meaning (which addresses the inequities in the distribution of wealth, resources and power) or a \textit{thin} – acquiescent – meaning (one accepting of the distribution of the status quo) (hooks & West, 1991, p. 39). In this dissertation, unless otherwise specified, where a term can be used in either a thick or thin sense, it should be read as having a thick meaning.

A major battle I have had in my use of language is the degree to which I use specialised academic language in writing about this research. There is an ironic contradiction that research designed to challenge the exclusionary use of power and resources uses language that is inaccessible to the vast majority of people. This exclusionary aspect of critical pedagogy is commented on by Stephen Brookfield (1995): “If you are familiar with neo-Marxist, phenomenological, and hermeneutic argot, you can participate in the conversation as an insider, on equal terms. But if you are not, the inaccessibility of this discourse excludes you from the circle” (p.xv). Brookfield (1995) notes one of the results of using such language:

If we rely too heavily on the jargon of critical pedagogy, we may find ourselves operating within a self-enclosed semantic loop. Our passionate declarations of transformative emancipation and dialogical empowerment may serve as a pedagogic version of a masonic handshake, but we may find no one who wishes to greet us on these terms. Our language becomes a set of coded messages whose resonance is only fully appreciated by those already on the inside. (p. 210)

To address my discomfort at using the ‘code’ of the critical pedagogue in this dissertation I am developing a more popular version of this project that will be made available to social change educators.

\(^4\) This book takes the form of a dialogue between authors thus allowing attribution of one author.
A final issue of language is that of the voice used in this thesis. Throughout the thesis I write in the first person in recognition of the inevitably subjective nature of the experience of a social research process in which the researcher is also a participant. At times I use the first person plural when speaking generally, less common in academic work. I do this to recognise that I am a part of the society that I am investigating, a product of its discourses as much as any other member of that society. This does not indicate my acceptance of the policies, attitudes or phenomena that I may be discussing. When discussing the community education programme my use of the first person plural indicates that it was something done together with the collaborative team.

**Some key concepts and understandings**

Some key concepts used throughout this work are set out below.

**Social justice**

In writing a definition of social justice I feel inspired by the possibility of a better world but reluctant to describe such a world because there are many possible versions. It seems to me that if we put importance on *how* we work towards a social justice vision, then there is less need to worry about the details of the vision. This emphasis on *process* is fundamental to my theoretical position in many respects. I am not committed to a social justice vision because I know what is best for everyone; rather I have a social justice vision to inspire me to keep struggling against injustice.

Social justice involves rectifying structural or systemic injustices in which certain groups are singled out for less favourable treatment and others are privileged. I use the term to refer to a vision for the world, a process or way of being in the world, and to a set of values. These three aspects are interrelated parts of the same thing and help tease out the concept.

As a *vision*, social justice plays a motivating role. It engages the optimism of the spirit – an antidote to the pessimism of the intellect. It refers to a world in which human beings and their relationship with each other and the environment are the determining considerations behind our decisions, not profit. It represents a society
committed to equality of negotiated outcomes for all. In the society it envisages, power and resources are equitably distributed.

How social justice operates as a process is at the core of the concept. It is through the daily struggle to live that process that we begin to realise the promise of the utopian vision. As a process it is a dynamic set of interactions in which each human being is valued and respected by other people, organisations and institutions. It recognises that equality of outcome involves structural change as well as additional resources, support or assistance for certain groups. The use of power and resources must ensure that all can have an adequate standard of living. A social justice process is collaborative, cooperative, collective, connected and non-coercive. It is radically democratic and participatory, in that it listens to all voices, is inclusive of all subject positions and ensures that those affected by decisions can be part of the deliberative process.

As a set of values, social justice is based on acceptance and respect for each human being. It recognises the importance of social relationships and human connection. The unique experience of every individual is respected to ensure that diversity is acknowledged and no one set of experiences is seen as the norm. Social justice values embrace pluralism but with limits. The acceptance of ethnic, cultural and religious differences does not mean that all cultural practices are seen as equal and acceptable. Basic human rights take precedence over cultural practices.

Rather than arguing for an underlying philosophical basis to justify the struggle for social justice and human rights, I accept the pragmatic approach of Richard Rorty. Rorty (1998b) sees the task “as a matter of making our own culture – the human rights culture – more self-conscious and more powerful, rather than of demonstrating its superiority to other cultures by an appeal to something transcultural” (p. 171).

This view of social justice valorises a variety of ways of being and knowing. It presents no single cultural model for society as the correct way – as the centre. This

---

5 As Peter Singer (2001) says in relation to living one’s philosophical principles: it provides “satisfaction of a way of life in which theory and practice, if not yet in harmony, are at least coming together” (p. 117).
makes for a more complex view of what may constitute equality as described by James Donald (1992):

In complex modern societies, asserts Walzer, the idea of ‘simple equality’ – everyone getting the same amount of the same thing in the same form – is neither achievable nor desirable . . . Instead, Walzer argues for a ‘complex equality’: the distribution of different social goods according to different criteria reflecting the specificity of these goods, their social significance, and the variety of their recipients. Rather than deriving normative principles that would apply in all cases from either the rights of individuals or the promise of universal emancipation, Walzer insists on a respect for the boundaries between social spheres and the negotiation of meanings and criteria appropriate to that particular sphere. (p. 143)

At times we see practices in social justice movements which are at odds with the vision we set out to achieve, in that they are characterised by disdain, divisiveness, rejection of others and violence. Knowing this, I set myself the challenging goal of coherence of vision and practice; or put another way, of seeking continuity of means and ends. From the smallest gesture, to the voice I use in writing, through to my most thoughtfully designed class – there are social justice implications in every detail. I am committed to paying attention to the how, or the form of the pedagogy, just as much as to the what or the content of the pedagogy. As Michele Rajotte (2002/2003) explains about her practice: “My coherence in the classroom is as important as my teaching of contents. A coherence of what I say, write, and do” (Findings and Implications section). Like Ira Shor (1987), I strive for a pedagogy in which “the form and content of the class dialectically support each other, as the practice of freedom through the study of oppression” (p. 95). I try to practise in my daily life the kind of alternative or transformed reality that I seek, knowing that it is unattainable.

Critical sensibility

This term means an openness to new experiences, feelings and understandings grounded in an awareness of the relationship between power and knowledge. It is based on a complex and multifocused, rather than a simplistic and unifocused, view
of the world. It involves a developed consciousness\(^6\) and conscience\(^7\) coupled with an engagement to transform oppressive discourses.\(^8\)

Victor Soucek (1995) in his critique of public education uses the term critical sensibility to mean something along the lines of *critical and creative skills and thinking, coupled with social, moral, intellectual, and psychological development*. There is clearly some overlap with our respective uses of the term. What my definition adds is an affective element, as well as a deliberate focus on alternative ways of seeing and understanding the world, and an engagement to act. A focus on critical sensibility sits comfortably in the pedagogical tradition that views learning as “an exercise in consciousness growth” (Shor, 1987, p. 47).

**Pedagogy**

Due to the explicit acknowledgement of the political nature of the pedagogies I will be examining (Escobar, Fernández, Guevara-Niebla, & Freire, 1994) and their necessary connection with society, culture and individual lives, it is no surprise that the term *pedagogy* requires a broader definition than the traditional definition of ‘the art or profession of teaching.’ Pedagogy is a dynamic process in which knowledge is created. The definition of pedagogy by David Lusted (1986) as that which concerns “the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the intersection of three agencies – the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together produce” (p. 3) fits well with this project.\(^9\) Lusted’s definition is similar to that of Paulo Freire (1987; 1998), who emphasises the active role of the student in a generative process in which the teacher and the student create knowledge together. I would make two changes to Lusted’s definition. In every pedagogical situation there is a variety of knowledge being produced, some of which is shared, but much of which is unique to the individual. Further, I see the particular pedagogical space created as having

---

\(^{6}\) Consciousness is used to encapsulate awareness, understanding and knowing.

\(^{7}\) Conscience is used to encapsulate the ethical and moral aspect of our thinking and acting.

\(^{8}\) Combining a developed consciousness and conscience with an engagement to act is effectively the equivalent to Freire’s (1987) *conscientisation*.

\(^{9}\) “The concept of pedagogy... refuses any tendency to instrumentalise the relations, or disconnect their interactivity or to give value to one agency over another... it denies notions of the teacher as functionary... the learner as 'empty vessel' or passive respondent, knowledge as immutable material to impart. Instead, it foregrounds exchange between and over the categories, it recognises the productivity of the relations, and it renders the parties within them as active, changing and changeable agencies” (Lusted, 1986, p. 3).
agency in its own right (developed in Chapter 8). My revision of Lusted’s definition is: *The transformation of consciousness that takes place in the intersection of four agencies – the teacher, the learner, the space created and the knowledges they produce.*

**Transformative Pedagogy**

The pedagogy I developed in the programme is called *transformative* in recognition of the fact that unjust social, political and economic systems need transforming. The vision of a transformed reality operates as an external motivator in the pedagogical process. However, it is *within* the process where transformation must also be located.

We are all too well socialised in authoritarian modes of power. Only by giving equal weight to the goal of creating transformed pedagogical *processes*, processes that embody the principles espoused, are we able to move towards a socially just world.

Transformative pedagogy has much in common with human rights education, social justice education (L. A. Bell, 1997) and popular education (the name by which Freirean pedagogy is known in Latin America). Other writers in this tradition have used terms such as *emancipatory* pedagogy (Giroux, 1997b; Mayo, 1999) and *liberatory* pedagogy (George, 2001; Weiler, 1994). The advantage of these terms is that they highlight the issues of domination and oppression that are critiqued and opposed by the pedagogy. However, they have been largely associated with a positivist ontological position and modernist notions of self, which sees education as freeing the true autonomous self so that the good innate human nature of the student can assert itself and understand the one true reality which our humanity dictates (Freire, 1987). Not convinced that there is such a thing as innate human nature, I have as the focus of my pedagogy a process in which the destructive practices of domination – destructive for those who dominate as well as those who are dominated – are transformed. The terms, *emancipatory* and *liberatory*, can be problematic for other reasons as Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) indicate:

---

10 A similar definition for “Transformative Education” was given by the Joint Workshop on Transformative Education and Global Democratization at the IVth World Social Forum, Mumbai, India (International Sociological Association Research Committee 10, 2004). The use of this term is not to be confused with Jack Mezirow’s (1994) theory of ‘transformative learning’. That theory understands *transformation* in terms of transformation of an individual’s mental schema.
At the beginning of the new millennium we are cautious in our use of the term *emancipation* because, as many critics have pointed out, no one is ever completely emancipated from the sociopolitical context that has produced him or her. Also, many have questioned the arrogance that may accompany efforts to emancipate “others.” (p. 282)

What needs to be clear in any definition of pedagogy is that it is inescapably a political act. Unlike traditional forms of pedagogy, transformative pedagogy acknowledges and names the political nature of education.

**Overview of dissertation**

**Chapter 2 - Asylum seekers in Australia: A social justice issue**

In considering why I chose to do this research I locate myself in the picture. This chapter sets out the context in which this research project takes place at the same time as it analyses the dominant discourse about asylum seekers. I discuss the controversial nature of the issue of asylum seekers and the characteristics that establish it as a key social justice issue in Australia. The interconnected factors that coalesce to create the context of this project are critiqued from the global, national and local dimensions, as traversed by the economic, political, social, and historical dimensions. In exploring the context in this way I am examining how the dominant discourses about asylum seekers are created and maintained.

**Chapter 3 – Towards a transformative pedagogy**

This chapter locates my transformative pedagogy in its broad theoretical tradition. It looks at the influences on my transformative pedagogy from critical theory, critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogies, postmodernism, cultural studies and importantly from the lived experience I had working in popular education in Guatemala. The implications for the application of Freirean pedagogy of the changed context (working with members of the dominant cultural group in a Western industrialised country) are analysed. It develops concepts relevant to the pedagogy such as context and situatedness, hegemony, ideology critique, power, agency, social difference and freedom. This chapter discusses how this diverse theoretical tradition underpins my transformative pedagogy as it works to develop critical sensibility.
Chapter 4 – Creating a transformative pedagogy

Chapter 4 describes the process I followed in taking the broad theoretical tradition from Chapter 3 and applying it to asylum seekers in Australia. This critical application of the general sociological theory from critical pedagogy is an area that has not been significantly developed in the literature. The chapter looks at how the programme was designed, who was involved (in particular the collaborative team) and the values and principles behind its pedagogy. It discusses the logistics of getting the programme implemented in my local community. In examining the development of the curriculum and pedagogical processes, it explores the processes aspired to – safe, democratic and social – and how they work towards the creation of critical sensibility. It concludes by examining the core pedagogical strategies adopted including dialogue, critique and reflection.

Chapter 5 – Methodology: A case study of critical reflective practice

In this chapter, I identify my methodology as a case study in critical reflective practice. The methodology is located within the tradition of critical social research with a pragmatic ethos. Philosophical issues related to methodology such as values, knowledge, and ethics are discussed as are the more prosaic issues of data collection and data analysis. The research’s praxis cycle is explored as are the influences of feminist research approaches.

Chapter 6 – Participants in the transformative pedagogy

The self-selected group of people who participated in the programme are introduced in this chapter with their demographic details and an analysis of their ideological positions. This is done using three categories of ideological position: monoculturalist; multiculturalist; and globalist. Through these loose ideological categories, I examine how the participants view Australian society, migration in general and asylum seekers in particular. This chapter locates the participants and the collaborative team within the broader community.
Chapter 7 – The embodied transformative pedagogy

This chapter describes in some detail the curriculum of the programme, setting out the aims, activities and educational strategies used in each session. It interweaves this with a discussion of how the participants experienced the various sessions and some of the knowledge that was created as a result. In this chapter I introduce the participants’ learning about asylum seekers and related issues, derived from the programme.

Chapter 8 – Pedagogical spaces

The notion of pedagogical spaces, created in the transformative pedagogy, is introduced and critiqued in this chapter. These spaces – safe, dialogic, democratic, social and empathetic – are analysed both as processes and outcomes. Within this analysis one of the core issues examined is facilitation. The chapter examines the interaction of educator, participant and process in terms of the extent to which it resulted in a productive space consistent with, and conducive of, social justice. The resulting group dynamic is examined as a product of the transformative pedagogy as well as a determining factor of the pedagogy. This includes a discussion of the various enabling and constraining factors. The impact of the different positioning of the participants is also analysed.

Chapter 9 – Challenging and being challenged

Chapter 9 analyses the participants’ learning and the knowledge created as it relates to the construction of a critical sensibility. In considering how the participants engaged with the challenges made to the dominant discourse about asylum seekers, this chapter focuses on issues of ideology critique, self-awareness and reflexivity. Following on, it examines the parallel question of the participants’ engagement to act to transform the dominant discourse. The chapter analyses the different ways that the participants responded to the transformative pedagogy relative to their positions of comfort within, or rejection of, the dominant discourse. I explore the experiences of those comfortable with the dominant discourse in dealing with the challenges to their ideological position and analyse their resistance to alternative worldviews.
Chapter 10 – Reflections on a process of change

This chapter critiques the enactment of the transformative pedagogy. By reflecting on my experience as educator, I suggest alternative ways of dealing with a number of pedagogical issues. In particular, I explore the tension present in all social change pedagogy between normativity and freedom. Further, I theorise on the privileged position of being a citizen of a safe, stable and materially comfortable country. The social justice issue of asylum seekers is explored through the lens of an analysis of privilege. This reflective chapter provides a dedicated place for me as an educator to consider some of the implications of my practice.

Conclusion

In the Conclusion I reflect on what I learned from this research and summarise the significant findings from the community education project. Recognising the limitations of my relatively short intervention, I suggest some areas for further research on social change pedagogy.

Caveats

This research assumes that education can play an important role in achieving social change, but of itself, education is insufficient to bring about social change. As Freire (1985) has exhorted, educators interested in social change need to “avoid falling into either an annihilating pessimism or a shameless opportunism” (p. 171), and accept the limitations of a social change project:

The forces that mold education so that it is self-perpetuating would not allow education to work against them. This is the reason any radical and profound transformation of an educational system can only take place (and even then, not automatically or mechanically) when society is also radically transformed.

This does not mean, however, that those educators who want and, even more so, are committed to the radical or revolutionary transformation of their society can do nothing. They have a lot to do, and without resorting to prescriptive formulas, they should determine their goals and learn how to reach them according to the concrete historical conditions under which they live. (pp. 170-1)

The structural causes that permit the oppressive discourse about asylum seekers to dominate have historical, social, political and economic dimensions that go well
beyond the individuals who espouse them. However, an education programme works with the individual and looks outwards. It does not directly change the structural features of a society. As such, education may not target the problem in the most direct way, unlike activism, which can directly seek structural change. Social change is such a mammoth task that a wide variety of strategies are needed. Education is one such strategy, helping to raise awareness of the problem and open up alternatives.

Agreeing with Freire that educational processes have a role to play in working toward social transformation, the short-term nature of the community education programme was nonetheless a major limitation. Critical sensibility must be honed over a long period of time. Small-scale community education programmes based on social justice processes or human rights practices are unlikely to cause major social change by themselves. The entrenched interests of the dominant group will not be given up easily. Those, whose positions provide them with the privilege of citizenship of a safe, rich country, will want to defend and maintain that privilege. Like many critical theorists, such as Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, I am relatively pessimistic as to the possibility of radical social change and human liberation (Brookfield, 2004). Unfortunately, I suspect that the situation for asylum seekers is likely to get significantly worse before it gets better.
Chapter 2

Asylum seekers in Australia: A social justice issue

Introduction

There are many injustices in the world, many issues I could have chosen to research. This chapter combines a review of my personal motivation with an examination of the broader context in which the research is located. In analysing the context, this chapter also explores the dominant discourse about asylum seekers in Australia.

I began this research profoundly aware of my many material benefits. I was born and raised in Australia, a safe, stable, wealthy country, to middle-class Australian-born parents of mixed British-European heritage. With this heritage and the benefits of a stable family situation, I was successful within the school system and undertook tertiary studies in law. After working for several years as a lawyer, I decided I wanted to work with people, not legal arguments. Moving out of law provided me with the opportunity to engage in work more fundamental to human existence, and based on love and connection.11 It is not easy when living in the dominant culture of a Western country to hear voices from outside that culture, especially subjugated voices (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993). Concerned about the insular nature of the dominant culture I have sought to learn about other experiences.

Feeling that I was a net beneficiary of an unfair world made me uncomfortable. Moving out of the legal profession, I wanted to live as simply as possible in a country disadvantaged in the global system to see if there was anything that I could learn and contribute. This choice to simplify life is one enjoyed by only a small minority of the world’s population. I moved to Guatemala (having previously

11 Love is not often mentioned in critical pedagogy despite Freire’s regular reference to it. Ana Freire in the Foreword to Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution (McLaren, 2000) says that McLaren’s choice to write about Paulo Freire and Che Guevara: “was surely born in admitting that he admired Paulo and Che above all because they had created the pedagogy of love” (p.xiv). McLaren notes that “what sets Freire apart from most other leftist educators in this era of cynical reason, and joins him in spirit with Che, is his unashamed stress on the importance and power of love” (p. 171).
worked in Switzerland and Japan) and worked as a volunteer for over three years in popular education with non-government organisations. This fulfilled my desire for challenges, to work in another language and also to feel that I was not merely continuing to materially benefit from the accident of my birth.\textsuperscript{12} I was, of course, benefiting in many other ways from the opportunity to work in Guatemala. It was in Guatemala that I fell in love with education as a creative practice with significant social justice potential. There, a commitment to social justice became firmly integrated into my life, complementing an already well-developed feminism. When I returned to Australia I wanted to reflect on the experience in Guatemala working with people committed to changing unfair systems and consider how it applied to the Australian context.

Not wanting to be part of an unfair system, I have worked in policy, law and education, going against the grain of the dominant discourse on issues such as disability rights and access by Indigenous people to government complaints processes. I am presently (and was during the course of this project) a volunteer at a community legal centre that provides free legal and migration assistance to refugees. Having worked both within and outside the system, I tend to agree with Vaclav Havel that “the power of those who choose to oppose the system . . . lies not in directly confronting the system but in denying it in principle” (cited in Briton, 1996, p. 102). This is not to minimise the importance of all forms of resistance to injustice. Rather:

\begin{quote}
[It recognises that the] choice to live in the truth and refusing to live in the lie – is far more effective than any form of conceptual resistance could ever be. It is a prescription for meaningful action that changes lived relations “to the point where living within the truth ceases to be a mere negation of living with the lie and becomes articulate in a particular way,” to “the point at which something is born that might be called the ‘independent spiritual, social and political life of society’.” (Briton, 1996, p. 102, citing Vaclav Havel)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} “To locate oneself, [Dwight] Boyd insists, is to understand that ‘I am unavoidably part of something that is doing something to me, for me, through me, as me’ and that what is being done may not be attributable to any intention or choice that one may have. What understanding of self can help to make sense of this type of complicity, and how can such an understanding of self, which seems to minimize the importance of intention and choice, avoid a determinism that precludes the possibility of (moral) agency” (Applebaum, 2004, p. 61).
Through this personal history, I acknowledge that my motives are not pure, in the sense of disinterested. They never are. I wanted to understand better the theoretical issues that arose out of my experience with popular education in Guatemala. In addition, I wanted the research to challenge the economic, political and social systems that marginalise, exclude and oppress the majority at the same time as they largely benefit the few. This project is part of my struggle to live a life that integrates many of the things that are important to me.

**Why asylum seekers?**

The choice of asylum seekers as the subject of my research was in some ways arbitrary. It clearly was a major social issue in Australia at the time of the research project – probably the most high profile issue. But there were other important social issues that continue to be significant, such as the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, Australia’s commitment to neo-liberal free market systems, and our interaction with the environment. The approach of the educational programme was to focus on us as Australians, as much as on the particular topic. As such, the pedagogy employed goes beyond the particular subject matter and has the potential to impact on other social justice, human rights or environmental issues. It is perhaps because of the strong public support for Australia’s policy of mandatory detention of asylum seekers coupled with my experience in Guatemala that I chose the issue of asylum seekers as the focus of the community education programme. In 1995 when I arrived in Guatemala there were in the vicinity of 100 000 Guatemalan refugees living in Mexico, having fled the civil war (Blue, 1996). There was not significant rejection of them by the Mexican population, notwithstanding the relative poverty of Mexico. Arriving back in Australia in 1999, there was growing anti-asylum seeker sentiment being expressed openly. This response seemed unnecessary given the small numbers of asylum seekers and Australia’s affluence. The simplistic two-dimensional image of asylum seekers portrayed in the mass media was disturbing. The dominant discourse strongly rejected asylum seekers. Exploring why and what can be done seemed a worthwhile project.
Chapter 2

The dominant discourse about asylum seekers

In Australia the dominant discourse about asylum seekers is characterised by fear and rejection of the people who arrive seeking asylum. This reaction to asylum seekers has allowed successive federal governments since the early 1990s to impose some of the harshest responses to asylum seekers of any Western nation.

A major fear that fed the dominant discourse in the late 1990s was the fear that Australia was being ‘overrun’ by asylum seekers. There were various elements which came together in this fear: the fear of invasion; the fear that Australia was being targeted by asylum seekers; the belief that Australia was doing more than a fair share in a global sense; and the loss of control over who lives in Australia. Other fears long dwelling within Australian society also stoked the rejection of asylum seekers: fears of the racialised Other; and of loss of a British, Christian heritage. The strong media focus on asylum seekers coming to Australia, coupled with the media’s and community’s lack of awareness combined to foster such fears.

Situating the dominant discourse

As with the dominant discourses on other contemporary social issues, the dominant discourse about asylum seekers in Australia has changed considerably over the last 30 years. The changing social, political, economic and international contexts have affected the discourse. The strength of the dominant discourse has waxed and waned as the numbers of asylum seekers reaching Australian shores has increased and decreased. Since the late 1990s there have been growing challenges to the oppressive dominant discourse, reflecting the contested nature characteristic of all discourse.

Unlike other social issues in which there are often specific groups within society whose interests are particularly affected by the outcome of the discourse, this is not the case with asylum seekers. The body of people most affected by the discourse, and who would otherwise seek to voice an alternative view, are either outside the country or locked up in detention centres hundreds of kilometres from population centres.
This has made it relatively simple for the two major political parties to use the issue in a way that apparently serves their electoral interests, presenting a strong and unified voice against asylum seekers.

The global context
Forced migration, which includes asylum seekers, is a global phenomenon. It has global causes and the ways that nations respond to the phenomenon are influenced by global events. War is a major cause of forced migration (Sesay, 2002). Wars fought over the control of natural resources continue to cause major refugee movements (“Country profile: Congo,” 2005). In a global ‘free’ market that does not concern itself with ethical issues, buyers ignore the legitimacy or human rights record of the seller, encouraging takeovers of power in unstable countries (Pogge, 2002, p. 22). Many wars are exacerbated by the effects of colonisation, the arbitrary demarcation of national boundaries in contradiction to ethnic groupings and processes of de-colonisation (Nkrumah, 1998).

The unfair global trading system contributes to the continuing poverty of many countries (Oxfam, 2001). This system is built on neo-liberal economic foundations which champion competition, individualism and the so-called ‘free’ market. Poverty in turn contributes to forced migration, creating a population of people relatively defenceless in the face of persecution. The contradictions arising out of economic globalisation in relation to asylum seekers have been well documented (Stelzer, 2000). The globalising processes by which nation states have deliberately removed restrictions over the international movement of goods, currency and other financial transactions are in stark contrast to the increases in restrictions over the movement of people. National boundaries are irrelevant to capital and discarded as unimportant in the postmodern condition, a condition “above all, associated with the emergence of globalisation as a dominant cultural practice throughout the Western world” (Symes & Preston, 1997, p. 25). In contrast, these boundaries are very significant to asylum seekers who find themselves outside the globalised rules. It is particularly contradictory that globalised capitalism has consciously set about creating consumer

13 The modern Liberal Party is based on responding to the interests of middle-class Australia. The Australian Labor Party has its roots in the trade union movement (Lovell, McAllister et al. 1998). They currently have many similar economic and social policies.
demand in industrially underdeveloped countries while national governments resist the movement of people to industrially developed countries where those desires may be fulfilled.

Since the Second World War, the international community has formally accepted that countries are obliged to help people who enter their territory, fleeing persecution. This international agreement is found in sub-article 14(1) of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” This ground-breaking human rights instrument was followed by the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention). Australia was one of 26 countries involved in drafting the Refugee Convention. Australia ratified the Refugee Convention in 1954, the sixth country in the world to do so. The Refugee Convention was made applicable to refugee populations outside Europe by a Protocol in 1967 (ratified by Australia in 1973). As noted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “the Convention and the Protocol are the principal international instruments established for the protection of refugees and their basic character has been widely recognized internationally” (UNHCR, 1996, p. 7). These instruments protect the basic human rights of refugees, ensuring that they will not be returned involuntarily to a country where they face persecution. The Australian government has sought to implement the obligations contained in those international agreements through amendments to the Migration Act 1958.

Although human rights instruments are an important tool in protecting people who are vulnerable and disadvantaged, they have limitations, especially in the area of asylum seekers. Purporting to apply universally to all human beings, human rights are only enforceable by citizens against the nation-state (Brysk & Shafir, 2004b). Asylum seekers are not citizens of the host countries and thus are unable to enforce their human rights in those countries. In addition, many countries are not signatories to human rights conventions. For example, neither Indonesia nor Malaysia, two countries through which asylum seekers often pass on their way to Australia, are signatories to the Refugee Convention. Unlike the majority of countries in the world, those countries have not undertaken to provide asylum for refugees. Further, the Refugee Convention only applies to people who fall within the specific definition of
Asylum seekers in Australia: A social justice issue

A person is persecuted for reasons other than those set out in the Refugee Convention, she or he is not considered a refugee. Similarly, if a person flees their residence because of persecution but does not cross a state border, she or he is not a refugee. If a person flees because of an environmental disaster, extreme poverty, or because of suffering discrimination (of a kind which does not amount to persecution), she or he has no protection under the Refugee Convention.

The numbers of asylum seekers at any one time have an impact on the international community’s ability and willingness to respond to them. It is part of the dominant discourse over the last decade in industrially developed countries that such nations are being ‘swamped’ by asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2003). Table 2.1 below shows the worldwide change in numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and other people of concern since 1951.

Table 2.1 Number of refugees, asylum seekers and other people of concern worldwide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year (at 31 Dec)</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>2.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>2.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>8.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>17.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>26.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>21.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003*</td>
<td>17.1 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNHCR (2003) and * UNHCR (2004b)

What is particularly interesting in relation to the concern in the West over the ‘flood’ of asylum seekers is to see where most refugees are living. At the end of 2003, approximately 30% of refugees were living in Africa, with a similar percentage in Central Asia, South West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East. Europe was host to 25% of all refugees. Asia and the Pacific (which includes Australia) had
approximately 8% of refugees. Table 2.2 shows the region where populations of refugees, asylum seekers and others of concern to the UNHCR were hosted at the end of 2003. There was a disjuncture between the public perception that Australia shouldered an unfair burden of the global refugee situation and the reality of our very minor role.

Table 2.2  Region where asylum-seekers, refugees and others of concern to UNHCR were hosted at the end of 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Refugees</th>
<th>Asylum seekers</th>
<th>Returned refugees</th>
<th>Others of concern*</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>3 135 800</td>
<td>166 100</td>
<td>345 100</td>
<td>638 100</td>
<td>4 285 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>3 635 700</td>
<td>48 800</td>
<td>713 700</td>
<td>1 789 600</td>
<td>6 187 800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>2 207 100</td>
<td>392 200</td>
<td>35 600</td>
<td>1 633 100</td>
<td>4 268 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>623 900</td>
<td>383 600</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>1 270 600</td>
<td>2 278 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>69 300</td>
<td>4 400</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>74 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>9 671 800</td>
<td>995 100</td>
<td>1 094 700</td>
<td>5 331 800</td>
<td>17 093 400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Others of concern include returned refugees, internally displaced persons, returned internally displaced persons and a small miscellaneous category.

Source: UNHCR (2004b)

The statistics show that Europe is the major industrially-developed destination for asylum seekers. The response of many European countries to the increase in numbers of asylum seekers through the 1980s and 1990s has been a tightening of generally relaxed policies and attitudes. This change has become known as ‘Fortress Europe’ (Reynolds, 2002). Christina Boswell (2002) argues that the dominant discourse in Europe now is a “nationalist ethics of closure”:

Over the past two decades, nationalist arguments have dominated the populist discourse on refugee policy in many European states. Despite the growing electoral significance of ethnic minorities, such arguments for restriction are accepted by almost all mainstream parties. Centre-left and moderate right parties have continued to pay lip-service to international obligations to refugees, but in practice... they have introduced various legislative reforms which have made it almost impossible for refugees to seek asylum in European states. (Nationalist Justifications for Restriction section)

These statistics relate only to refugees, not the broader category which includes asylum seekers and other people of concern to the UNHCR, such as internally displaced persons.
A major global event that has influenced the dominant discourse about asylum seekers was the attack on the World Trade Centre and Washington on 11 September 2001. The subsequent ‘War on Terror’ launched by the United States and its ‘coalition of the willing’ against the alleged perpetrators has resulted in a heightened fear in the West of all things Islamic. That fear has been accompanied in the West by increased indiscriminate prejudice against Muslims (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004). Given that large numbers of asylum seekers over the past decade have been Muslims, this augments the rejection of them.

**Australia’s migration experience**

Australia’s global location is isolated by sea from the rest of the world. Although there was no category of ‘asylum seeker’ until recently, in the past there were waves of refugee populations that arrived in Australia without authorisation (i.e. as asylum seekers). These include European expatriates living in South East Asia who fled the Japanese invasion during the Second World War, Vietnamese refugees during the late 1970s and Cambodian refugees in the 1970s, late 1980s and early 1990s. Since the Indonesian takeover of East Timor in 1975 until independence in May 2002, many East Timorese arrived seeking asylum. In the 1990s asylum seekers from the Muslim countries of Afghanistan and Iraq were the major groups.

Australia has a tradition of not welcoming non-Anglo migrants or refugees. From the commencement of colonisation in 1787 until the 1960s, Australia was strongly aligned with Britain. The first major piece of legislation passed after the various British colonies formed the Commonwealth of Australia was the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, which implemented the now infamous White Australia Policy. This legislation was designed to ensure that Australian society would be firmly British and monocultural. When Australian citizenship was created by the *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948*, the Minister stated in his second reading speech that “to say that one is an Australian is, of course, to indicate beyond all doubt that one is British” (Australian Citizenship Council, 2000, p. 32). The White Australia Policy was the cornerstone of Australian immigration policy until after the Second World War when it was believed that it was imperative, in response to the communist threat from the Asian north, that Australia ‘populate or perish’ (Collins, 2001, p. 105). Although the White Australia Policy was clearly racist and assumed a
cultural superiority of the British, migrants to Australia “seem to have escaped the sharp edge of racist attacks and anti-immigrant mobilisations that characterised community relations in many other countries” (Collins, 2001, p. 107). It was expected of post-war migrants (and Aborigines) that they would assimilate into the ‘Australian way of life,’ giving up their existing cultural ways (White, 2001, p. 44).

As late as 1969 the Minister for Immigration, Billy Snedden, stated:

We must have a single culture. If immigration implied multi-cultural activities within Australian society, then it was not the type Australia wanted. I am quite determined we should have a monoculture with everyone living in the same way, understanding each other, and sharing the same aspirations. We don’t want pluralism. (quoted in Collins, 2001, p. 109-110)

When significant numbers of previous migrants started to leave Australia, this triggered a review of the policy of assimilation. Integration became the new policy in the 1960s, followed by a more expansive policy of multiculturalism in the 1970s (Jamrozik, Boland, & Urquhart, 1995, p. 113). The policy of multiculturalism was first promoted in 1973 in a number of speeches and papers produced by Mr Al Grassby, Labor Minister for Immigration (Lopez, 2000). Multiculturalism as originally conceived was to promote social cohesion, equality of opportunity and cultural identity (DIMIA, 2004a). The general nature of multiculturalism in Australia is described by Stephen Castles as “ethnocultural pluralism” where it has been promoted as a “public policy designed to ensure the full socio-economic and political participation of all members of an increasingly diverse population” (Castles, 1997, p. 120). This is in contrast to European approaches which generally reject multiculturalism as “a legitimation for separatism and fundamentalism, and therefore as a threat to modernity, secularism and gender equality” (p. 121). Castles states that:

[Multiculturalism] may be characterized as the acceptance of immigrant populations as ethnic communities which remain distinguishable from the majority population with regard to language, culture, and social organization over several generations. Pluralism implies that immigrants should be granted equal rights in all spheres of society, without being expected to give up their diversity, although usually with an expectation of conformity to certain key values. Here, membership of civil society, initiated through permission to immigrate, leads to full participation in the nation-state. (pp. 119-120)
Policy response to asylum seekers

The more inclusive approach of multiculturalism to migrants from non-English speaking countries has occurred at a time when the policy towards asylum seekers has become increasingly less inclusive. Australia now locks up all asylum seekers and keeps them locked up until they are either recognised as refugees by administrative or judicial decision, or deported. Deportation of failed asylum seekers occurs regularly. The policy of mandatory detention was implemented by a Labor government in 1991. Detention centres are generally located in inhospitable desert regions, remote from urban populations. The longest period a detainee (asylum seeker) was in detention was over 6 years (Gratton & Shaw, 2005). Since 1999 the government only gives a 3-year Temporary Protection Visa (TPV), rather than a permanent protection visa to asylum seekers who arrive in Australia without authorisation and prove that they meet the definition of refugee under the Refugee Convention. The social, migration and other rights of a TPV holder are significantly restricted. In 2001 the Liberal government implemented the ‘Pacific Solution’ under which boats carrying asylum seekers have been refused permission to land on Australian territory. Instead the navy has towed boats to neighbouring Pacific Islands under agreement with the local governments. The asylum seekers are locked up by these countries to avoid processing them under Australian law. Australian territory for the purposes of making an asylum claim, known as the ‘migration zone,’ has been significantly reduced in order to further this objective first in 2003 and again in 2005 (Phillips & Millbank, 2003; DIMIA, 2005).

The major opposition party has not contested these policies because they are popular with the general public. It is commonly agreed that the Liberal Party won the 2001 national election because of its stance about asylum seekers taken on board the MV Tampa as their boat sank (Green, 2004; Devetak, 2004; Gibney, 2004). The Australian government created an international incident by refusing to allow the Tampa to take the asylum seekers to Christmas Island, the nearest safe place, because it was Australian territory. Instead the vessel was obliged to take the asylum seekers to Nauru. The opinion polls which had predicted a clear victory for the opposition

15 Policies such as the Temporary Protection Visa were initially rejected by all mainstream political parties in 1998 when they were suggested by an ultra-conservative parliamentarian, Pauline Hanson.
Labor party prior to the Tampa incident were quickly replaced by strong support for the governing Liberal party (Green, 2004).

**International human rights obligations**

The dominant discourse about asylum seekers in Australia is characterised by a lack of awareness of global and historical factors. The general public is unaware of Australia’s international obligations under various human rights treaties. This may be part of a general lack of engagement by the public on current affairs. As noted by Soucek (1995), there is a “widely spread perception that Australia has a strong anti-intellectual and pre-eminently utilitarian tradition” (p. 146).

Human rights discourse in Australia has suffered various blows over the last decade as the Liberal government has deliberately and loudly retreated from its international obligations. Examples of this include threatening to bar the UN Human Rights Committees from visiting the country (Kirk & Archive, 2000) and refusing to sign the Optional Protocols on various UN treaties thereby excluding individual complaints against Australia. As Dianne Otto (2001) writes:

> The evidence is mounting that the present Australian government [still in power in 2005] has retreated from the infamous ‘reluctance’ of its predecessors to domestically implement Australia’s international human rights obligations, to the even less defensible position of Australian ‘exceptionalism’ with respect to these obligations. This new low point in Australia’s commitment to the international human rights system was confirmed by the Joint Ministerial Statement of August 2000, which announced that the government’s future cooperation with the human rights treaty committees would be ‘strategic’, in the sense of maximising positive outcomes for Australia, and contingent upon unspecified reform of the system. (p. 81)

This closing down of human rights discourse serves to support the dominant discourse about asylum seekers. Australia’s policies towards asylum seekers, such as mandatory detention, short term protection offered by TPVs, and the Pacific Solution have been criticised (Lubbers, 2001) and declared to be in breach of various international human rights conventions by the UNHCR (Bhagwati, 2002), Australia’s Human Rights Commissioner (Human Rights Commissioner, 2001) and various international NGOs (Amnesty International (Australia), 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2003). The numerous reports declaring Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers to be
Asylum seekers in Australia: A social justice issue

in breach of human rights treaties are able to be discounted because the language of human rights has been marginalised. This has occurred in a period in which our ranking in freedom of the press – a good indicator of a country’s human rights record – plummeted from 12th in the world in 2002 to 50th in 2003 (“Australia’s Media Freedom Drops,” 2003). It was at 41st in the world in 2004 (“Index slams Australia's media freedom,” 2004).

Sovereignty

The dominant discourse effectively neutralised and marginalised human rights principles. The notion of sovereignty was one strategy employed to this end. In relation to international human rights obligations, sovereignty was used to position bodies such as the UN, and human rights treaties, as improperly interfering in domestic affairs. The policies, practices and laws relating to asylum seekers were represented as issues internal to Australia. Human rights were set up in opposition to the right of Australians and the government to control such internal affairs. The importance of the notion of sovereignty was well exemplified by the giant polling booth posters employed by the Liberal Party during the 2001 election stating: “We decide who comes into this country” (Lawson, 2002). This was an abbreviation of the party’s election slogan: “We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come” (S. Smith, 2004). The dominant discourse reassures people afraid of asylum seekers that the nation’s sovereignty, borders and way of life are all being protected by mandatory detention.

This discourse is in stark contrast to the way that issues of sovereignty are silenced when promoting economic globalisation. The general political and industry position is that Australia obtains great economic benefits by participating aggressively in globalised markets. Australia is a strong supporter of the World Trade Organisation, willingly becoming a signatory to WTO agreements and subjecting itself to the WTO dispute settlement system. Australian governments, with little comment from the population, accept this as a legitimate limitation to Australian sovereignty. The WTO is an international organisation that has power and authority to intervene in matters that effect Australia domestically. It is clear that in the economic sphere Australia accepts that there are limits to its sovereignty. Sovereignty is thus not an absolute value but negotiated and contested. At the same time as Australia argues for the
destruction of barriers to globalised trade and accepts limits on sovereignty in economic matters, more effective barriers to the globalised movement of people are erected, using sovereignty as part of the argument to support those barriers.

Habermas sees late capitalism as being driven by a “relentless quest for a controlled environment” (cited in Symes & Preston, 1997, p. 22). Control is an issue close to the government’s heart and very relevant to the context of asylum seekers in Australia. The government and supporters use controlling language in significant ways: control of borders (‘border protection’); control of who can enter Australia; control of the image of a good Australian (‘I don’t want people here who throw their children overboard’);\(^{16}\) and physical control of those people who stray outside the correct and acceptable way to behave (those who ‘jump the queue’\(^{17}\) instead of standing in it) by locking them in detention centres.

**Economic issues**

In line with global economic trends, Australian governments (including both major political parties) over the past two decades have adopted neo-liberal economic policies, known in Australia as economic rationalism. Even though the Australian economy has been strong over the last 20 years, the individual security of many workers has decreased as the workforce has undergone structural adjustment. The casualisation of many jobs and the suppression of wage growth, while good for national economic statistics, are not good for the individual worker. Many people feel significantly less financially secure in the 2000s than twenty years ago (Catholic Commission for Justice Development and Peace, 2002). There is a growing distance between the wealthiest Australians and the poorest Australians (Robinson, 2003). Adding to the changes in employment are the ever-increasing demands on us as consumers to buy more and search for fulfilment through the acquisition of more material goods. This feeds into growing financial dissatisfaction. This general feeling of dissatisfaction among the community is supported by recent research:

---

\(^{16}\) The Children Overboard Affair is explained on p. 35.

\(^{17}\) The notion of ‘queue jumper’ is explored further on p. 35.
In late 2002 a Newspoll survey asked a representative sample of Australian adults whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

- You cannot afford to buy everything you really need.
- You spend nearly all of your money on the basic necessities of life.

Sixty-two per cent of Australians believe they cannot afford to buy everything they really need... When we consider that Australia is one of the world's richest countries ... it is remarkable that so many people feel their incomes are inadequate. It is even more remarkable that almost half (46 per cent) of the richest 20 per cent of households in Australia – the richest people in one of the world's richest countries – say that they cannot afford to buy everything they really need. (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005, p. 59)

In a climate of financial dissatisfaction and insecurity there are many historical examples of the need for hegemonic forces to find a scapegoat. The fear that asylum seekers would take ‘our’ jobs was linked to a more generalised fear about migration per se causing job loss for Australian citizens. An additional economic concern about asylum seekers was that they were a burden to society through the Australian social security system. The fact that the government placed limitations on the ability of an asylum seeker, once recognised as a refugee, to access the social security system was not commonly known.

**Language and culture**

The language used about asylum seekers is indicative of the importance of language in creating and maintaining hegemonic positions. The various fears of the Australian public were accessed through a series of images of asylum seekers evoked by powerful language. The political debate, the media commentary and the discussions ‘around the kitchen table’ use language in complex ways. That the Australian public has permitted rather than rejected the increasing dehumanisation of asylum seekers makes it clear that such portrayal was responding to their fears. Considering the semiotics of asylum seekers in Australia, Don McMaster (2003) writes:

In this instance the ‘significant other’ is marked out with the ‘bad sign’, to be feared and excluded. In Australia bad signs have been constructed in rhetoric such as ‘yellow peril’, ‘the hordes from the north’; and the terms ‘boat people’, ‘illegal immigrants’ and now ‘border protection’ signifies invasion and threat. This tool of social control and social construction has been, and is still, used to discriminate against specific groups of people. (¶31)
A dehumanised image of asylum seekers has been created by language and reinforced by visual images shown by the media. Common descriptors of asylum seekers included such terms as queue jumpers, terrorists, rag heads, and illegals. There is an intentional desire to maintain what Baudrillard calls “spectacularity and surfaceness” within the dominant discourse (cited in Symes & Preston, 1997, p. 25). The signifier of asylum seekers as ‘illegals’ is unrelated to people in need.  

Dehumanising language allows the population to pretend that there is no obligation to treat asylum seekers as human beings. This process is necessary if Australia, which prides itself on equality and fairness, wishes to violate the human rights of others. Using examples, such as the atrocities committed by the Serbs on the Muslims in Bosnia and by the Nazis on the Jews in Europe, Rorty (1998b) argues that even in democratic countries, people whose human rights are not protected, are spoken of in ways which deny that they are human. This allows good people to do nothing or much worse.

The mandatory detention of asylum seekers is also the subject of deceptive language. The asylum seeker who arrives in Australia without a valid visa is placed in an ‘Immigration Reception and Processing Centre,’ a term that Julian Burnside QC\(^{19}\) states is “false in every detail” (2002, p. 2). He explains why:

> They are locked up without trial, for an indefinite period – typically months or years – in desert camps which are as remote from civilisation as it is possible to be. They are held behind razor wire, they are addressed not by name but by number, and they slowly sink into hopelessness and despair. (p. 2)

The dissemination of dehumanising images comes about largely through the mass media. The media has descended into nearly every nook and cranny of our subjectivities – at times with no resistance. This relationship with media images leaves us very impressionable to the slogans, catch cries and doublespeak which constitute the dominant discourse. As a result we become infantilised (Chow, 1998).

With a population of “thoroughly mediatized feelings and perceptions” (Chow, 1998, 18 In June 2004 after numerous complaints, the Australian Press Council issued Reporting Guideline No. 262 in which it stated that the press should be careful in the use of unqualified terms such as ‘illegal refugee’ and ‘illegal asylum seeker’ as “they are often inaccurate and may be derogatory.”

\(^{19}\) QC – Queens Counsel; a senior barrister.
Asylum seekers in Australia: A social justice issue

p. 26), the issue of whether asylum seekers pose the various threats which are suggested is largely irrelevant. In highlighting the role of the media, the 2001 Refugee Conference – Where to from here? drew the following conclusions:

The media plays a large part in forming public opinion and reflecting government debate. It was also noted that there was often disjuncture between legal definitions of refugees versus local perceptions as portrayed and propagated by the media. It was recognised that the media needs to be held accountable for the long-term impact on the community of their reporting. This includes results from incidences of negative stereotyping, selective reporting of issues, the current discourse of nationhood and the concepts of race and gender within this discourse. (Refugee Conference, 2001, p. 33)

It is interesting to note that in addition to the media, the government has employed schools, one of the major cultural institutions to disseminate its message in relation to refugees and asylum seekers. In May 2004, a publication, *Australia says yes to Refugees*, was released into schools. The kit criticised asylum seekers for pursuing their legal rights and cast them in the role of taking advantage of the system. It failed to mention the Pacific Solution or criticism of the policy of mandatory detention (“Refugee Schools Booklet ‘Propaganda’,” 2004).

‘Our way of life’

The much discussed but poorly defined Australian ‘way of life’ (Whitlock & Carter, 2001) is a concept filled with longing for an idealised existence. It is a concept effectively used to defend the status quo (White, 2001, p. 43). Although the Australian ‘way of life’ may be difficult to define with precision, we know it when we see it and even more surely we know what it is not. Racially it is very clearly White, even British. Economically it has been characterised by a relatively small distance between the rich and poor, until the last 20 years or so. Religiously it is notionally Christian but with strong secular attributes.

The discourses in which the Australian ‘way of life’ are called on show how ideas of nation and national culture have an unpleasant intersection with racism. Traditional views of ‘our way of life’ require the maintenance of the purity of the national culture. Impurity is feared in its various guises – racial impurity, linguistic impurity,
religious impurity, impurity of beliefs and values, and impurity of practices. These various guises can be reduced to the racial. The largely Muslim asylum seekers of the 1990s were positioned by the dominant discourse as presenting a threat to ‘our way of life’, a threat to our culture and traditions. In an analysis of letters to the editor at the time of the Tampa incident, Jane Mummery and Debbie Rodan (2003) identified that the letters relying on ‘our way of life’ reject the presence of asylum seekers in Australia. Asylum seekers were seen as not being ‘civilised’ and as having different and lesser values. The identification of asylum seekers as not following regulations and thus cheating the system was an important element of this. Those who argued against asylum seekers based on ‘our way of life’ were also rejecting multiculturalism as destabilising and divisive. As Mummery and Rodan (2003) argue, “What consistently emerges is the belief that Muslims/Islam cannot be assimilated in Australian culture because of a clash of values; ultimately, ‘they’ (all Muslims and the Islamic religion) are considered too ‘other’ ” (p. 437).

**Fear of cultural differences**

Identifying a fear of loss of ‘our way of life’ is to display the face of the fear in its more positive light. After all, traditions and values are important cementing agents in any culture. Another way of seeing this fear is as a fear of loss of dominance – of the potential loss of being part of the dominant culture should other ways of life challenge that position. Asylum seekers have been portrayed as wanting to take over our culture. And given their difference in terms of language, religion, culture and physical appearance, this challenge can be seen to threaten the dominant position of White Australian culture.

Historically Australia has “drawn the boundaries of the nation in an exclusionary way” and through the tool of racist policies such as the White Australia Policy, created an “imagined community” (Castles, Kalantzis, Cope, & Morrissey, 2001, p. 136). Fazal Rizvi (1993) links the way that racism is practiced and conceived in Australia as still utilising ideas of ‘nation’:

> “New” racism . . . seeks to present a normative image of a nation characterized by a requirement that all those who reside in Australia commit themselves to a uniform set of social and cultural values. It binds ideas of national culture and social cohesion into an homogenous form, an ethnic essence, in which minority cultures are often regarded as alien.
Marginalization and exclusion are thus not so much legal as ideological, informed by a theory of human nature that presumes that human beings have a deep-seated desire to prefer the company of “their own kind” and that it’s “only common sense” for people to be hostile to other groups and thus protect their territory from “aliens”. (p. 130)

The strength of the rejection of, and the typification of, all asylum seekers as people alien to the Australian way of life, crystallised during what became known as the Children Overboard Affair. Although they were later shown to be false allegations (Select Committee for an Inquiry into a Certain Maritime Incident, 2002), it was stated by members of the government that asylum seekers had thrown their children into the ocean from their boat in order to force the Australian Navy to take them onboard. It unleashed expressions of the Otherness of asylum seekers, from a wide variety of Australians – from the Prime Minister to the average talk back radio caller. In particular, the statements of the Prime Minister came to typify the dominant discourse at the time:

On October 8, 2001, the Herald Sun journalist John Hamilton reported the Prime Minister as saying: “I don’t want people like that in Australia. Genuine refugees don’t do that; they hang on to their children.” The following day he told Jon Faine on Radio 702: “I certainly don’t want people of that type in Australia. I really don’t.” (Henderson, 2004)

**Fear of criminality**

A significant aspect of the Otherness of asylum seekers for Australians is the suggestion that they don’t ‘play by the rules’ and that they engage in unlawful behaviour. This is an interesting flight to conventionality and legality from the fondly idealised image of the larrikin Australian always ready to challenge authority. The allegations of ‘queue jumping’ conjure feelings of unearned advantage. Australians’ belief in fair play is assaulted by the suggestion that asylum seekers take advantage of our compassion and displace perhaps more deserving refugees by not coming through the proper channels. This argument ignores the fact that Australia did not have an Embassy in Afghanistan nor Iraq during the period that the latest refugees were fleeing. Add to this the use of the term ‘illegals’ to describe asylum seekers brought to Australia by ‘people smugglers’ and the association with criminality is understood. Another basis is added to the overall fear towards asylum seekers.
A dichotomy of good refugees and bad refugees, or genuine refugees and non-genuine refugees has also been created by the language of the dominant discourse. Good refugees: stay in a queue; with their documents; in another country. Bad refugees: get on a boat; pay for their passage; don’t have papers; and arrive in Australia without permission. This dichotomy of good and bad refugees is very real in the minds of many Australians and determines their attitude to asylum seekers. Australia will choose to accept some good refugees because it is the right thing to do. Importantly, the population feels in control of the process. As the argument goes, it is right to reject the bad refugees who seek to come to Australia as asylum seekers because they are undeserving.

**Fear of terrorism**

The dominant discourse about asylum seekers has not needed to work hard to engender fear around asylum seekers since September 11, 2001. The new fear felt in the West from the threat of Islamic extremists coincided with a wave of asylum seekers from Islamic countries. At that time the vast majority of asylum seekers coming to Australia were Muslims. It is a relatively simple equation that takes us from asylum seeker to Muslim to terrorist. Of course it requires us to ignore that the asylum seekers were the victims of regimes that have been associated with Islamic fundamentalism or extreme oppression, principally the Taliban in Afghanistan and Sadam Hussein in Iraq. Maintaining this ignorance has not been a problem and the term asylum seeker was quickly conflated with terrorist within the dominant discourse. Some politicians, such as the then Parliamentary Secretary Peter Slipper, have explicitly asserted a connection: “There is an undeniable linkage between illegals and terrorists” (Henderson, 2002). The head of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) publicly rejected this link:

> The Director-General of ASIO, Dennis Richardson, said he had “not seen evidence” that foreign governments or entities were attempting to slip potential terrorists into Australia as refugees or asylum seekers. He raised a pertinent query: “Why would people use the asylum-seeker stream when they know they will be subject to mandatory detention?” (Henderson, 2002, p. Opinion 15)

Later, the head of ASIO advised the Senate that of nearly 6 000 individual checks on asylum seekers over a two year period, not one was found to be a risk (Catholic
Asylum seekers in Australia: A social justice issue

Commission for Justice Development and Peace, 2002). The success of the dominant discourse is shown with the inversion of reality that has occurred. Asylum seekers changed from being victims in the global system into aggressors invading our nation. Positioned as aggressors, asylum seekers raised a nationalistic response – one usually associated with expelling a foreign force. Notwithstanding the absence of serious threat or domination, recourse to this type of nationalism continues to be part of the discourse around asylum seekers.

**Silence/invisibility**

The voices of asylum seekers have been silenced through a variety of technologies. The policy of mandatory detention makes contact between them and Australians very difficult. In addition, journalists are not permitted to interview asylum seekers in detention centres (PEN, 2003; Australian Press Council, 2001) on the basis that the government is protecting the privacy of the asylum seekers (DIMIA, 2004c). It is even made difficult for the legal representatives of asylum seekers to visit them (Kingston, 2002). Despite the difficulties of properly reporting on the policies and implementation of those policies in relation to asylum seekers, the media has been criticised for not fully reporting the situation. The Refugee Conference held at the University of New South Wales in late 2001 included in its final report that “The media are not fulfilling their obligations to the refugees, especially the children refugees, by not reporting what is going on” (Refugee Conference, 2001, p. 33).

In line with historical discourses about other marginalised groups such as children, slaves, women, and people with disabilities, the voices of those most affected by the discourse – the asylum seekers – have been silenced. As a result, the dominant discourse excludes sources of information which would enable a more complete and nuanced understanding of the issue. The government policies that cause this silencing have been challenged as asylum seekers and others concerned with the implications of the policies struggle to find their collective and individual voices. The extremely limited opportunities for asylum seekers to express their voice have contributed to the, at times, violent and excessive ways in which a small number of asylum seekers have protested their treatment. It is interesting to note that the government has not sought to protect the privacy of protesting asylum seekers,
allowing photos of riots at detention centres and of asylum seekers sewing their lips to be taken and published. These extreme expressions of despair highlight how the ability of asylum seekers to have a voice remains limited. What can be said, how it can be said, and how it is positioned when asylum seekers find a voice remains very restricted and largely determined by the government and media.

Changes in the dominant discourse

The many strands of the dominant discourse cause the public to accept as commonsense the harsh treatment of asylum seekers. This was particularly strong at the time of the Tampa crisis and the federal election in late 2001. The public support for a harsh response has waned somewhat since then. In September 2001 there was overwhelming (68%) support for the government’s policy of putting boats carrying asylum seekers back to sea, with 65% of the population believing that the government was doing a good job “handling the refugee problem” (Roy Morgan Research Centre, 2001). At the time my fieldwork was taking place in August and September of 2003, community views were beginning to soften. Approximately three years after the Tampa incident, in August 2004, 63% of the population supported the idea that at least some boats in certain circumstances should be allowed to enter Australia (Newspoll Market Research, 2004). However, in research carried out by the Australian National University and Queensland Institute of Technology, “54.4 per cent of those polled either strongly agreed or agreed with the Government’s policy of turning away boats” (Dodson, 2005). On the major policy of mandatory detention there is no clear position from the public. As shown in polling carried out at the beginning of 2005:

Attitudes to mandatory detention of asylum seekers are evenly divided – 44 per cent think the system is “about right”, 42 per cent think it too harsh. This issue, though, is linked to an important development in accountable government, with Coalition backbenchers speaking out against an inhumane and indefensible system. (“Refusing to Say Sorry,” 2005)

The editorial above highlights how the discourse about any issue is the result of the interplay of a wide variety of factors. One important factor has been the

20 The changes in public opinion have been followed by minor amendments to asylum seeker policy. Community style detention is now being used for some asylum seekers and some of the restrictions for people on TPVs have been removed (DIMIA, 2004b).
Asylum seekers in Australia: A social justice issue

multiplication over the last five years of groups challenging the dominant discourse. Groups such as *Rural Australians for Refugees, A Just Australia, Children Out of Detention*, and *We Are All Boat People* have worked hard to present a different perspective on the issue of asylum seekers. Some elements of the media also began to present more humanised images of asylum seekers. They challenged the stridently anti-asylum seeker rhetoric of the major political parties. Looking at the dominant discourse as reflecting a dominant ideology, the words of Terry Eagleton (1991) are worth keeping in mind:

How unified ideologies actually are, however, is a matter of debate. If they strive to homogenize, they are rarely homogeneous. Ideologies are usually internally complex, differentiated formations, with conflicts between their various elements which need to be continually renegotiated and resolved. What we call a dominant ideology is typically that of a dominant social bloc, made up of classes and factions whose interests are not always at one; and these compromises and divisions will be reflected in the ideology itself. . . Oppositional ideologies, similarly, usually reflect a provisional alliance of diverse radical forces. (p. 45)

**Reflection**

The interconnectedness of the global, national and local context is apparent when examining the dominant discourse about asylum seekers. The global economic system (neo-liberal capitalism) and the global political situation (fear of terrorism) have contributed significantly to a rejection of asylum seekers. This has led to the silencing and invisibility of the very people most affected by the discourse, namely asylum seekers. The national political process has ensured this outcome, aided by cultural institutions such as the mass media. The spaces available at the beginning of the third millennium from which to challenge discourses that privilege the powerful over the powerless have narrowed. The particular confluence of economic, social, political and historical factors makes the expression of alternative discourses more suspect and thus more difficult. As Henry Giroux (2004) has remarked, educators working in such a situation need to find new approaches:

Educators and other cultural workers need a new political and pedagogical language for addressing the changing contexts and issues facing a world in which capital draws upon an unprecedented convergence of resources – cultural, political, economic, scientific, military, and technological – to exercise powerful and diverse forms of hegemony. (p. 32)
The following chapters explore my attempt to create such a political and pedagogical language to address the dominant discourse about asylum seekers in Australia in 2003. Although the task was full of uncertainty and contradiction, it was an attempt to interrupt oppressive discourses, make them more transparent and ultimately to challenge socially unjust systems.
Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw how the dominant discourse about asylum seekers was characterised by fear, rejection, approval of punishing regimes and deliberate misrepresentation. For me, the key question was how to build an educational project that would problematise this dominant discourse and create a spirit of critical sensibility? In searching for answers, this chapter examines the theoretical traditions that influenced the resulting transformative pedagogy. As with the crossing of national borders by asylum seekers, I have crossed theoretical borders to create an educational response.

One of my aims was to theorise and enact a situated pedagogy. I was interested to see how insights from the popular education movement from Latin America and critical pedagogies from the West could join to create a transformative pedagogy. The theoretical framework that emerges is most relevant to situations where an educator from the dominant cultural group of a Western society works with participants largely from the same group to tackle contentious social justice issues. I raise the context in which the pedagogy takes place at this early stage because context significantly affects the limitations and possibilities of any pedagogy. As Giroux (2004) notes:

> Pedagogy can never be treated as a fixed set of principles and practices that can be applied indiscriminately across a variety of pedagogical sites. Pedagogy must always be contextually defined, allowing it to respond specifically to the conditions, formations, and problems that arise in various sites in which education takes place. (p. 37)

In analysing the theoretical foundation of this project, this chapter shows the wide variety of influences on my work. Some are academic, others experiential. Even writers with whom I disagree have been important in this ongoing theoretical development.
Theory exists in the detail, in the big picture and in the places in between

Critical pedagogy, critical postmodern pedagogies, and even some feminist pedagogies tend to emphasise sociological issues, and big picture, abstract theory. These theories are largely concerned with visions of, and the construction of a just society, impediments to achieving such a society, and the importance of power relations. As with critical theory, critical pedagogy usually “provides a framework of principles around which action can be discussed,” (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 3) rather than providing a detailed exploration of the pedagogy itself. In this research I am interested in exploring the intersection of big picture theory with a more focused theoretical application. Jennifer Gore (1992) refers to these two types of theory as two “systems of thought.” She identifies Giroux and McLaren in the “strand [that] emphasizes the articulation of a broad (and shifting) social and educational vision”, and Freire and Shor in the other strand that “shows greater concern for instructional practices in specific contexts” (p. 55).

Some writers such as Graham Hall (n.d.) have critiqued the broad theory of critical pedagogy on the basis that it does not provide sufficient guidance by way of illustrative case studies to show what it means in practice. Other critiques argue it does not go beyond “theoretical pronouncement about emancipatory potential,” and there is nothing to show that in fact such pronouncements have ever “been liberatory for particular people or groups” (Gore, 1992, p. 60). As Donald (1992) says, its “inflated promises about . . . the development of society are endlessly broken in practice” (p. ix). The work of some feminist and post-structural pedagogies critique the epic character of critical pedagogy as holding little emancipatory promise given the emphasis on oppression and possibilities as abstractions rather than on specific strategies for educators (Briton, 1996, p. 95).

Big picture critical pedagogy can be de-motivating for those trying to implement it, given the obvious practical difficulties in achieving its emancipatory vision. Notwithstanding these criticisms, such broad theory remains useful in highlighting the social context, the major theoretical shifts and provides a backdrop to my transformative pedagogy. Broad sociological theory by its nature is inherently
difficult to research. The call for “more historical or empirical inquiry . . . in particular sites and discourses” (Gair, 1998) seems to be a call to those of us engaged in working on more focused theory building. This is one of the gaps in the current literature that this research seeks to address.

**Sources of theory**

In reflecting on the theoretical framework that underpins my transformative pedagogy, the dialectical nature of practice and theory is highlighted. It is an explicit part of the tradition of popular education and critical pedagogy that theory is derived from the interaction of action and reflection. That is, theory remains in constant communication with practice. Given the importance of practice in theory building, to have a chapter devoted solely to a review of the literature – the written theory – would be inconsistent with this tradition. Equally as important as the published writings of academics who have struggled with some of the same issues that confront me, is the embodied or practised theory that I have absorbed less consciously through educational practice. Of major importance has been the theory and practice I absorbed while working in Guatemala with popular educators. Theorising on that experience to improve my practice as an educator is a major motive for this research and a mark of the respect that I have for those educators. In undertaking this reflection I am acting on the principle that as a critical educator I need to make my theoretical framework as transparent as possible (Carr & Kemmis, 2005).

There is a tendency to present theoretical positions in deceptively neat categories, in contrast to the messy, overlapping and evolving nature of theory. Who and what falls into each category is debatable, as illustrated in Alistair Pennycock’s (2001) question as to whether Freirean pedagogy is a part of critical pedagogy or not (p. 131). In my own work, as I engage with the critique of others, I anticipate an ongoing revision and even rejection of some aspects of my theorising and practice. In rendering my practice more consistent with my values and its theoretical underpinnings, I seek a constructive engagement with theory. Figure 3.1 shows the major theoretical influences on my transformative pedagogy.

---

21 Carlos Enrique Mendez, Carlos Aldana, Cecilia Alfaro and Daniel Saquec.
Chapter 3

Figure 3.1 The major theoretical influences on my transformative pedagogy

Critical theory, popular education and critical pedagogy have developed in dialogue with each other. They share an understanding of the political nature of all theory and educational processes, and a critique of unfair social and economic systems. In line with critical theory, my practice is committed to identifying and changing oppressive
Towards a transformative pedagogy

systems (Brookfield, 2001). The critical theorists of the Frankfurt School took Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony and developed the practice of ideology critique (How, 2003). This is an important component of my transformative pedagogy, along with critical theory’s insistence on considering the economic dimension of any social problem. While acknowledging the limitations of critical theory’s modernist tendencies and over-emphasis on class (Brookfield, 2004), more recent efforts of feminist (Luke & Gore, 1992), postmodernist (Usher, 1994), cultural studies (S. Hall & du Gay, 1996) and post-colonial (McLaren, 1997) theorising have helped modify earlier deterministic approaches.

In Latin America I was inspired by popular education based on the work of Freire.\(^{22}\) While working in Guatemala with skilled popular educators, I came to appreciate that education can be used to challenge and transform oppressive social systems. Freire (1987) was inspired by his love of people and the world, his hope for justice and his commitment to freedom. Freire (1998) is an important voice in arguing for a coherence between practice, content and objectives of the educational process. The emphasis on coherence is an important reminder that we should not allow the difficulty of the task to justify an educational process characterised by intolerance, hierarchy and exclusion.

By calling on the foundational work of Freire, critical pedagogy applies critical theory in the area of education. Critical pedagogy is a response by Western (for the most part) theorists committed to social change who seek to implement that commitment through education (Peter McLaren, 1989; Brookfield, 1995; Shor, 1992). In a welcome addition to the class-based analysis of oppression that characterised early critical theory and Freirean pedagogy, critical pedagogy introduces gender, race and other forms of social difference. However, this broader-based analysis of oppression has been accompanied by a general dilution of the explicit economic and political nature of the critique. Working within a strongly capitalist context, particularly in the United States, critical theory’s and Freire’s explicit Marxist critique, with its examination of the social inequities produced through capitalism, tends to be lost (McLaren, Martin, Farahmandpur, & Jaramillo, 2004). Freire named his pedagogy *educación cultural popular* in his 1969 publication *La Educación como Práctica de la Libertad* (Freire, 1997).

\(^{22}\) Freire named his pedagogy *educación cultural popular* in his 1969 publication *La Educación como Práctica de la Libertad* (Freire, 1997).
An economic critique remains vital to social justice issues, including the situation of asylum seekers.

From the traditions of critical pedagogy and popular education, I incorporated certain principles and values. In addition to making transparent hidden injustices and hegemonic practices (Lather, 1991), I sought to integrate a praxis that was both personal and collective, combining social change action with reflection on that action (Kincheloe, 1991). Such a praxis is based on a belief in human agency and acknowledges that while we are constructed by our world, we are also constructors of the world (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Inbuilt into the reflection is a “reciprocal reflexivity and critique, both of which guard against . . . imposition and reification on the part of the researcher” (Lather, 1991, p. 59).

The influence of more recent theories such as feminism, postmodernism, cultural studies and post-colonialism has significantly benefited the pedagogy of popular education and critical pedagogy, helping them to incorporate the insights of more complex and different ways of understanding the world. I agree with Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux (1991) that we need to combine important theoretical insights of postmodernism with “strategic modernist elements that contribute to a politics of radical democracy” (p. 81). Although the different theoretical traditions approach the central issues of a social change pedagogy in different ways, they all have contributed to my transformative pedagogy. They contribute analysis and attention to situatedness, hegemony, ideology critique, conscientisation, social difference, power, agency, privilege and freedom.

**Context and situatedness**

My experience in social change education in a variety of contexts has convinced me of the importance of both the macro and the micro context within which an educational process is situated. The particular context is a factor that both limits the possibilities of the pedagogy and creates certain opportunities. At a macro level, factors such as the global economic system, the (multi)cultural nature of the society, patriarchy and the level of economic development of the society, influence the subject positions of the participants and how they will respond to a social change
Towards a transformative pedagogy

programme. At a more micro level, the positionality (social, economic, racial, gender and other characteristics) of the participants influences how they will experience the pedagogy.

In applying the theory and practice of a pedagogy developed in one context to a different context, care must be taken (Brookfield, 2004). The difficulties that can arise are most apparent in relation to the application of early Freirean pedagogy (1987) to situations in which an educator seeks to implement her or his critical approach with a group that may not share the same political goals. Likewise, using Freirean pedagogy within the formal education system of an economically developed country brings with it certain challenges not relevant to the context in which Freire’s pedagogy was developed. As critiqued by Gary Cale and Conni Huber (2001), an unthinking appropriation of Freirean pedagogy does not make sense in a Western context:

Progressive and critical adult educators generally advocate for individual and social empowerment (Freire, 1970; Heaney, 1996) democratic teaching practices (Brookfield, 1999) and inclusive and safe environments (Tisdell, 1995). Many adult educators in this camp believe in starting where the adults are (Horton, 1998) giving all adult learners shared voice (Sheared, 1994) and avoiding coercive environments (Elshtain, 1976). Yet each of these authors seem to assume, more or less, a homogenous group of oppressed people, a situation we do not usually encounter in higher education. We, as often as not, teach the oppressor not the oppressed. (html document)

The emphasis on class and the role of the popular sectors so central to popular education has not been the focus in the West. The importance of these factors to popular education comes out clearly in Robert Austin’s (1999) work where he brings together several Latin American voices describing popular education:

Popular education in the Latin American context can be understood as an educative practice located within a wider process that intends that the popular sectors constitute themselves as organized and conscious political subjects (García-Huidobro, 1983:2) . . . In this sense, it is a Gramscian construction (Gramsci, 1992: 82-89) . . . CEAAL’s current president defines popular education (Nuñez, 1992:55) as a process of education and training carried out politically from a class perspective that forms part of or is articulated with action organized by the people, by the masses, in order to achieve the objective of constructing a new society in accord with their interests . . . [It] is a continuous and systematic process implying moments of reflection on and study of the group and organization . . . It is theory emerging from practice, not theory about practice.  (p. 43-4)
Chapter 3

Even with the application of popular education in Guatemala, my Guatemalan colleagues were mindful of the local context and other theoretical ideas were often incorporated to complement the Freirean approach. They valued the informal learning that participants brought from Indigenous culture – in particular the cosmology of the Mayan peoples, Guatemala’s indigenous majority. For example, the Mayan theory of the place of humans in the natural world\(^{23}\) offers a fundamentally different way of approaching environmental problems to the technological solutions sought by the West. Rather than seeing human beings as the chosen leaders of the world with an entitlement to exploit, human beings are charged with the responsibility of not interrupting the rhythms of the natural world. Another Indigenous understanding that influenced the work we did was the Mayan theory of time. Unlike the Western view of time as linear, the Mayan view is that time is cyclical. Incorporation of such an understanding into educational processes helps to challenge the Enlightenment faith in progress that has contributed to the rapacious development since the industrial revolution.

My experience in Guatemala, where I clearly had so much to learn, impressed on me the importance of an approach that recognises that both educators and students would be learning in a dialectical process. In many of the communities where we worked – community leaders and even the literacy workers we trained had not finished primary school. Nonetheless, there was a profound respect for their knowledge and experience – a respect that was translated into an explicit acknowledgement of the importance of their informal learning. We recognised the daily struggle that most Guatemalans experienced and the innovative ways in which they strove to retain their dignity.

An example of how context affects the political impact of a pedagogical approach can be seen from the resulting dynamic of incorporating (or not) the life experiences of students. Popular education uses the existing knowledge and life experiences of the participants as the point of departure of the educational process (Freire, 2002, p. 69; Mayo, 1999, p. 147). When working with oppressed groups, affirming these experiences \textit{in itself} challenges the status quo and is part of a process of ideology.

\(^{23}\) In the Mayan cosmology, human beings are understood to have been created from corn.
critique. It is counter-hegemonic because the students in such a context are from marginalised groups. They will have stories which challenge, and experiences that contradict, the dominant discourse.24 Their lived experience is inconsistent with the hegemonic voice. This is not the case where participants come from the dominant social group. Where this is the case, the unreflective adoption of a pedagogy that affirms participant experience can reinforce oppressive discourses (Cale & Huber, 2001).

**Hegemonic discourses and ideology critique**

In creating a pedagogy that questioned the dominant discourse about asylum seekers, I was endeavouring to challenge hegemonic forces and engage in ideology critique. Hegemony, as developed by Gramsci (1971), is one of the ways in which the dominant group maintains its power (Mayo, 1999). In addition to oppressive exercises of power, the dominant group obtains the consent of the population through ideological processes, or ‘hegemony.’ Traditionally applied in relation to economic oppression, the notion of hegemony can be transferred to social exclusion based on other forms of social difference (Wood, 1998).

Ideology is used in relation to hegemony in the sense of “collective symbolic self-expression” through ideas and beliefs that not only unify social formations “in ways convenient for its rulers,” but do so through “distortion and dissimulation” (Eagleton, 1991, pp. 29-30). The ideological processes which work to create an oppressive regime in relation to asylum seekers were set out in Chapter 2. All of us involved in the programme were necessarily part of the ideological struggle that positions asylum seekers as the Other.

Understanding the constructed nature of discourse and the role of ideology in maintaining the status quo is a first step in challenging hegemonic discourses. Through their ability to construe oppressive relations as part of the commonsense or taken-for-granted basis of society, hegemonic practices seek to keep us all acquiescent. Raising awareness of these practices precedes social change. As Rorty

---

24 They remain subjects formed within oppressive discursive practices, and as such will reflect to some extent that discourse (Luke, 1992, p. 37).
(1998a) rather more poetically puts it:

Only if somebody has a dream, and a voice to describe that dream, does what
looked like nature begin to look like culture, what looked like fate begin to
look like a moral abomination. For until then only the language of the
oppressor is available, and most oppressors have had the wit to teach the
oppressed a language in which the oppressed will sound crazy – even to
themselves – if they describe themselves as oppressed. (p. 203)

There are a number of ways that critical sociologists and educators have approached
the process of unmasking the interests and consequences of dominant ideologies. The
notion of ideology critique, common to critical theory and critical pedagogy, as
explained by Brookfield (2001) is especially helpful:

A critical theory of adult learning should have at its core an understanding of
how adults learn to recognize the predominance of ideology in their everyday
thoughts and actions and in the institutions of civil society. It should also
illuminate how adults learn to challenge ideology that serves the interests of
the few against the well-being of the many . . . It studies the systems and
forces that shape adults’ lives and oppose adults’ attempts to challenge
ideology, recognize hegemony, and unmask power. Such a theory must
therefore recognize its explicitly political character. (p. 20-1)

Although many critical pedagogues retain the idea of ideology critique as the
cornerstone of their practice, they are moving away from the modernist notion that
behind the smoke screen created by hegemonic forces lies ‘the truth’ that can only be
revealed once false consciousness is exposed. Postmodernists and social
constructionists challenge the notion of any objective reality existing under the layers
of ideological beliefs. Although it is easy to be sympathetic with the postmodernist
rejection of such an objective reality and see it as a necessary brake on the overly
dualistic approach of critical theory, unquestioning acceptance of the postmodern
position may be equally unhelpful to a transformative political project. In the case of
the popular education approach we practised in Guatemala, the technique of
conocimiento de la realidad (‘understanding reality’) was the method we adopted to
look behind the images and information generally available. A similar approach was
shared by some members of the collaborative team in the current research project.
These members felt strongly that a major cause of exclusionary attitudes towards
asylum seekers was that most people were not aware of the ‘real’ situation relevant
Towards a transformative pedagogy to asylum seekers in Australia due to the misinformation contained within the dominant discourse.

The process of ideology critique and of exposing hegemony does not lead automatically to an engaged population that acts for social change. The very unmasking of ideological processes, institutions and structures can bring an awareness of the overwhelming nature of hegemony that may result in despair when recognising the limitations of human agency. This is made worse when hegemony is seen as an abstraction – not the result of specific human action but more the result of social structure. According to Michael Newman (1994) this is a common fault of the ‘old’ social movements:

The conflict is made abstract . . . Enemies are often defined in generalised and abstract terms – injustice, poverty, class, or capitalism – and the responses are generalised or abstract as well – love, faith, struggle, praxis, education for socialism, and so on. The generalised ruling class is blamed for various crimes rather than the people with names and addresses and very personalised bank accounts that make up the ruling class. (p. 86)

From a postmodern perspective, power and knowledge are located in discourses that construct ‘regimes of truth.’ Michel Foucault’s notion of ‘regimes of truth’ (1980) has obvious links to the modernist notion of ideology and hegemony. Being aware that social justice processes may well be one of the permissible responses within a regime of truth adds weight to the need for reflexivity. It highlights the role of ‘truth’ within discourse. As Foucault expresses:

Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned: the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth: the status of those who are charged with saying what accounts as true. (p. 131)

The way that regimes of truth can be approached by those wishing to contest their rules is the equivalent to critical theory’s use of ideology critique. Foucault (1988) challenges the subversive intellectual to:

Reinterrogate the obvious and the assumed; to unsettle habits and ways of thinking and doing; to dissipate accepted familiarities to re-evaluate rules and
institutions, and on the basis of this re-problematization to participate in the formation of a political will. (p. 207)

This problematising of accepted ideas and beliefs (ideology) is common to all critical approaches in education. It is seen at work as part of the process of conscientisation.

**Conscientisation**

There are useful insights to be gained from the practice and theory of popular education’s process of *conscientisation*. Conscientisation fosters critique, reflexivity and a depth of abstract thinking that allows a clearer understanding of the existing reality in which we live (Freire, 1997; Aldana Mendoza, 1997). It is related to critical theory’s processes of ideology critique with the added element of transformative action. As a process it raises awareness of oppressive social, political and economic structures, and how they influence the individual and collective. Through the formation of critical consciousness people read their world and as a result question the nature of their historical, political, economic and social situation. The critical consciousness of the students is then translated into transformative action. We broke this down into three steps in the work we did in Guatemala: *conocimiento de la realidad; problematizar la realidad; transformar la realidad* (understand reality; problematise reality; transform reality).

The process of *conocimiento de la realidad* involved an historical, economic, cultural, political and social analysis of the issue being considered (Aldana Mendoza & Nuñez H., 2002, p. 14-5). In a country where information had been severely controlled during the 36-year civil war, there were low levels of awareness of critical social issues. As a result, there were strong reactions felt by some participants when their awareness was raised. Although the same degree of official control of information does not exist in Australia, there are significant indirect ways in which information inconsistent with the dominant discourse is suppressed (Burnside, 2005).

---

25 Freire stopped using the term conscientisation in 1987 although he continued to apply the concept and method behind it. This was after the word was adopted by conservative educators and its political content removed (Escobar et al., 1994, p. 46).

26 Working in a different cultural context helped reinforce for me the constructedness of all cultures and the arbitrariness of many of the things that we value.
Again, the context impacts on how pedagogy works. Unlike the Guatemalan participants who were from marginalised groups, the Australian participants in this research were in significantly more powerful positions than asylum seekers. Although I expected that not all would be comfortable with the dominant discourse, it was possible that many would be. It is much easier for those who are excluded by a system to critique it, see its constructedness and how it works to privilege certain groups over others. Those who benefit from any system have an emotional as well as material interest in maintaining the status quo. The unearned privileges and benefits of a system are often invisible to the beneficiaries (Tannoch-Bland, 1998). They are seen as the natural order of things and act as an obstacle to ideology critique and conscientisation.

The process of conscientisation with people from the dominant group is difficult as it requires people to challenge their comfort, their secure position and their beliefs in their superiority. Challenging the hegemonic position and suggesting alternatives goes against the dominant social and political messages, as well as the material interests of the dominant group. It is intrinsically easier for a person who is not a beneficiary of the dominant ideology to have an intellectual, affective and visceral appreciation of hegemony once the process is discussed. This was my experience working in Guatemala. On the other hand, people from the dominant culture are more likely to resist or deny concepts like hegemony and ideology. As Kincheloe (1999) says about hegemonic forces related to race: “One of the great paradoxes of the end-of-the-century Western societies is their ability to deny what is the most obvious: the privileged position of whiteness” (p. 176). Sandra Postel (1992) looks at the West’s denial of the impact of its economically privileged position:

Denial runs particularly deep among those with heavy stakes in the status quo, including the political and business leaders with power to shape the global agenda. This kind of denial can be as dangerous to society and the natural environment as an alcoholic’s denial is to his or her own family. (p. 4)

These reflections on the difficulties of using conscientisation in a Western context are not to discount its usefulness. Rather, they signal to the educator that different and possibly resistant responses should be anticipated.
Social difference

Oppressive discourses often gain ascendancy because of our fear of difference. The ways that social difference is managed within a society are the result of historical processes. Feminist theories, postmodern theories, cultural studies and post-colonial studies have significantly developed the notion of social difference within oppressive discourses (Applebaum, 2003; Applebaum, 2004).

The class-based analysis of difference, with the dichotomy of oppressor/oppressed, used in traditional critical theory and early Freirean pedagogy is not particularly useful in Western countries in the 21st century where there is a strong middle class and a social security system that ameliorates serious poverty. The forms of oppression are subtler and the class-based analysis does not adequately address the complexity of our multiple subjectivities. Freire’s acknowledgement that oppressed people often become oppressors in other situations may be an early hint of postmodernism’s multiple subjectivities and more complex understanding of oppression. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) discusses the complexity of our subjectivity from a postmodern perspective:

As Minh-ha reminds us, “There are no social positions exempt from becoming oppressive to others . . . any group – any position – can move into the oppressor role,” depending upon specific historical contexts and situations. Or as Mary Gentile puts it, “everyone is someone else’s ‘Other’.” (p. 322)

Broadening the analysis of social difference is not to diminish the importance of class difference but to add to it (Mouffe, 1988a; Brookfield, 2001). Freire, whose early work was blind to issues beyond class recognised the limits of this analysis in his later work. He stated: “I did not focus specifically on oppression marked by specificities such as colour, gender, race, and so forth. I was extremely more preoccupied with the oppressed as a social class” (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 397). 28

Feminism contributed significantly to Freire’s and critical pedagogy’s broadened analysis through the destruction of the myth of the rational man and claims of the

27 I am not asserting that this fear is a ‘natural’ human response but rather that it is able to be aroused through particular discourses.
28 This book takes the form of a dialogue between authors thus allowing attribution of one author.
universal subject (Luke & Gore, 1992, p. 5). It helped to highlight the marginalisation and silencing based on other ways of being. The destruction of the myth works together with postmodernism’s decentring of that previously normalised position. Any one focus (such as class or gender or race) will always be inadequate to explain the complex ways in which we experience and perpetrate oppressive patterns. Social difference is thus understood as a complex set of relations and processes arising from our multiple subjectivities. We inhabit subjectivities which at times position us in the role of marginalised Other, and at other times position us at the centre (McLaren & Lankshear, 1994).

Feminist pedagogy for the most part sits comfortably in the ‘critical’ tradition as it looks for ways to counter oppressive uses of power against groups whose social positioning renders them subjugated. The normalisation of maleness in Western society can be seen as operating in a similar fashion to the normalisation of citizenship, relevant to how citizens approach asylum seekers. The relationship between a more modernist version of feminist pedagogy and Freirean pedagogy is discussed by Kathleen Weiler (1994):

Both feminist pedagogy as it is usually defined and Freirean pedagogy rest upon visions of social transformation; underlying both are certain common assumptions concerning oppression, consciousness, and historical change. Both pedagogies assert the existence of oppression in people’s material conditions of existence and as a part of consciousness; both rest on a view of consciousness as more than a sum of dominating discourses, but as containing within it a critical capacity, what Gramsci called ‘good sense’; both thus see human beings as subjects and actors in history and hold a strong commitment to justice and a vision of a better world, of the potential for liberation. (p. 13)

As with feminism, postmodern thinking de-centres the way the world is viewed and acknowledges the validity of competing standpoints. The relativism present in postmodern theory operates in quite contradictory ways for a social change pedagogy (McLaren, 1995, p. 205). The appreciation that my culture and my way of thinking is but one of many cultures and one of many ways of thinking, opens me to intellectual and emotional growth and freedom. It also works towards the goal of equality of outcome for people from different cultural backgrounds and with different ways of thinking. These are potentially liberating forces consistent with greater freedom for
all. But relativism is not all positive in terms of emancipatory objectives. If all paths are equally valid, why should one opt for a path that on the face of it looks like it will be more work and not provide one personally with any rewards? Without a clear set of values provided by a concept of what is worthwhile for human existence, a person can be lost for a sense of direction and purpose. The challenge for educators is to ensure that the pluralism, which is a fundamental underpinning of social justice, is accompanied by a value base that incorporates fundamental human rights. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) use the concept of resistance postmodernism to describe how critical theory and postmodernism can come together to further social justice:

As it invokes its strategies for the emancipation of meaning, critical theory provides the postmodern critique with a normative foundation (i.e., a basis for distinguishing between oppressive and liberatory social relations). Without such a foundation the post-modern critique is ever vulnerable to nihilism and inaction. (p. 294-5)

Postmodernism brought to the fore the impact of class, colour, location, gender, sexuality and other factors on our subjectivities and experiences of identity formation, social exclusion, and points of engagement with regimes of truth. In my own understanding of social difference and transformative pedagogy, Giroux’s (1988) notion of border pedagogy was helpful. In his words:

A theory of border pedagogy needs to address the important question of how representations and practices that name, marginalise, and define difference as the devalued Other are actively learned, interiorized, challenged, or transformed. In addition, such a pedagogy needs to address how an understanding of these differences can be used in order to change the prevailing relations of power that sustain them. (p. 174)

To respond to the destructive Othering of asylum seekers my transformative pedagogy needed to make these effects transparent. We can see the relevance of border pedagogy to combat the dehumanised image of asylum seekers. Giroux (1997a) suggests that we need to “acknowledge and critically interrogate how the colonizing of differences by dominant groups is expressed and sustained through representations in which the humanity of the Others is ideologically disparaged or ruthlessly denied” (p. 55).
A purely outward directed gaze in relation to social difference can continue to reinforce oppressive relations. Implicated as I am in systems of exclusion and exercises of power, I see the need to enhance my critical awareness of my own identity and how my subjectivity has been formed. I am interested in highlighting how we are all implicated in discourses which privilege some and exclude others. Each of us brings “a social subjectivity that has been constructed in such a way that [means that we can] never participate unproblematically in the collective process of self-determination, naming of oppression, and struggles for visibility in the face of marginalization” (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 309).

As a strategy to challenge exclusion based on social difference my transformative pedagogy incorporated the presence and input from those Others who are usually excluded. Creativity was needed to ensure that different ways were found for bringing into the process those whose voices are currently silenced. People excluded from a variety of dominant discourses (refugees, gays, people with disabilities) were involved in the design and implementation of the pedagogy. Such an approach is discussed by Ellsworth (1989) with her characteristic reflexivity:

The terms in which I can and will assert and unsettle “difference” and unlearn my positions of privilege in future classroom practices are wholly dependent on the Others/others whose presence – with their concrete experiences of privileges and oppressions, and subjugated or oppressive knowledges – I am responding to and acting with in any given [pedagogical space]. (p. 323)

I share with Freire (Freire & Macedo, 1995) his hope that the potential for more effective alliances between excluded groups, arising from a postmodern analysis of difference, may translate into effective action:

It is exactly because of my growing awareness over the years concerning the specificities of oppression along the lines of language, race, gender, and ethnicity that I have been defending the fundamental thesis of Unity in Diversity, so that the various oppressed groups can become more effective in their collective struggle against all forms of oppression. (p. 398)

**Power, agency and facilitation**

Any pedagogy hoping to engage people to challenge and work to transform unjust social structures and systems must consider the nature of power, as well as the role of individual and collective agency. What are the power dynamics in maintaining,
challenging and destroying oppressive systems? How does power operate within the pedagogical processes we participate in? How can we use power within a pedagogical setting so that it does not perpetuate exclusionary practices but furthers social justice?

In modernist critical pedagogy, those who challenge powerful hegemonic forces are seen to be resisting the oppressive use of power. This comes from a concept of power as hierarchical, structural and negative. This notion of power is opposed to the disinterested concepts of knowledge and truth (Usher, 1994, p. 85). Even though this modernist approach to power is not a complete picture of the way power works, it seems that Freire is right to insist that it is one of the ways in which power works (Freire & Macedo, 1995).

What postmodernism shows us is that power is not just a negative capacity used to advantage certain groups over others, rather that it is “everywhere and . . . available to anyone” in relationships which are often “unstable, ambiguous and reversible” (Hindess, 1996, pp. 100-101). After struggling with arguments that pedagogy should be a path to freedom, critical post-structuralists such as Bronwyn Mellor and Annette Patterson (2001) came to acknowledge the impossibility of critical neutrality and the importance of their productive use of power. Seeking social change through critical literacy which aims for the production of particular readings over others they came to “admit, indeed, to the use of power, not simply to the resisting of others’ uses of power” (p. 132).

As Foucault (1980) has said, power is a “productive network that runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” (p. 119). This understanding of power supports a view of human agency that retains some ability for constructive action. However, a productive, dispersed concept of power is at times accompanied by an enervating relativism. This relativism sees power as existing in different sites and situations. It erases power differentials such as the significantly greater influence of, for example, those who attend World Bank meetings, than those who live in a slum in Guatemala City. Rather than needing to choose between a modernist or postmodernist analysis of
Towards a transformative pedagogy

power, it seems to me that transformative pedagogy benefits from both analyses. As Newman (1994) states:

The idea of decentred power may lead us to have more confidence in local struggle . . . However, we cannot go on from there and conclude that centralised power is an illusion . . . Nor do we have to conclude that cohesive mass political action is an illusion . . . Power can manifest itself in centralised structures, in pervasive hegemonic ideologies, in organised movements, and in a vast, decentralised array of organisations, relationships, and events. (p. 137)

Can we do anything about centralised structures and pervasive hegemonic ideologies? The idea of human agency – that we are active creators of our world and not merely objects acted on by economic, social, cultural and political forces – has been rejected by some postmodern thinking (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991a). This is contrary to critical pedagogy’s desire to work with students who are “their own agents for social change, their own creators of democratic culture” and to “empower students to intervene in the making of history” (Shor, 1987, p. 48). With a postmodern human subject constituted entirely through discursive practices there is no room for “traditional notions of agency as the capacity for choice and self-determination” (Applebaum, 2004, p. 66). Donald (1992) identifies the significant limitations of human agency within the postmodern paradigm:

Accept the ambivalence of participation and agency – we are always both subjects of and subject to – and it is impossible to imagine the exercise of liberty as a psychotic escape from relations of power. Instead it becomes an invitation or an obligation to act on the basis that the rules of the game can be changed while it is being played, however rigged the game may be in favour of some players and against others. (p. 161)

The reduced scope of agency is a significant challenge for any educational practice that encourages engagement and action. This challenge is not seen as insurmountable by critical pedagogy which sees that in a postmodern world, “agency becomes the site through which power is not transcended but reworked, replayed and restaged in productive ways” (Giroux, 2004, p. 34). In affirming agency within the new understandings of critical postmodernism, a new concept emerges, distinct from the somewhat epic terms commonly used in critical pedagogy. As Barbara Applebaum
(2004) expresses the possibility of agency:

One can find a discursive space in which to resist, not in the sense of denying complicity, but in the sense of challenging and disrupting social norms. Thus, although the subject may have no choice in its formation as a subject, this does not imply a sacrifice of agency. (p. 65)

Critical postmodern understandings of power open up possibilities for educators to acknowledge the presence and play of power in new locations, facilitating agency. Power needs to be used productively by both educators and participants. Structural power also needs to be understood and resisted. As such, there is a strategic directiveness in the pedagogy that welcomes engagement and challenge from participants. I do not see my transformative pedagogy as being a process in which the facilitator ‘empowers’ the participants. This has a patronising flavour, minimising their existing awareness. It appears to be condescending as to their existing agency and sees power as a form of property. The notion of ‘empowering’ can imply a one-way movement of knowledge and power from the facilitator to the participants. This is contrary to the acceptance that all persons present are learning and together creating knowledge.

The rejection of the role of ‘empowerer’ is not a rejection of the notion that the facilitator exercises power. On the contrary, attempts to disavow power and purport to create equality between participants and facilitator are rejected as naïve at best and deceptive at worst. As Brookfield (2000) states:

While it is important to privilege learners’ voices and to create multiple foci of attention in the classroom, it is disingenuous to pretend that as educators we are the same as students. Better to acknowledge publicly our position of power, to engage learners in deconstructing that power, and to attempt to model a critical analysis of our own source of authority in front of them. (p. 40)

The role of the facilitator is to combine the insights gained from postmodernism with the critique, values base and understanding of agency encapsulated in critical theory. Bringing together the insights of Foucault’s postmodern approach and Habermas’s critical theory approach is well set out for us by Soucek (1995):

His or her role is to detach “oneself from what is accepted as true and seek other rules . . . the changing of received values and all the work that has been
done to think otherwise, to do something else, to become other than what one is” (Foucault, 1988, p. 330), and to “modify one’s own thought and that of others” (Foucault, 1984, p. 22). Habermas similarly argues for the need to thematize and make problematic all validity claims, which can always achieve at best a provisional status of truth, as they always remain a subject to oppositional claims. (p. 145)

The role of problematising the dominant discourse referred to by Soucek can only be achieved through deliberate action – through employing the facilitator’s power. This is particularly so where the pedagogical process does not consist of a collective of like-minded people seeking social change. In addition, to be able to challenge effectively, it is vital that the facilitator has investigated the issues widely and obtained information from sources alternative to the mass media and major cultural institutions. The problematising facilitator must be ready to counter the dominant discourse when it is voiced.

In the popular education we practised in Guatemala, the educator was responsible for generating the dialogical process, providing guidance, analysing and reflecting on the comments of the participants and ensuring everyone had fun (Aldana Mendoza & Nuñez H., 2002, p. 7). Since my work in Guatemala, the pregunta generadora (generating question) has become a central strategy in my pedagogy for creating dialogical processes and problematising issues. This useful technique, called ‘problem-posing’ by Shor (1992), inhibits the educator from lecturing and promotes active collaborative knowledge creation.29 As Shor says, it “frontloads student thought and backloads teacher commentary” (p. 147).

The facilitator brings institutional power with her/him and this is regularly being exercised. As stated by Magda Lewis (1990), who used her institutional power to “create the possibility for privilege to face itself and own its violation,” the use of institutional power “should not always be viewed as counterproductive to our politics” (p. 480). To challenge the hegemonic voice, the facilitator makes strategic decisions as to which opinions are problematised; whose voices were sought out; what questions were asked; which leads were followed up and which were not.

29 It is also particularly welcome when you are educating in a second language.
Giroux (2004) discusses how teacher authority can be employed within social change education:

Authority that is directive but open, critical but not closed, must be vigilant and self-conscious about its promise to provide students with a public space where they can learn, debate, and engage critical traditions in order to expand their own sense of individual agency while simultaneously developing those discourses that are crucial for defending vital social institutions as a public good. (p. 43)

The transformative pedagogy of this project was explicitly built on the principle that facilitators and participants bring relevant knowledge and experience that contributes to the creation of new knowledge. In keeping with Freire’s (1987) pedagogy it works towards constructing a horizontal relationship between student and teacher. The facilitators of the programme acknowledged to the participants that the process was one in which we as facilitators expected to be learning, and they would also be teaching. The explicit acknowledgement that the facilitator is also a learner, reminds the educator of the need to reflect on her/his learning throughout the process.

Facilitators should be aware of institutional/structural power so that they can decentre it. Unconsciously, it is too easy for educators committed to social justice to utilise power in ways which support a dominating role for them as expert, rather than a co-voyager stumbling along looking for coherence in the struggle for social change. Ellsworth (1989) critiques the way in which the critical pedagogue “has constructed two key discursive positions for her/himself in the literature – namely, origin of what can be known and origin of what should done” (p. 323). Any self-positioning by the facilitator as expert or leader carries with it the danger of perpetuating the very relations of dominance which critical pedagogy seeks to challenge. I agree with Patti Lather (1992) that “deconstructing such vanguardism” is necessary (p. 127). Powerful support of alternative ways of educating was provided by the humility of the educators I worked with in Guatemala, and by their respect for the participants.

**Pedagogy of oppression and privilege**

Popular education and critical pedagogy have traditionally had a strong focus on oppression and oppressed groups. However, a transformative pedagogy dealing with the social issue of asylum seekers in Australia needed to incorporate a pedagogy to
challenge privilege as well as a pedagogy of oppression. The more recent discourse of privilege has been harnessed by social justice educators in relation to racism, sexism and global inequalities (McIntosh, 2002; Tannoch-Bland, 1998; O’Sullivan, 1999). The notion of privilege understands social justice as requiring an examination of those who benefit from global and local inequities, as much as if not more than an examination of those who are disadvantaged. The forced migration of peoples is caused in part by the global inequalities in resource allocation as well as the effects of colonialism. The privileged position we occupy as Australians on these issues is intimately bound up with the significant disadvantage experienced by those who come here seeking asylum. However, most of us refuse to see it, adopting instead the ‘arrogant eye’ as Edmund O’Sullivan (1999) explains:

Marilyn Frye (1983) names this position of privilege [arising from dominant class, gender and race positions] the ‘arrogant eye.’ With this occlusion of perception, one can organize everything seen into one’s own frame of reference to the exclusion of any other. The position of arrogance allows for ignorance of the other because this ignorance has no consequences for the arrogant perceiver. (pp. 133-4)

A major obstacle to changing one’s frame of reference is that privilege works to maintain itself as the superior way of being in clearly demarcated binaries. How will men come to want to have a non-sexist concept of masculinity when what is traditionally feminine is so clearly second class? How can Whites be expected to view whiteness as merely one of many ways of being when the alternatives are represented as inferior and unattractive? Why would a heterosexual embrace options that include other forms of sexuality when those forms are presented as deviant? As O’Sullivan (1999) writes:

It takes a great deal of cognitive, emotional and spiritual work for the one occupying the position of privilege to break free of it in order to embark upon more inclusive perceptions of the other. (pp. 133-4)

Privilege in relation to asylum seekers can be characterised in terms of citizens/non-citizens. The ethnic, cultural and religious Otherness of asylum seekers works to add privilege upon privilege for those of us on the inside – white privilege, global privilege, religious privilege and more. The emotional and material incentives to maintain privilege need to be understood in order to be able to confront them. In a
Western context particularly, this applies as much to the educators as to the students. We thus need to interrogate our own positions and beliefs.

In this project I am exploring social change from within the dominant Australian culture. As such, I am an example of the kind of person Applebaum (2004) discusses, uncomfortable in her privileged position vis-à-vis asylum seekers: “The conflict between the reality of social injustice and one’s ethical commitments to justice can unsettle the epistemological and moral certitude that privilege confers and can act as a catalyst for change in privileged subjects” (p. 68).

**Freedom**

For some, the pursuit of freedom is at the heart of critical pedagogy and popular education. This is not surprising given critical pedagogy’s links with critical theory – a theory devoted, in part, to achieving human freedom. The struggle between living within the dominant discourse and creating a better alternative is linked with these ideas of freedom as shown by Ledwith (2001):

> Critical thought leads to critical action. Thus, education is located at the interface of liberation and domestication. This is not a neutral space. The power of ideas has the possibility of either reducing us to objects in our own history or freeing us as subjects, curious, creative and engaged in our world. (p. 177)

Freedom however is a slippery concept. It is one of those terms which can derail dialogue when it becomes obvious that even though the parties to the conversation may be using the same words, they in fact are speaking a different language. It is a particular kind of freedom that is being advocated by Freire (1997), Giroux (1997a) and others. Graziella Moraes Dias da Silva (2000) assesses Freire’s concept of freedom as:

> Not the “liberal freedom” of the modern, but the freedom to transform the objectified people into actors of History – a notion similar to the one that one finds in Habermas’ communicative action. The freedom to understand the historical moment of transition, and to act in the creation of this moment. (Section II)

The freedom that I seek through my transformative pedagogy is a less ambitious ideal than that promised by the Enlightenment. Living in society we are constructed
Towards a transformative pedagogy

by that society. To a large extent our imaginings are determined by that society. Even more so, our options are constrained by our positioning and subjectivities. To be free and live in society is almost a contradiction. Moving towards a freer state requires first that we are aware of the way that the society is constructed and how it constructs us. Knowing how social forces affect us is the first step to freeing ourselves. A further step to becoming freer comes from having the ability to respond to or initiate action in ways that are not anticipated by the discourses available. This freedom to act in an informed way is a stronger freedom than merely freedom from constraint.

A different limitation on the possibility of freedom comes from the fact that as social beings the exercise of our freedoms affects the freedom of others. For me, this highlights that an individual’s freedom can never be positioned as an absolute good. Rather it is circumscribed by the pursuit by others of their freedoms. Other values, such as equality, place similar constraints on freedom. Moraes Dias da Silva (2000) talks of the “tenuous balance – if it is really possible – between freedom and equality, which is necessary to the building of a fair citizenship” (Section III). This same tension exists between freedom and other social justice ideals.

Given the clear values base and political position I bring to this pedagogy, how do I reconcile a commitment to greater freedom for all? Freedom bumps up hard against the normativity of the transformative pedagogy. This creates one of the irresolvable tensions that is often ignored in social change discourse. It cannot be ignored in this work as it was the source of troubled moments for me throughout this process. Critical pedagogies question the reproductive nature of formal education with its implicit norms and limits on human freedom (Apple, 1985). Does critical pedagogy merely replace one set of norms with another? Gore (1992) for example seeks to expose the dangers of the normalising tendencies of critical and feminist pedagogy.

Rather than seek to legitimate or celebrate critical and feminist discourses, I want to look for their dangers, their normalizing tendencies, for how they might serve as instruments of domination despite the intentions of their creators. (original emphasis) (p. 54)

No educational process is politically neutral. The individualised autonomous freedom espoused by modernity has implicit in it a set of assumptions about social,
economic and political relations. Because these relations have been naturalised by hegemonic processes they appear to be value free. Social justice education cannot claim neutrality because its value base goes against the grain of the existing social order. The explicit politics of critical pedagogy has come in for significant critique. Maxine Hairston (1992) sees critical pedagogy as:

A model that puts dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student. It’s a regressive model that undermines the progress we’ve made in teaching writing, one that threatens to silence student voices and jeopardize the process-oriented, low-risk, student-centred classrooms we’ve worked so hard to establish as the norm. (p. 180)

Of course, in the hands of an autocrat, any form of education may be applied in ways that limit student freedom. However, I disagree with Hairston that there is something inherent to social change education that makes it regressive. On the contrary, the explicit recognition of everybody’s right to understand the socio-economic forces that shape our lives, minds and desires, has liberatory potential. Chapter 10 addresses some of these criticisms further and describes the tension I experienced between freedom and normativity.

**Reflections**

In building a transformative pedagogy I wanted to learn more about pedagogy, social justice, privilege and power. To do this, I looked for ways to distance myself and reflect on the research and pedagogy. This reflexivity needed to be a part of my practice as researcher and incorporated into my practice as educator (Brookfield, 2000, p. 46). Critical reflexivity covers a multitude of reflections, connections and relations that incorporate issues of power and knowledge. I do not expect to find any one right answer from my research because productive pedagogical moments are unpredictable, uncontrollable and unrepeatable (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 8). Recognising the uncertainty of pedagogical practice, I acknowledge the dangers inherent in my transformative pedagogy. These dangers include the possibility of solidification of existing power relations, a strengthened blind trust in authority and further alienation from Others. However, reflexivity may show the circumstances that make productive pedagogical moments more likely to occur. Some pedagogical moments may cause people to reflect on who they are in the world and what sort of world it is that they
want to help create. Reflexivity means taking risks and exposing areas where my practice did not meet my expectations and my theoretical position. Through this I hope to gain better awareness of the pedagogy’s weaknesses and strengths, and my personal weaknesses and strengths.
Chapter 4

Creating a transformative pedagogy

Introduction

This chapter discusses how the broader sociological and pedagogical principles already outlined were translated into a concrete educational experience to interrogate the issue of asylum seekers in Australia. It deals with the methodology of the community education programme – the embodied transformative pedagogy enacted in my local community.

Collaborative team

Aware of my limitations I decided from the outset to form a collaborative team of people who could assist in the creation of the educational programme. The composition of the group was very important given that I was seeking two different kinds of inputs. I was seeking firstly the expertise of people who had worked in a variety of social justice education projects and secondly people who understood the experience of exclusion from the dominant group in Australian society. Emphasis was placed on bringing together people with diverse experiences and subjectivities who shared a commitment to social justice. I saw this process as symbolic of the potential for alliance-building among marginalised groups.

To form the collaborative team, I identified six individuals whom I felt had the qualities and experiences to benefit this project. I personally knew all but one of them through previous social justice work. Four of the team lived or worked in the local community. They were interested in the research because of their commitment to social justice and were looking to make their own practice more effective through participation. I hoped to obtain the input of an Aboriginal educator or activist given the similarities that exist with the prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping that occurs in relation to Aborigines in Australia. Despite my best intentions, this did not eventuate. Aboriginal activists and educators are called upon to assist in a wide range
of social justice initiatives and those whom I contacted were already extremely busy.

The members of the collaborative team are introduced below:

- Donna: a young White lesbian activist, was an experienced community educator on issues including sexuality and youth legal rights. She had two small children and lived in the local area.
- Karen: a middle-aged female White primary school teacher, had worked with me on refugee issues in her school. Karen lived and worked locally.
- Helen: a middle-aged White woman, disability advocate and educator, had used a wheelchair since childhood. Helen lived locally.
- Rod: a middle-aged male White psychologist of Irish heritage, had worked in the area of anti-racism and other social justice education for over 20 years. He had adult children, and worked in a community organisation counselling refugees who had suffered torture and trauma.
- Sonja: a young single White university student studying cultural studies, came to Australia as a refugee from the former Yugoslavia when she was a teenager and was active in informal community education on the topic of refugees and asylum seekers.
- Murray: a middle-aged White male community nurse, was active in social justice issues in the local community. Murray was married with a small child. (At the time I invited Murray to participate, I did not know that he was the son of a victim of the Nazi regime in Europe.)

By including in the collaborative team people whose personal biographies and experiences positioned them at times outside the dominant culture, I was acknowledging the importance of those experiences and indirectly making them available to the participants of the educational programme. Such experiences are not easily available to members of the dominant culture. The composition of the collaborative team was part of a strategy of ‘border crossing’ as described by Giroux (1997b).

I did not expect, nor desire, uniformity of political or pedagogical positions from the members of the collaborative team. Although we shared a commitment to social justice, there were times when our different ideas were apparent. We did not share a uniform view on what Australia’s policy towards asylum seekers ought to be, nor did we have uniform pedagogical approaches. In Chapter 6 we shall hear the voices of the collaborative team (along with the participants) as they describe their views on the subject of asylum seekers.
Prior to agreeing to be on the collaborative team, members had been informed that their input would be sought to:

- devise a strategy for engaging a broad cross-section of the community in a transformative pedagogy;
- provide suggestions and insights as to how barriers between the dominant culture and marginalised groups can be crossed;
- review the content and methodology of the programme;
- provide feedback on the overall research project;
- identify ways by which the project could strengthen the community; and
- assess the responses of the participants to the pedagogy in a socially critical manner.

I met with the collaborative team on six occasions. As we worked together, the areas of interest and expertise emerged and the team determined its own role. It became part of the reflective space created for this project. The role the team ultimately performed included some of those tasks identified above and more. For example, we devoted considerable time to developing the overall principles and values of the programme. In addition, once the programme commenced one member of the team, Murray, attended all of the sessions in the role of observer and contributed greatly to the social cohesion of the group. Three members of the collaborative team, Rod, Helen and Donna, also facilitated sessions. The remainder of the programme sessions I facilitated.

**Logistics**

The collaborative team helped determine the duration, location and publicity of the programme. In considering the duration of the programme, there was a balance between a programme that could fully explore the issues and the time a participant would be prepared to devote. To minimise possible attrition of participants, the timing of the sessions and the duration of the programme were important factors. As the programme was scheduled to be held in the winter months, evenings would be dark, cold and possibly rainy. We decided that the sessions would be held on a weekday evening as this maximised who could attend. We considered that a weekly two hour session for six weeks (after a general information session) was an acceptable balance between the time needed to develop the issues and not stretching the stamina of participants too far. To make the programme accessible for people with families, childcare was offered.
Place was important in this project. The project was an expression of my commitment to social justice in my community – Victoria Park, Western Australia. I had chosen local people where possible to be on the collaborative team and was expecting the participants to come from the local area also. Although it was not a specific objective of the educational programme, I was interested in seeing whether there would be any ongoing community activity arising from the project. It felt right to realise this work in my local community for all of these reasons. This may well reflect a postmodern emphasis on the local (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). By considering place to be important, the project shares some similarities with place-based pedagogies described by David Gruenewald (2003). He states that “place-based pedagogies are needed so that the education of citizens might have some direct bearing on the well-being of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit” (p. 3).

On a pragmatic level, availability and cost helped me choose the club rooms of the East Victoria Park, Returned & Services League (R&SL) as the venue. As one of the participants later commented, it was an interesting combination of location (surrounded by war memorabilia) and topic (asylum seekers). It was a new building, providing kitchen facilities, and was serviced by public transport.

The collaborative team discussed a number of different methods of publicising the educational programme. I employed the following methods:

- an article and letter to the editor published in the free local community newspaper (Appendix 4.1);
- flyers for letterbox drops in the local area (Appendix 4.2);
- notices placed in various public places (e.g. shopping centres, libraries) (Appendix 4.3);
- letters to approximately 20 local organisations (e.g. ratepayers association, service organisations) (Appendix 4.4); and
- a weekday information stand at a local shopping centre.

The publicity invited interested community members to attend an information session. At the information session, basic information on the educational and research programme was provided to the 22 people who attended. The particular

---

30 The Returned & Services League is a voluntary association for members and ex-members of the defence forces.
requirements of the university’s ethics committee were addressed. Those who were interested in participating provided me with their contact details so that I would be able to interview them before the first session.

**Participants**

When considering whether or not there should be any criteria that might exclude a person from participating, I started from the proposition that all permanent residents, other than refugee activists, would be welcome. People already actively committed to social change were not the target group. I was particularly interested in engaging people who did not question the dominant discourse about asylum seekers or were unsure. In the end, it was decided that it would be too difficult to make judgements on a person’s position and the only criterion for participation was permanent residency in Australia.

A further issue considered was whether we should specifically invite participants who had come to Australia as refugees. The pedagogical process would clearly be different depending on whether there were refugees in the group. There was an ethical and a pedagogical dimension to this decision. Not to include refugees meant that there was the potential that any representation of refugees in the programme would be inaccurate and misleading. However, the focus of the programme was on interrogating the dominant culture and our reactions to Others, and not on representing asylum seekers in any particular way. As such, an absence of asylum seekers or refugees was not necessarily problematic.

There are significant problems that arise when the dominant group seeks to learn about the reality of Others. The desire of privileged groups to use people from disadvantaged groups to teach them about the impact of prejudice and exclusion has been criticised (Ellsworth, 1989). A strong argument has been made by some black educators that the problem of racism is one that white people have and that we need to solve this problem ourselves and not expect the targets of our racism to do it for us. Gloria Yamato (1990) admonishes us not to use the victims of our prejudice to heal ourselves: “You can educate yourselves via research and observation rather than rigidly, arrogantly relying solely on interrogating people of color. Do not expect that
people of color should teach you how to behave non-oppressively. Do not give into the pull to be lazy” (p. 23). The same argument can be applied to the relationship between Australians from the dominant culture and asylum seekers. It is incumbent on the beneficiaries of the unequal power relations to take the initiative to understand and overcome the damaging effects of those power relations and not rely on asylum seekers to do that for us.

An associated consideration was that a safe environment could more easily be created if all participants were from the same cultural group. In a situation where the educator and all the participants have a shared cultural background, an intimacy can be more easily engendered; a feeling of safety for all is more easily facilitated. Using the shared language, talking about ‘us’ and ‘our’ experiences, the educator can effectively, and in a way that is less threatening to the participants, challenge the assumptions and interests behind certain dominant positions when expressed. When more cultures are present, the existence of a dominant cultural group may have the effect of excluding certain participants who do not have a shared understanding of idioms, jokes and history.

Although in a different context the inclusion of people from the non-dominant group would an important pedagogical and social justice element, I decided not to invite refugees to be participants. Sonja and Murray, from the collaborative team provided input of the refugee experience and Rod and I had experience working with refugees. In addition, the programme included a session with people who had come to Australia as refugees or asylum seekers. There were thus different strategies used so that the refugee perspective would be present. Had the context been different and the participants comprised people already committed to social justice, including refugees in the programme would probably have been beneficial. However, I decided that, given a desired target group of diverse Australians, many of whom could have negative attitudes towards asylum seekers, on balance, refugees would not be included. Such a space may not be safe for people who had come to Australia as

31 It would not be possible to invite asylum seekers as they are in mandatory detention.
refugees, if stridently anti-refugee attitudes were expressed, further compounding traumatic experiences.\textsuperscript{32}

**Development of curriculum and pedagogical processes**

As with the desire for coherence of theory and practice discussed in the previous chapter, we also sought to attain coherence of pedagogical content and form. By *content*, I mean the explicit curriculum – the topics studied, the materials used and the information provided – what it was that was studied. By *form*, I mean such things as: the facilitation; the modes of raising topics; the relationships created; the participation of those present; and the respect of people and knowledge. Form thus deals with *how* the content was studied. Form overlaps with content and inevitably conveys as much as the explicit curriculum of the programme, but in subtler ways. Incompatibility of form and content can alienate participants. The reflective striving for coherence is in itself a social justice process, as it is within the difficulties of this struggle that glimpses of a social justice vision can be seen. The development of the pedagogy – its form and content – was a continual process that did not end until the final session was finished. Its development was both deliberate and organic. Certain pedagogical approaches and activities were planned well in advance while maintaining some flexibility to respond to the participants’ interests as well as the political and social context at the time the programme was implemented.

**Pedagogical principles and values**

One of the early tasks the collaborative team undertook was to define the programme’s principles and values. It is important to note the difference between having a personal social justice goal and having pedagogical principles and values. This was particularly important because the group of participants would have a wide

\textsuperscript{32} Note: One participant indicated before the programme commenced that he would not be interested in participating if refugees were part of the group. Another commented after completion of the programme on the trauma that refugees could have experienced in the group. In her words:

_"I asked you right at the beginning about whether there would actually be refugees or asylum seekers in the group. . . I’m a big advocate of community development and . . . going to the people and getting their opinions . . . but I can see now, very clearly that that was a wise decision because there would have been a completely different dynamic . . . I think different members in the group felt more uneasy with the differences of opinion and you could get that tense kind of ‘shut up’ kind of thing, ‘back off’. But then I was also wondering how the refugees and asylum seekers might have felt if they had this negativity coming towards them as well. I think that it was a good balance having different views and different attitudes to explore." _ (Talia – Interview 2)
range of positions about asylum seekers. My commitment to accepting other visions (that did not violate human rights) meant that I needed to acknowledge the difference between my personal social justice goals and my pedagogical goals. Through my pedagogy I sought to unmask hegemonic processes, to see who might benefit from these processes and who was disadvantaged, and to explore how all of us were implicated. Participant would act upon the experience in their own way.

Respecting freedom of choice was tempered by certain considerations. Firstly, that freedom of choice would be based on an informed choice, an awareness of the consequences of that choice. Secondly, that freedom of choice must also respect the human rights of all people. Finally, freedom of choice must be shared so that all people would be able to enjoy the same freedoms. It is in this context that the pedagogical and research aim of working towards a critical sensibility for myself and others comes in.

The principles and values discussed by the collaborative team are long-term aspirations. It was not expected that they would be achieved in the short programme we implemented. We wanted to:

- Problematise the dominant discourse about asylum seekers;
- Critique the role of information/media in the creation of the dominant discourse;
- Provide accurate, relevant information on the situation of asylum seekers, nationally and globally;
- Create a democratic space in which people are able to discuss views respectfully and practise radical democracy;
- Create an educational process in which social relationships, caring and connection between the participants/facilitators/guests are important;
- Model, through the facilitation, a tolerant critical sensibility;
- Establish facilitator/participant relationships in which both learn from, and both teach, each other;
- Vary educational approach to accommodate different learning styles and also to incorporate different learning processes (cognitive, affective, somatic, experiential);
- Listen to voices normally subjugated;
- Foster (self)reflection and (self)critique;
- Allow people to better understand Others and themselves; and
- Foster a sense of agency.

Once the underlying principles and values of the programme were settled, I commenced crafting the curriculum. I developed a series of sessions and then sought
feedback from the collaborative team. In addition to these discussions, I also sought feedback from other critical friends such as my supervisors and other educators who work in a social justice context. Once a draft of the programme had been prepared and reviewed, another facilitator from the collaborative team and I piloted a number of the sessions using critical friends and other contacts as participants. These pilot sessions were tape recorded and participants provided oral feedback at the end of the sessions. This feedback was incorporated into subsequent versions of the programme.

**Multiple approaches**

I anticipated that we would be working with a group largely from the dominant Anglo-Celtic ethnic group, but with mixed gender, socio-economic status, age and personal histories. This would result in different approaches to education and different learning preferences. We did not want to base our pedagogy on the traditional model which anticipates normalised white, middle-class, male students and relies predominantly on cognitive learning processes.

What works pedagogically for one person does not necessarily work for the next. Brookfield (2000) suggests that these differences make it impossible to satisfy all:

> Most groups of adult students exhibit such diverse learning styles, different states of readiness for learning, contrasting cultural histories and genders, varied class allegiances, and different personality types that it is impossible to teach in a way that satisfies all needs and preferences all the time. (p. 41)

Seeking to move away from a pedagogical approach that privileges the rational and the normalised male, the post-structuralist feminist pedagogy of Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore (1992) is useful as they suggest: “that we cannot claim single-strategy pedagogies of empowerment, emancipation, and liberation” (p. 7). I welcome the focus of some feminist pedagogues on ways of knowing and learning that go beyond the rational to include emotional, somatic and experiential learning (Tisdell, Hanley, & Taylor, 2000). While not without problems (Weiler, 1994, p. 28-9), this valuing of

---

33 Patrick Fox (National Education Officer, Catholic Mission) and Sama Bruce-Cullen (Society and Environment Secondary School Teacher)
affective, experiential and corporeal learning encourages educators to work with students in a more holistic way (Tisdell et al., 2000, p. 145).

The historical emphasis on rationality that flows from critical theory has been incorporated into critical pedagogy. Feminist writers such as Luke (1992) soundly critique pedagogies built principally around rational democratic processes for their inherent support of patriarchal systems. Affective learning has long been a part of humanistic and feminist pedagogies. In part, this is because of the limitations that were seen to exist for women learners adopting a purely rational learning approach. Elizabeth Tisdell (1993) notes that in environments that emphasise connected teaching and learning “women begin to recognize their own ability to think independently, to think critically, and to come to their own conclusions” (p. 96). These insights have been taken up by many current critical pedagogues who understand desire and emotionality as having a central role in pedagogical processes (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993). As Giroux (2004) states: “Any viable approach to critical pedagogy suggests taking seriously those maps of meaning, affective investments, and sedimented desires that enable students to connect their own lives and everyday experiences to what they learn” (p. 48).

The response of the dominant Australian culture to asylum seekers has a strong emotional component. Annette Baier challenges the predominant position of reason when she looks at the role of the sentiments in philosophy (cited in Rorty, 1998b). As with many feminist pedagogues, there is an emphasis on connection. Rorty (1998b) writes:

[Baier] suggests we think of “trust” rather than “obligation” as the fundamental moral notion. This substitution would mean thinking of the spread of the human rights culture not as a matter of our becoming more aware of the requirements of the moral law, but rather as what Baier calls “a progress of sentiments.” (p. 181)

Rather than look for the rational answer as to why we should care about a stranger, Rorty (1998b) suggests that as part of an educational strategy to further human rights, social justice educators follow Baier’s advice and look for the answer that is:

The sort of long, sad, sentimental story that begins, “Because this is what it is like to be in her situation – to be far from home, among strangers,” or
“Because she might become your daughter-in-law,” or “Because her mother would grieve for her.” Such stories, repeated and varied over the centuries, have induced us, the rich, safe, powerful people, to tolerate and even to cherish powerless people – people whose appearance or habits or beliefs at first seemed an insult to our own moral identity, our sense of the limits of permissible human variation. (p. 185)

Emotions are a powerful tool for engaging people in particular struggles. Reflecting on my own engagement with social justice, it is clear that empathy plays a significant role in maintaining my commitment. And although I would not agree with the potentially coercive element of Rorty’s (1998b) exhortation, it accords with my experience that we “concentrate our energies on manipulating sentiments, on sentimental education” (p. 176). Freire (1998) too was aware of the importance of a “critical comprehension of the value of sentiments, emotions, and desire as part of the learning process” (p. 48). In this transformative pedagogy I sought not to privilege the affective over the rational but incorporate both. Even the somatic was given attention in the setting up of the room, incorporation of activities which involved us at a physical level, and by asking participants to reflect on how their bodies experienced the process.

By incorporating multiple pedagogical approaches, I sought to maximise the extent to which all participants were able to engage with the pedagogy. For some participants the traditional modernist emphasis on cognitive learning processes would be comfortable. For them, a dialogical method, which develops a logical analysis of different social issues, may provide a way into difficult issues (Freire & Macedo, 1995). For others, Rorty’s sentimental education may effectively engage them in affective learning. There were also the considerations of the sensory learning preferences of different individuals – visual, auditory and to a lesser extent tactile. The learning needs and desires of different participants will at times be contradictory (Brookfield, 2000). For example, a participant who does not like uncertainty will be more likely to engage in a social justice discourse if a strong, unequivocal, black and white message is provided. This will be unpalatable to the postmodernist participant who disagrees with the epistemology inherent in such an approach – another example of the complexity of the pedagogical task.
Openness, critique and reflexivity

A participant’s openness is central to the success of most pedagogical processes. It is particularly relevant where the educational process seeks to challenge dominant discourses and encourage participants to think about their own views and attitudes. We are intricately enmeshed within dominant discourses through hegemonic processes of which we are often, at best, only partially aware (Eagleton, 1991, p. 61). Being prepared to pause and stand back from ourselves and from those discourses is the first step to challenging them. My transformative pedagogy sought to foster openness to new experiences, feelings and understandings.

Each participant with her or his specific subject formation had an existing preparedness to hear and consider alternative ways of viewing the world. Because our identity and sense of self is closely connected to our worldview, openness to alternative ways of seeing the world also requires an openness to personal challenge. Although some people will feel secure in opening up their views to scrutiny, challenge and critique, others will feel threatened by such a practice. Barriers to a person’s openness are often the same things which stop them feeling safe. Although much of a person’s sense of security within any setting will come from socio-economic and psychological factors external to the particular situation, some barriers that can arise within the pedagogical situation are:

- Participants feeling judged or not respected;
- An educator with an authoritarian or dismissive approach;
- Participants feeling a stranger in the physical and social space;
- Gender imbalance;
- Domination of the process by a few;
- Lack of experience listening to others’ views; and
- Use of alienating language.

To address these barriers my transformative pedagogy adopted an approach in which we were all (facilitators and participants) explicitly co-learners and co-constructors of the process. The facilitation involved a gentle, non-judgemental challenging of views – not of the person. We sought to establish a safe pedagogical environment. The language used was pitched at the middle of the group – middle-class white Australians who had completed high school.
An openness to learning and to being challenged facilitates processes in which participants “gain the skills of philosophical abstraction which enables them to separate themselves from manipulation and from the routine flow of time” (Shor, 1987, p. 48). To encourage participants to start reflecting on themselves and their learning, certain strategies were employed. Problematising questions focused on how we were connected to the issues being discussed. A notebook was provided to all participants for the purpose of keeping a journal of their experiences in the programme, the new understandings they had and their overall learning. Weekly written feedback sheets required participants to think about their affective and cognitive learning, and their developing understandings. To provide dedicated time for reflection, the programme had a 2-week break during which time participants were to reflect on a particular topic. The interview process (discussed in Chapter 5) also required participants to stand back from themselves and their experience of the programme and describe it as a third party.

An important aspect of reflection and critique is that of self-reflection and self-critique. This is an anti-authoritarian technique reinforcing a humility of approach (Freire, 1987). Facilitators can model self-reflection and self-critique through voicing doubt, encouraging participants to challenge them and discussing their own learning. However, it must be recognised that such an approach will be rejected by some participants whose subject formation is such that they feel uncomfortable with uncertainty. A lack of confidence in the facilitator may result.

Listening, openness and preparedness to consider alternative and new information and experiences may be dangerous in a transformative pedagogy if they are not accompanied by a strong critique. Critique is one of those terms the meaning of which lies in the eyes of the beholder. Criticality is understood as a thick concept, to borrow from the language of West (hooks & West, 1991, p. 39), much more than the capacity to analyse and look for the logical flaws in an argument. As with Svi Shapiro’s (2000), ‘critical imagination,’ students were “constantly encouraged to question assumptions, challenge the ‘taken-for-granted’ dimensions of reality, and approach knowledge and truth as the stuff of human invention” (p. 60). Criticality is central to a transformative pedagogy as students who question and challenge
assumptions are unlikely to accept oppressive systems of belief which arbitrarily set one group over another.

The reflections and connections that I sought through the pedagogical process crossed a multitude of boundaries. One such boundary crossing – between theory and everyday life – is discussed by Giroux (2004): “Critical pedagogy emphasizes critical reflexivity, bridging the gap between learning and everyday life, understanding the connection between power and knowledge. . . ” (p. 34). In addition, I was keen to bridge boundaries of time – between the past, the present, and the future; and of place – between the here and the there. Through reflection I was seeking to make transparent the connections between the economic, social, psychological, and political as well as between the local, national and global.

**Social interaction**

Having fun and making connections with the people with whom we share experiences is conducive of the sense of safety we wanted to create. Social interaction facilitates the connection and relationships we wanted to cultivate among the participants, facilitators and importantly the guests who were invited into the group. Ways were sought to develop the relationships between individuals and the group as a whole. For example, each week, the programme included a break of approximately 20 minutes during which I provided appetising refreshments. This gave the collaborative team and participants the opportunity to informally socialise.

It is interesting to reflect on my desire for everybody to have a good time and also the emphasis that I placed on the social aspects of learning. Although I believe that it is pedagogically sound to build positive relationships and pay attention to connection, it is interesting to consider that this may be no more than an attempt to rationalise my socialised destiny. As Lewis (1990) writes, “for women, tension in the feminist classroom is often organized around our historically produced nurturing capacity as a feature of our psychologically internalized role as caretakers” (p. 473).

Social interaction plays a role beyond that of creating a sense of safety, it also contributes to a sense of pleasure. From my experience in Guatemala I am convinced
of the benefits that enjoyment and pleasure bring to social change pedagogy. There I learned to appreciate the importance of community, connectedness, relationship and solidarity in pedagogy and beyond. My colleagues unconsciously brought this into their pedagogy, along with other aspects of their cultural identity. Time was taken at the beginning of every workday or every educational session to enquire about each others’ well-being. Not only was connection regularly established and re-established at an emotional level, there was also a lot more physical contact – between work colleagues and between strangers brought together for an educational process. The attention given to the person displaced the functional approach to education that I was used to in Australia, where the primary attention is focused on the educational content and the individuals present are to some extent irrelevant. This social aspect of the work significantly increased the pleasure I received from the pedagogy. What we enjoy and are attracted to, we wish to continue. In any event, given that life is short, we may as well have fun in whatever we do.

I have always employed humour as an incidental pedagogical technique, a technique that reduces formality and increases connection. Obviously, this must not conflict with the other pedagogical processes and so “competitive wit, negative satire, aggressive sarcasm, narrative digressions” are not included (Shor, 1992, p. 257). Like Shor I use “the comedy of overstatement, understatement, novel comparisons, unexpected convergence of apparently unrelated items, exposed contradictions, motifs... and discovering something to be the opposite of what it seemed” (p. 258). Thus, the social element combined humour and general playfulness with the feminist ethic in which reproductive values of “connection, relationship and caring are emphasized” (Jane Roland Martin cited in Shapiro, 2000, p. 61).

**Fostering radical democratic practices**

It is not a formal representative democracy that serves the interests of social justice but rather a radical democracy characterised by active and robust participation of all. A radical democracy is tolerant of differences and accepts a variety of ways to live life. It is inclusive of the social, racial, religious and political differences present in a multicultural society. Given the existing structural barriers that privilege certain groups and disadvantage others, in order to achieve equitable outcomes, radical
democracy requires affirmative action processes to promote marginalised groups (Castles, 1997, p. 122). This would work towards the redistribution of resources and power – vital for a radical democracy to function (Shor, 1992, p. 136).

In an attempt to model the kind of society we desire, the collaborative team wanted to create a tolerant and respectful acceptance of all people, and in particular to look for ways to ensure full participation by all. The reproduction in an educational setting of forms of domination based on patriarchal, racial and class lines has been well documented by critical educators (Shor, 1992; Brookfield, 2002b; Luke, 1992; Ellsworth, 1989). To avoid reproducing inequality, facilitators needed to be alert to the possibility of certain participants dominating and to look for ways to counter this if it occurred. A distinct danger relating to democratic practice is that the tolerance needed for democracy can allow hegemonic positions to be established as the normalised discourse. What often occurs when a diversity of views is encouraged is an inevitable support of the status quo. As Brookfield (2002b) has argued using Marcuse, a diversity of views is not in itself powerful, what is needed is the critical view.

Creating democratic processes within the pedagogical experience relies to a certain extent on the use of dialogue, which was one of my central instructional processes. Donald (1992) exemplifies the relationship between radical democracy and dialogue:

> All claims to speak in the name of ‘the people’ or ‘the individual’ or ‘the class’ are assertions and justifications of a particular mode of authority . . . So could a popular politics perhaps learn from Lyotard to find . . . a politics concerned less with the people as an archaic myth of origins than with a pragmatics of the popular as an endless, disorderly dialogue? (p. 120)

These sentiments reflect my belief that it is through the social justice process that we begin to achieve the social justice vision.

**Dialogical processes**

The establishment of a supportive, yet challenging atmosphere was a necessary prior condition for the dialogical processes I sought to engender. Dialogue as understood by Freire is important because the very process is anti-authoritarian, loving and demonstrates alternative ways of being (Freire, 1987; Shor & Freire, 1987). It is an
Creating a transformative pedagogy

essential part of the process of conscientisation. For a productive dialogue Stuart Rees (2004) suggests that certain attitudes are necessary:

Dialogue presupposes a willingness to comprehend perspectives that derive from different cultural and religious experiences. It requires a certain humility about one’s own position, however convinced we are about our point of view. We cannot afford the righteousness of Bush, Blair or Howard. Polarisation of views hinders the chances of even beginning a dialogue. Care needs to be taken to overcome that tendency to rush to judgement about opponents, to discourage that need to always look for the opportunity to justify one’s own position. (Expressing Non Violence section)

The dialogical method is based on the engagement of everyone present. As distinct from the traditional role of teacher, the problem posing facilitator ensures that the knowledge is created through collaborative and shared processes. The dialogical method with its emphasis on participation, student centeredness, non-authoritarian teaching and student freedom does not, however, imply a laissez-faire process:

It is not a “free space” where you may do what you want. Dialogue takes place inside some kind of program and context. These conditioning factors create tension in achieving goals that we set for dialogic education. To achieve the goals of transformation, dialogue implies responsibility, directiveness, determination, discipline, objectives. (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 16 per Freire34)

Dialogical processes are premised on the basis that all people will participate. This is not the reality of most pedagogical situations. Among the various reasons certain people choose not to participate in dialogue in an educational setting is that they do not feel safe to express themselves. The dialogical method of education has been critiqued in feminist pedagogy for being a process that inherently excludes women and other marginalised groups (Ellsworth, 1997). We have little experience in radical social justice practices and open dialogue can be a dangerous process for some subject positions (e.g. women, indigenous people) without significant preparatory work.

Notwithstanding the critiques of the dialogical method, it was seen as having an important role to play in my transformative pedagogy. Handled by a facilitator alert

---

34 This book takes the form of a dialogue between authors thus allowing attribution of one author.
to its potentially silencing and exclusionary characteristics and creative in seeking ways to address the impact of the different subject formations of the participants, I believed that it could reduce societal silencing. Dialogical processes can refuse to perpetuate the dominance of certain voices.

**Reflections**

There were tensions apparent between the goals and practicalities of the community education programme. A major limitation was its short-term nature. It is not possible to seriously contemplate such wide-reaching pedagogical and political aims within a six-session programme of twelve hours duration. The time limitations meant that conflict existed between a flexible approach that allowed content to be developed in a way that was responsive to the group and the need to ensure that we covered what the collaborative team and I saw as important. The dense curriculum limited the flexibility that I had when implementing the programme. Because of the limited free time in the programme, I had little flexibility to vary the schedule. Another tension I felt was between creating a participatory, fun process and providing as much ‘useful’ information to the participants as possible. Having been socialised in an educational process which favours the provision of knowledge by the teacher to the student, described by Freire as ‘banking’ education (1987), I have unconsciously taken on those values, albeit while now rejecting them. In addition, I believed that some participants would value traditional methods of teaching and dismiss pedagogical approaches which appeared less ‘serious’ and more experiential. I suspected that this would particularly be the case for older participants. Coupled with the fact that providing information is a much quicker process than participatory, experiential processes, I was tempted to revert to a less student focused pedagogy. In the end I included fewer games, less movement and less time for small group discussion than was my practice in Guatemala.
Chapter 5
Methodology: A case study of critical reflective practice

Introduction

Reseaching how community members understand, experience and respond to a transformative pedagogy requires a multifaceted approach. This research was exploratory in seeking a better understanding of how people experience a particular educative process. In documenting the phenomenon created through my transformative pedagogy, I produced an account that is descriptive and explanatory (Neuman, 2000, pp. 21-23). This involved interrogating some well established a priori theory, as well as some newer, transformative pedagogical theories to see whether they were useful in challenging dominant ‘truths’ about asylum seekers in Australia.

The combination of research purposes meant that during the course of the research I was regularly using both deductive and inductive processes, aware that there was an existing theoretical basis for much of the work, but also looking to develop new knowledge from the experience of the research. This was a process of “dialectical theory-building” where existing themes in the literature interacted with the lived transformative pedagogy to create new theoretical insights (Lather, 1991, p. 55; Gibbs, 2002, p. 9).

Presenting my methodology in this chapter may create an impression of a neat and ordered process, deliberately structured from beginning to end. This would be misleading because the nature of the research required an evolving and flexible methodology. There was an ongoing iterative process of action and reflection as the preliminary analysis of data impacted on the subsequent development of the pedagogical and the research process. Like Lawrence Neuman (2000), I see this as a common characteristic of much qualitative research:

Qualitative researchers can look for patterns or relationships, but they begin analysis early in a research project, while they are still collecting data. The
results of early data analysis guide subsequent data collection. Thus, analysis is less a distinct final stage of research than a dimension of research that stretches across all stages. (p. 419)

I agree with Neuman’s (2000) point that in social science research the “researchers rarely know the *specifics* [italics added] of data analysis when they begin a project” (p. 418). This openness to context and emergent evidence, together with self-reflexivity, adds important rigour to the project. As Valerie Janesick (2000) states: “The essence of good qualitative research designs turns on the use of a set of procedures that are simultaneously open-ended and rigorous and that do justice to the complexity of the social setting under study” (p. 379).

A general outline of the research process may be useful here before getting into any further detail. Table 5.1 provides a summary of the major steps.

*Table 5.1 Overview of major steps in research and data collection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-community education programme</th>
<th>Community education programme</th>
<th>Post-community education programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selection of social justice issue for exploration through education programme</td>
<td>Six educational sessions • videotaped • observer present • weekly written feedback sheets • final written feedback • journals</td>
<td>Individual interviews of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formation of collaborative team</td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group discussions with participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity for community education programme</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection on experience by facilitators and presenters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information session on education programme</td>
<td></td>
<td>Interview of me by critical friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual interviews of participants</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing dialogue with select participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provision of draft chapters 2, 6, 7, 8 and 9 to all participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pedagogical component of the project was introduced in Chapters 3 and 4 and is further analysed in Chapters 7 to 9. The research aspect of the project is described in detail in this chapter. In combining the two components in one project there are methodological advantages and disadvantages. Having the dual role of facilitator and researcher gave me two main advantages. First, prior to commencing the programme, I already knew quite a lot about each participant from the pre-programme interview
and could incorporate that knowledge in the realisation of the pedagogy. Second, I was able to implement an explicit action-and-reflection-based praxis. My dual role as facilitator and researcher permitted me to reflect on what I was observing and being told by the participants and how it related to my practice as an educator. Lather’s (1991) comment applies well to my situation: “For researchers with emancipatory aspirations, doing empirical work offers a powerful opportunity for praxis to the extent that it enables people to change by encouraging self-reflection and a deeper understanding of their particular situations” (p. 56).

The disadvantages of the dual role of facilitator and researcher included that I had a personal investment in the research outcomes, having largely created the pedagogy. As researcher, I was aware of this investment and tried to observe it along with the other factors. Because of the dual role, there were times when I was tempted during the post-programme interviews and focus group discussions to switch into the role of educator, and indeed did so on a couple of occasions. This experience highlighted for me the importance of self-reflexivity in critical social research.

**Critical social research**

This research was located within a critical social research framework (Carspecken & Apple, 1992), incorporating postmodern insights (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). A key preliminary feature of such research is that the research is political and aware of its political nature. This links to the undertaking that in critical social research our motives and underlying assumptions are made explicit (Ngwenyama, Lyytinen, Davis, & Truex, 1997, p. 121) and is discussed further in the section on values and knowledge below. Another important feature in such research is the relevance of social relations and their historical specificity (Carspecken & Apple, 1992). Equally important is the feature of social change. A further feature of critical social research, the centrality of praxis, is developed in the following section.

Looking first at social relations, the research identifies the winners and losers on the issue of asylum seekers. It investigates how power operates between groups (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 281), in particular between Australian citizens and asylum seekers. The phenomenon under study is critiqued and situated in the social
and economic relations that give it meaning (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Wainwright, 1997). Given the importance of the underlying theoretical framework to my transformative pedagogy, this research necessarily involves significant theoretical discussion. This is a key characteristic of critical social research. Part of the counter-hegemonic approach of this project is the need to understand the relationships that we have, and asylum seekers have, to social structures (Kanpol, 1997; Schensul & Schensul, 1992; Wolcott, 1992). As David Wainwright (1997) summarises:

> At the core of a genuinely critical methodology lies the application of dialectical logic . . . The application of dialectical logic enables us to recognise the historical specificity and social construction of prevailing phenomenal forms, in order that we can act to consciously transform them, and better satisfy our needs and wants. (pp. 3-4)

Once the underlying network of historical, social and economic factors is revealed, the second key feature of the research – social change – comes into play. My research examines the “assumptions that shape our lives and institutions and [asks] how they can be altered” (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 3). The role of hegemonic processes that privilege social elites are identified and struggled against (Lather, 1991; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). As such, participants are seen as agents of change, not simply acted on by structural determinations (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Wainwright, 1997; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). In this sense, the research seeks to link with the broader community and to examine the possibility of alliances for social change (Kincheloe, 1991). Not only should critical social research be of interest to the researcher and research community, but it should also “contribute to the development of critical consciousness” (Wainwright, 1997, p. 3).

The social contribution of critical research raises the importance of the uncertain dialectic relationship between agency and structure. I was interested in finding ways to represent the participants’ experiences and reality with “explanations sensitive to the complex relationship between human agency and social structure” (Anderson, 1989, p. 251). Even accepting the limited and contingent understanding of agency discussed in Chapter 3, I sought to maximise ways for its expression.
Critical social research is not a particular research strategy, rather, the appropriate strategies must be found from general research approaches. As noted by Wainwright (1997): “Critical inquiry is diverse and flexible and only takes on a specific form when applied to the study of a particular phenomenon” (p. 3). The following section describes the particular research strategy I adopted for this project.

**A case study of critical reflective practice**

The methodology of this research is best described as a ‘case study of critical reflective practice’. This description hints at its “praxiological orientation” (Wainwright, 1997, p. 7; Kincheloe, 1991, p. 20). Through reflexivity and critique, the research has an “open-ended, dialectical theory-building that aspires to focus on and resonate with lived experience” (Lather, 1991, p. 55). My subjectivity as researcher is acknowledged in this approach as I strive for improvement in my practice as educator (Boudreau, 1997). The process of developing sound pedagogy through research is characterised by consciously reflecting on the myriad factors relevant to my pedagogy and research practice.

The concept of reflective practice has been used in the field of educational and other professional research to describe an ongoing process by which the practitioner continually pauses to question both the big picture and the detail of her or his practice (Schön, 1983; Brookfield, 1995). Fundamental to the research process was the incorporation of a variety of ways to pause and critically reflect. The questions the reflective practitioner asks are designed to get behind the general assumptions about the way things should be (Brookfield, 1995), to clarify knowledge and to encourage the ‘art’ of the particular practice (Schön, 1983). For the reflections to be ‘critical,’ they need to integrate an appreciation of the social conditions that surround the practice and focus on unequal power relations both at the micro and macro level (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 5; Brookfield, 1995, pp. 8-9). The transformative pedagogy embodied in the community education programme is the object of critical reflection in this research project. From the critical reflection I will be better able to implement “pedagogical change in light of discoveries [I] make, and . . . monitor the effects” (Smyth, McInerney, Hattam, & Lawson, 1999, p. 11).
Part of a critical reflective practice is self-reflexivity. Although it is not possible ever to transcend one’s positionality, by practising self-reflexivity I seek to know and minimise the limitations of my socialisation. Self-reflexivity is also important due to the additional investment I have in the research arising from my political and personal relationship with the pedagogy. The reflexivity between researcher and the research process is continuous. It needs to be present in conceptualising the project, collecting the data and analysing the data. It incorporates a “sceptical approach to the testimony of respondents . . . and to the development of theoretical schema” and is a strategy by which the researcher “can manage the analytical oscillation between observation and theory in a way which is valid to him or herself” (Wainwright, 1997, p. 7).

My research adopted a pragmatic approach enabling me to vary my methods. Abbas Tashakkori and Charles Teddlie (1998) explain why a pragmatic approach is useful. They exhort us: “Study what interests and is of value to you, study it in different ways that you deem appropriate, and use the results in ways that can bring about positive consequences within your value system” (p. 30).

The case of this research is the development, implementation and experience of the transformative pedagogy enacted through the community education programme. It is a “bounded system” with “working parts; it is purposive . . . It is an integrated system” (Stake, 2000, p. 436). The primary focus of the research is the way that the underlying theoretical principles of my transformative pedagogy become a lived experience (and the implications for social justice). As such it fits with Robert Stake’s (2000) definition of an instrumental case study. Based on the earlier work of Stake, William Shadish, Thomas Cook and Laura Leviton (1991), identify the following features of case study methods:

Descriptions that are complex, holistic, and involving a myriad of not highly isolated variables; data that are likely to be gathered at least partly by personalistic observation; and a writing style that is informal, perhaps narrative, possibly with verbatim quotation, illustration, and even allusion and metaphor. Comparisons are implicit rather than explicit. Themes and hypotheses may be important, but they remain subordinate to the understanding of the case. (p. 283)
Methodology: A case study of critical reflective practice

The research strategy follows the praxis methodology of the pedagogy. The basic components of this research – action (design and implementation of the programme) and reflection (theory building from the experience) – are the basic components of a praxis approach (Lather, 1991). In this way, the research process and the pedagogy were mutually reinforcing. The praxis cycle is also a feature of participatory action research, a common methodology for reflective practice and one which shares the philosophical approach of this research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). As with participatory action research, this project is based on “shared ownership of research projects, community-based analysis of social problems, and an orientation toward community action” reflecting “a commitment to bring together broad social analyses; the self-reflective collective self-study of practice, the ways language is used, organization and power in a local situation, and action to improve things” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 568). The spiral of steps involving action and reflection are integral to my pedagogy and this research (Tripp, 1992).

Although the participants in the programme were encouraged to become involved in the content and process of the education programme, they were not encouraged to participate in the realisation of the research. However, the following elements reflect a participatory action research approach:

1. The participants were not seen as objects to be exploited but received something from their involvement. Even those participants who did not wish to interrupt the dominant discourse benefitted from their participation. (They confirmed this unanimously in the final interview.) The benefits included greater knowledge, better self-awareness and friendly social activity.

2. Aspects of the programme including the timing of the two-week break and some of the content were determined by the participants.

3. In the interviews I asked participants to reflect on what they learned and what their participation meant in relation to asylum seekers.

4. After the completion of the programme two participants and I organised a social event and we invited the guest presenters who had come to Australia as refugees.

5. On several occasions after the finalisation of the programme, I discussed certain theoretical issues with select participants. These issues included a gender analysis with a feminist participant, a discussion on the issue of transparency of
educational objectives with a male and female participant (separately) and a discussion on privilege with a male participant.

6. The preliminary theorising and reporting of the research was taken back to the participants for their comments and additional reflections.

Lather’s ‘research as praxis’ generally relates to research carried out with participants who are members of oppressed groups. Given that the participants could (and did) include people comfortable within the dominant discourse, the fully dialogic, negotiated research espoused by Lather was modified to suit the situation. Figure 5.1 shows the components of the praxis cycle of this research.

**Figure 5.1 Praxis cycle of this research**

The inclusion of prior experience and future practice in the praxis cycle is an important part of linking this research into my ongoing project of developing social change pedagogies. This research will be disseminated in a number of ways. The members of the collaborative team are both the recipients and multipliers of the research outcomes. I will also provide a summary of the research to activists working on asylum seeker and refugee issues and social justice educators’ networks. From the programme developed I will create an educator’s kit for the One World Education
Methodology: A case study of critical reflective practice

and Resource Centre and other global education and development organisations. I have presented aspects of this research at international conferences and submitted articles to international journals.

As with feminist research approaches, *collaboration* was a distinctive element throughout this research. The ‘collaborative theorizing’ with the collaborative team, critical friends and selected participants was as important as collaboration during the early stages of the research. Lather (1991) describes the process of collaborative theorizing thus: “Submitting concepts and explanations to the scrutiny of all those involved sets up the possibility for theoretical exchange, the collaborative theorizing at the heart of research that both advances emancipatory theory and empowers the researched” (p. 64). Equality and empathy were also key ingredients. The collaborative team and I worked together with a shared commitment to disrupt the dominant discourse and see how to transform an unjust situation (Schensul & Schensul, 1992). Jean Schensul and Stephen Schensul (1992) suggest that in seeking to solve complex social and political problems of communities or nations:

> All parties or “stakeholders” must be involved in identifying, defining, and struggling to solve the “problem”. . . . Strategies for solving problems may lie in investigating the dimensions of a problem, in testing and evaluating new approaches, in the continuous interaction of research and action, or in using research to influence policy or to promote political or economic change.

(p. 196)

It is important to note, however, that the involvement of the collaborative team beyond the pedagogical project and into the research project was sporadic. The following gives some indication of the ways the members became involved in the research process:

- After the completion of the programme, we debriefed, discussing our preliminary understandings of what was emerging from the research. We also discussed the extent to which a disclosure of social justice objectives should be made in such educational processes.
- Team members who were also facilitators critically reflected on their sessions, considered the participants’ responses to their sessions and commented on relevant parts of the drafts of this dissertation.
- Murray was the member who most played a role in the research process. He was present at all of the community education sessions as an observer and kept notes on the way each session developed. During the course of the programme, I met with him to discuss various issues arising from the sessions, the participants’
feedback sheets and my reflections. He was present at one of the focus groups held after the programme finished.

I was keen to have greater involvement of the collaborative team but all the members were involved in a variety of activities and had limited time available for the project. Nonetheless, the members of the collaborative team to varying degrees were keen to share the results of the research.

Values and knowledge

This section does not deal with values and knowledge in a metaphysical way, but rather makes their place in the research more transparent. Contrary to positivists who consider that inquiry should and can be value free, this research was conceived and developed because of a commitment to certain values. The research integrates my commitment to social justice and my search for greater moments of freedom. Kincheloe (1991) puts it well:

Critical qualitative researchers have accepted the fact that inquiry is anything but a neutral activity, as it draws upon our values, our hopes, and the mysteries which come out of our social worlds . . . Indeed, many philosophers of research argue that educational research is meaningful only to the extent that it has a value orientation . . . Thus, from the critical perspective an awareness of the value orientation of research is essential, as it brings to awareness the fundamental embodiments of power which move social and educational events. (p. 162)

The idea of research as critical reflective practice highlights the need for the research process to be coherent with the value base it espouses. By achieving coherence, Lather (1991) argues that emancipatory results may be obtained: “Both the substance of emancipatory theory and the process by which that theory comes to ‘click’ with people’s sense of the contradictions in their lives are the products of dialectical rather than top-down impositional practices” (p. 59).

This research demonstrates my attempt not only to understand the world but also to act on it. It envisages a collective rather than an individual employment of power to analyse the causes of oppression, exclusion and rejection and to work to change those conditions. The values base affects the research topic, methods, analysis and theoretical interpretations. Thus, as best I can, I make clear at every stage my
assumptions, foundations, biases and even the emotional content of this research. In doing so, I continue the process of self-critique, examining the ways in which the methodology of the research could have more fully reflected that value system. Being aware of my value base, I can step back from that position. The common philosophical underpinnings between critical pedagogy and critical social research allow me to adopt the words of Giroux (2004) and apply them to my methodology:

Pedagogy[research] is never innocent and if it is to be understood and problematized as a form of academic labor, educators[researchers] must not only critically question and register their own subjective involvement in how and what they teach[research], they must also resist all calls to depoliticize pedagogy[research] through appeals to either scientific objectivity or ideological dogmatism. (p. 38)

This discussion of values leads to questions about what it is that I can purport to say about my research. What is the knowledge generated by it? Working in the critical tradition and influenced by postmodernism, it is important to note that there is no state of absolute knowledge free from the filters imposed by the orientations of my subject position. The imperfect nature of our understanding does not mean that there is nothing knowable or that all knowledge is relative. However, I do reject “positivistic perspectives of rationality, objectivity, and truth” (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 19). Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) see critical hermeneutics (which holds that all research – even perception itself – is an act of interpretation) as reminding us that:

No pristine interpretation exists – indeed, no methodology, social or educational theory, or discursive form can claim a privileged position that enables the production of authoritative knowledge. Researchers must always speak/write about the world in terms of something else in the world. . . . As creatures of the world, we are oriented to it in a way that prevents us from grounding our theories and perspectives outside of it. Thus, whether we like it or not, we are all destined as interpreters to analyze from within its boundaries and blinders. (p. 286)

These comments reflect the feminist and postmodernist critique of researcher as neutral. Acknowledging that my assumptions and beliefs are never fully knowable, I wish to strip away these filters as much as possible. In this respect I would like to adopt the phrase used by Shadish et al. (1991), that I approach this research “epistemologically humble” (p. 318).
I enter the research with the hope that the educational process I designed will have a positive impact on people and assist in the creation of critical sensibilities. This highlights the need to be aware of how my role as educator influences my role as researcher. Notwithstanding my personal attachment to the educational programme, I genuinely wanted to know how people experienced it, how they engaged, what worked and what did not. I am more interested in understanding what was not successful and why, than in meaningless and insincere confirmation. My commitment to social justice is bigger than my commitment to the particular programme developed. However, my personal investment in the educational programme and my assumptions behind it will inevitably have shaped how I realised the role of researcher.

Trying to make my investment in the research as explicit as possible maximises the “core principle of validity, to be truthful (i.e., avoid false or distorted accounts)” of qualitative research (Neuman, 2000, p. 171). It ties in with Wainwright’s (1997) conceptualisation of reflexivity as a way to achieving research validity:

Reflexivity refers to the researcher’s conscious self-understanding of the research process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983), or more specifically, to a skeptical approach to the testimony of respondents (i.e., Are they telling me what I want to hear?), and to the development of theoretical schema (i.e., Am I seeing what I want to see?). The purpose of reflexivity is not to produce an objective or value-free account of the phenomenon. (p. 7)

As with many issues in qualitative research, the notion of validity is not without its problems. As Harry Wolcott indicates (1990), the term is problematic for qualitative research given its association with testing and measurement theory. However, I am not ready to discard the notion as Wolcott does, but rather use it, as other qualitative researchers do (see writers such as Phillips, Goetz and LeCompte cited in Garman, 1995), to require attention to the quality of the research. As such, some of the criteria for validity identified by Noreen Garman and Maria Piantanida are relevant. They use the criteria of verité in which it is asked whether the research 'rings true,' whether it is “consistent with accepted knowledge in the field” and whether it is “intellectually honest and authentic” (Garman, 1995, On determining the 'quality' of qualitative research section). The rigor and integrity of the research are further relevant criteria in judging quality (Garman, 1996, p. 19). Looking at validity in
critical social research from a perspective different to other forms of social research, Lather (1991) sees the degree to which the research process “re-orient, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it” as providing an important aspect of catalytic validity (p. 68). Garman uses a similar, although much less political criterion of ‘utility’ or whether the work is professionally useful and relevant. Wainwright (1997) picks up the issue of catalytic validity:

The point is not simply to reveal the oppressive aspects of existing phenomenal forms as an end in itself, but to embed this knowledge in the consciousness . . . Whilst the objective of critical social research is to inform conscious activity, it also derives its validity from active involvement in political struggle. From this perspective the production of knowledge is deeply embedded in the process of social transformation; both informing, and derived from, the struggle to consciously change the material world. (p. 6)

Chapter 9 explores how this research may have informed conscious activity and been a catalyst for active involvement in political struggle.

Data collection

Because of the multiple aspects of this research – exploratory, descriptive and explanatory – it required the flexibility facilitated by a pragmatic framework. There are advantages discussed by Greene et al. (cited in Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) in using multiple approaches with various data sources. To Greene et al.’s list which follows, I add that multiple approaches are particularly useful in that they provide an external brake to the researcher bias present in all research. The advantages of multiple approaches include:

- triangulation, which promotes convergence of results;
- complementarity, which allows the examination of overlapping and different facets of a phenomenon;
- initiation, or the discovering of paradoxes, contradictions and fresh perspectives;
- and expansion of the research by adding breadth and scope to the project. (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 43)

Critical researchers have taken the concept of triangulation beyond its original psychometric definition of multiple measures, to include “multiple data sources, methods and theoretical schemes” (Lather, 1991, pp. 66-67). A fourth common form of triangulation provided by Norman Denzin is investigator triangulation or the use of several different researchers (cited in Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 41).
Chapter 5

Postmodern researchers have taken the notion of triangulation a further step away from its positivist origins and replaced it with the concept of crystallisation. This is a corrective in so far as it recognises the inherent complexity of all social research objects and the need to approach them in multiple ways. The crystallisation approach of this research is indicated in Table 5.2. Janesick (2000) adopts Laurel Richardson’s conception of crystallisation:

Crystallization recognizes the many facets of any given approach to the social world as a fact of life. The image of the crystal replaces that of the land surveyor and the triangle. We move on from plane geometry to the new physics. The crystal “combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, and alter, but are not amorphous” (Richardson, 1994, p. 522). (p. 391)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multiplicity of theory</th>
<th>The multiple theoretical schemes include critical theory, critical pedagogy, feminist theory, popular education, cultural studies and postmodernism.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiplicity of methods</td>
<td>Methods of data creation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• From participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ interviews/conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ written feedback (sessional and final)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ oral feedback on the research with selected participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• From facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ informal discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ reflective notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• From presenters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ informal discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ reflective notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• From myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ interviewed by critical friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ reflective notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Observation: contemporaneous notes from observer; video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple investigators</td>
<td>Occasional co-researcher status taken by some members of the collaborative team, participants, and other critical friends.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In discussing data collection it is relevant to note that the information obtained in the interviews/conversations/focus groups is likely to have been affected by my dual role.
Methodology: A case study of critical reflective practice

of interviewer and educator. The rapport with participants established during the programme made it probable that the participants toned down any criticism of the educational programme to avoid offending me. To try and ameliorate this, I deliberately addressed the issue during the programme (in respect of the written feedback sheets and in the oral feedback in the final session) and during the interviews/focus groups, by making positive comments when criticism was offered and advising them that I had the ‘hide of an elephant.’

Interviews/conversations

All participants were interviewed on two occasions. The first occasion was in the week between the information session (held on 6 August 2003) and the commencement of the community education programme (pre-CEP interview). The second occasion was in the two-week period after the community education programme finished (post-CEP conversation). The pre-CEP interview was a relatively structured interview that lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The interview schedule is contained in Appendix 5.1. The final question in the schedule was added spontaneously during the first interview because I was interested in participants’ perception of where their social justice views came from. The areas that I wanted to cover in the pre-CEP interview related to levels of knowledge about asylum seekers, the relationship between asylum seekers and Australian culture, identity, social difference, attitudes towards asylum seekers, behaviour towards asylum seekers, human rights and social justice. The relatively structured approach of the pre-CEP interview is consistent with much critical social research which “entail[s] a much more focused approach to interviewing, in which questions are asked about specific issues derived from the broader social critique” (Wainwright, 1997, p. 9).

The post-CEP conversation was a much less structured affair. The participants and I knew each other reasonably well by this stage and were comfortable in each other’s company. I was keen for the participants to feel free to raise any relevant issue and discuss the programme and their experience in terms that they chose. Depending on whether they also participated in a focus group, the conversations lasted between 40 minutes and 1 hour 15 minutes. The areas covered in the post-CEP conversation

35 Where participant transcript is used in subsequent chapters, the pre-CEP interview is identified as Interview 1 and the post-CEP conversation is identified as Interview 2.
were knowledge and beliefs around asylum seekers; attitudes towards asylum seekers; affective responses to asylum seekers; behaviours towards asylum seekers; and whether their participation in the programme had impacted on these matters. This conversation commenced with a very broad open-ended question that allowed the participants to steer the conversation. By the end of the conversation I ensured that I had covered all of the areas contained in Appendix 5.2. The less structured format facilitated participants to raise issues that I had not considered.

Both the interviews and the focus groups had a variety of types of questions. Some questions were designed to elicit general information. Others sought more reflective processes from the participants, in keeping with the philosophical approach discussed by Lather (1991): “The goal of emancipatory research is to encourage self-reflection and deeper understanding on the part of the researched at least as much as it is to generate empirically grounded theoretical knowledge” (p. 60).

**Focus groups**

All participants were invited to take part in a focus group held after the completion of the programme and ten of the fifteen participants chose to do so. The subject matter for the focus group discussions was the community education programme – its content and process (Appendix 5.3). For the participants who chose not to participate in a focus group, issues of content and process were explored in the post-CEP conversation. The reason for using focus groups for some of the post-programme data collection was to encourage a more honest and critical level of engagement with the education programme. I deliberately grouped like-minded participants together so that their presence would be mutually supportive of greater openness. I also wanted to ameliorate any power differential between the participants and me, and our socialised reluctance to criticise openly. In addition, I believed that the interaction between the participants would be conducive of a deeper exploration of the issues. Three separate focus groups were held.

**Feedback Sheets**

Weekly feedback sheets (Appendix 5.4) were distributed to participants at the end of each night’s programme and participants were given five minutes to fill them in. They were deliberately designed not to be onerous but to provide an easy way to
Methodology: A case study of critical reflective practice

capture some contemporaneous reflections. In addition, the feedback sheets were a tool for encouraging the participants to reflect on their learning, at the same time as providing me with a means to see their reflections. Participants could elect to complete the feedback sheets anonymously or with their identity disclosed. Approximately half the participants disclosed their identity. The feedback sheets sought to record information relating to new knowledge, new experiences, the impact of the session, how the participants felt during the session, and their reflections since the preceding week. The feedback sheet provided me with the opportunity to reiterate to participants that I was interested not only in their intellectual response to the experience but also their emotional and somatic responses.

A final and more thorough feedback sheet (Appendix 5.5) was distributed at the end of the last week. This sought responses on topics such as the materials and handouts, the content of the sessions, the presenters/facilitators, and ways to improve the programme.

Observation
Murray, a member of the collaborative team, was the observer at each of the sessions and recorded the ways in which he saw the participants engage with the various activities and with each other. The observation sheet for the first week of the programme is provided in Appendix 5.6. This sheet was used as a prompt to the kinds of things that were to be observed and noted.

Given Murray’s role as observer, he was able to provide important input during the course of the programme. We discussed the way that the programme was unfolding and the written feedback which had been given. As well as the benefit of his observations, these discussions provided an opportunity for me as researcher and educator to ‘think out loud’ and reflect during the process.

In addition to a live observer, all sessions were videotaped from a fixed point. The videotaping may have influenced how some of the participants behaved during the
sessions. This is one of the unknowable factors in this research. Only one participant commented on the video’s presence in the post-CEP conversation.  

Reflections from facilitators and presenters

Some months after the completion of the programme, facilitators and presenters were asked to comment on their experiences. I provided them with either a written or verbal summary of the participants’ and my reflections on their sessions. The facilitators/presenters’ comments were either provided to me in written form or I recorded their comments and they responded to my written summary of our conversation. A negotiated form of their reflections was thus obtained.

Journal

In the folder of materials given to participants at the first session was a pen and notebook for them to record their ongoing reflections during the programme. I advised them that I would like to receive their journals at the end of the programme, although there was no obligation. The journal was intended to fulfil two principal roles. Primarily the journal was to provide a place for the participants to reflect on their experiences and learning through the programme. In addition, it was to provide an additional source of data. Only six of the participants provided me with their journals (and I believe that it was only these six who kept a journal). The journals varied greatly in the amount and degree of reflection. Although they were not a significant source of data, the journals that were maintained contained some interesting reflections.

Interviewing me

Shortly after the completion of the programme, I sought out critical friends and requested that they interview me about my experience in the programme and the learning I derived. This reflected my position as both a learner and an educator. It also reflected my position as participant in the research process, albeit a participant quite distinct from others. It was an invaluable process that greatly facilitated my reflection, learning and theorising. I find that it is often in expressing thoughts that they become clear.

36 She indicated that at the beginning of each session she was very conscious of it.
37 Prof. Barry Down (who later became one of my supervisors), Assoc. Prof. Irene Styles and Dr. Joan Squelch.
All interviews and focus group discussions, including the interviews of me, were recorded and transcribed.

**Data analysis**

In approaching data analysis I started from the position that the data collected was not the same as the real experience or thing being examined. As such, this work does not make any claim to reveal the “final truth, the essence of . . . any form of experience” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 289). As with critical hermeneutics, I am “more comfortable with interpretive approaches that assume that the meaning of human experience can never be fully disclosed – neither to the researcher nor even to the human who experienced it” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 289). In analysing the data it must be remembered that the assignment of meaning to a term is an internal process; meaning comes from inside us. And because our experiences, knowledge and attitudes differ, we often misinterpret each other’s messages while under the illusion that a common understanding has been achieved (Barker, n.d.). The data collection *process* significantly affects the data collected. As a result, the raw information that is analysed is already distorted because of what is said and what is left unsaid.

The research questions required both inductive and deductive analytical processes. The final analysis is found not solely in the data nor in the theory, but rather in the repeated interplay between the two or “open-ended dialectical theory building” (Lather, 1991). The emphasis on the position of theory is slightly different for each question. Certain research questions are more grounded in the data. For others, *a priori* theory plays a bigger role. Some examples of themes that were generated inductively (from data) are the role of conflict in a transformative pedagogy, and the importance of listening in a transformative pedagogy. Examples of themes that were generated deductively (from existing theory) include the role of economic insecurity and emotional responses to the pedagogy.

High levels of familiarity with the data are an essential precursor and ongoing part of the data analysis process (Weitzman, 2000). Because I was responsible for
conducting the interviews and focus groups, transcribing the recordings, coding the transcripts and analysing the data, I quickly became immersed in all the nuances of what the participants and other sources revealed. Without this closeness to the data, important issues could more easily be missed and my ability to tell the story would also be compromised (Janesick, 2000, p. 389).

The entire interview, focus group, written feedback and observation data were transcribed, input into QSR N6 (Qualitative Solutions Research, 2002) and coded. QSR N6 is one of a number of software programmes designed to facilitate qualitative data analysis. (The journals were not coded as only six participants maintained a journal and there was significant variation in the way that they used the journals.) The discussion and reflective notes of the presenters and facilitators were not coded as their purpose was to add an additional level of complexity to our understanding of the experience of the core participants in a transformative pedagogy. Appendix 5.7 shows the coding system that I developed in QSR N6.

Each of the research questions required slightly different approaches to data analysis although the principle of open-ended dialectical theory building was consistent. For example, in seeking to explain the dominant discourse about asylum seekers and how the participants are located in that discourse, I applied a membership categorisation analysis (Silverman, 2000) to the data and identified three broad categories – monoculturalist, multiculturalist and globalist. The process involved active interpretive work choosing the descriptive categories and analysis of the implications of the choice (Silverman, 2000, p. 827). In relation to the research question: “What are the dynamics of bringing together a community education group and what is learned from this in relation to transformative pedagogy?” I created a number of initial conceptual maps to see how the evolving themes of pedagogical spaces could be developed and to connect their relationship with broader social considerations. In working towards an enhanced understanding of “transformative pedagogical approaches that assist in the development of critical sensibility” (research sub-question 3), I adopted the traditional bracketing approach used by sociologists and others. The bracketing approach I used in the analysis reflects Janesick’s (2000) approach:
Then the researcher may categorize, group, and cluster the data in order to interpret the data. The researcher uses constant comparative analysis to look for statements and indices of behavior that occur over time and in a variety of periods during the study. In addition, bracketing allows the researcher to find points of tension and conflict and what doesn’t fit. (pp. 390-1)

To undertake the bracketing I followed a process similar to that set out by Denzin (cited in Janesick, 2000). In relation to a particular phenomenon, the bracketing process has the following steps:

1. Locate within the personal experience, or self-story, key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question.
2. Interpret the meanings of these phrases as an informed reader.
3. Obtain the participants’ interpretation of these findings, if possible.
4. Inspect these meanings for what they reveal about the essential, recurring features of the phenomenon being studied.
5. Offer a tentative statement or definition of the phenomenon in terms of the essential recurring features identified in Step 4. (p. 390)

The variety of data analysis techniques employed followed the pragmatic injunction to use whatever works.

**Reporting of participants’ words and actions**

The way in which I present the participants in this dissertation is the result of some deliberation. I sought to give a “candid portrayal of [the community education programme] that is true to the experiences of people being studied” to maximise the study’s authenticity (Neuman, 2000, p. 171). I would have liked to present the participants in a way that better reflects them as whole people – subjects in their own right – and considered doing this via individual case studies. For various reasons, including the relatively short time that I was with the participants and the impossibility of trying to reliably represent another person in any event, I did not go down this path. More importantly, this research places greater emphasis on the transformative pedagogy than on the individual participants. However, the downside of organising the dissertation around pedagogical themes is that the voices of participants are presented in a relatively disembodied and fragmented way. Although this may better represent the “fragmented, de-centered self” of the postmodern subject (Lather, 1991, p. 37), it creates a tension with the pedagogy which is underpinned by a humanist valuing of people and relationships.
In reporting participants’ voices I have made minor modifications to their speech as recorded and transcribed. This was done so that the sense of the words was not altered and it allowed the words to flow better. For example, words and phrases that have been removed include but are not limited to: ‘um’, ‘I guess’, ‘really’, ‘sort of’, ‘yeah’, ‘just’, ‘you know’, when used as fillers and pauses. In addition, grammatical errors have been corrected, such as inconsistent tenses. In this way, participants’ ability to clearly articulate their thoughts is not the primary focus. This was preferable given that I am not doing a semiotic or linguistic analysis but rather a content analysis.

At times, participants commented on other participants during interviews, focus groups, conversations or written feedback. I have referred to the participant who was the subject of the comment as X. It will be a relatively straightforward process for the group of participants to be able to identify each other behind the pseudonyms so I felt that another level of anonymity was needed.

**Ethical issues**

A number of ethical issues could have arisen from my research because of the controversial nature of asylum seekers. However, I took a number of steps to ensure that the research followed ethical guidelines. The non-judgmental pedagogical approach adopted ameliorated some ethical concerns. Ethical issues may also arise out of the power of the researcher to exploit, manipulate or cause harm to participants. The general ethical test proposed by Maurice Pappworth is that no research ought to be conducted “in which a researcher would not also involve his kin, closest friends, and himself” (cited in Roth, 2004, Research Methods: Brief Historical Context section). As explained, I was directly involved in all aspects of the research and would happily have involved my kin and closest friends.

Furthermore, it should be clear that I did not see my position as being superior to others because I was also a co-learner. Nonetheless, I was aware that some participants might have positioned me in a powerful position. Part of my ongoing reflection through the research process was on the assumptions, arising from our different subject positions, that all of us brought to our interaction, and my ethical
obligation to make these as explicit as possible and not take advantage of them. The consent form that the participants signed advised them that the purpose of the study was to “find out how attitudes [towards asylum seekers] are formed and how an educational intervention can affect attitudes” (Appendix 5.8). They were advised in the information session of the dialogical nature of the educative process and of our positions as co-learners. During the programme they were encouraged to bring their issues to the group and be involved to some degree in the direction of the programme. Participants were able to determine their own level of participation with some having a more passive role and others a more active role during the programme and after. In addition, not all participants took part in all of the research data collection processes. For example, some choose not to participate in the focus groups and some did not maintain a journal. The level of involvement, control and ongoing dialogue with the participants is indicative of an ethical approach that extends the informed consent (characteristic of utilitarian ethics) by introducing the ‘deontological ethics’ notion of ‘reciprocity’ (Flinders, 1992, p. 104). In addition, by aiming for some degree of reciprocity, the research tries to ameliorate the one-sided balance of power and achieve a more democratic form of knowledge production (Carspecken & Apple, 1992). This meets some of the postmodernist concerns about ‘appropriation’ and ‘objectification’ of participants (Anderson, 1989).

I encouraged participants to contact me outside the community education programme and maintain contact with me after the end of the data collection. This permitted ongoing dialogue about the programme and the research with five of the participants. All participants were provided with the preliminary “description, emerging analysis, and conclusions” in the form of draft Chapters 2, 6, 7, 8 and 9 on which to make comments (Appendix 5.10). Although Lather talks about this procedure as a means of ensuring face validity, it also plays the role of ensuring that participants are not treated as objects of research but have some control over the product. This approach also addresses the danger that participants can be misrepresented, either wilfully or by misinterpretation. The standard research practices of using pseudonyms and not

38 Members of the collaborative team also signed a consent form (Appendix 5.9).
39 None of the participants wished to make any changes and a number commented on the accuracy with which they had been portrayed.
including any details that would allow the participants to be identified beyond the research group ensured their anonymity.

A final ethical issue relates to the potential of the topic to cause participants anxiety or distress. Asylum seekers was a controversial topic and the pedagogy sought to challenge the dominant discourse, albeit gently. Although procedures were in place to ensure personal harm did not occur, that potential nonetheless existed. This potential was discussed in the first session of the programme and participants were advised that appropriate support could be provided should this occur.  

**Reflections**

In reflecting on methodological issues, there are two separate areas that deserve comment. The first relates to how the research was viewed by the university’s Human Research Ethics Committee. The second relates to some methodological aspects that I would seek to anticipate better if undertaking similar research in the future. The controversial nature of the subject matter of this research made the journey through the university’s Human Research Ethics Committee a little more complicated than usual. Unlike most doctoral research projects, the research proposal was not approved by the committee on initial application. Rather, my principal supervisor was summoned to attend a meeting of the committee. I requested to attend this meeting after providing them with a written response to their minor questions. At this meeting, a wide-ranging discussion of the research ensued during which two members of the committee were concerned about my definition of ‘asylum seeker.’ They asked if this would include ‘illegals.’ I was surprised by their use of inaccurate language which had become part of the dominant discourse. This term used by the media and politicians was designed to dehumanise and create fear. The same members queried the appropriateness of the university doing social justice research. I read to them from the university’s publicised areas of research strength that included research “to promote social justice.” The acceptance of the dominant discourse, by at least some academics, was an early illustration of the power of the media on people’s understanding of this issue.

---

40 No-one sought this.
Moving to the second issue, some of the methodological aspects that I would try and improve if I were to undertake similar research again arise from my inexperience, feeling rushed for time and external factors. It would have been advantageous to have the collaborative team more involved in the research process. Likewise the research would have had greater reciprocity if I had identified particular participants who could become co-researchers, for example those participants who shared the same social justice goals. If undertaking similar research, I would obtain the participants’ reflections on how they believe their socio-economic position influenced their attitudes to asylum seekers and their engagement with the education programme. Finally, I would integrate the journal better for both pedagogical and research purposes, perhaps asking weekly questions to encourage participants to maintain the journal more consistently. (I would also maintain my own journal more religiously!)
Chapter 6

Participants in the transformative pedagogy

Introduction

It is time to meet the participants who were involved in this project. It is through them that we learn about the lived transformative pedagogy. This chapter introduces the participants and positions them within Australian society. It describes the positions participants (and members of the collaborative team) held within the discourses about asylum seekers. These descriptions are based primarily on the pre-CEP interview, my first significant contact with most of them.\(^{41}\) Given the period of time that I spent with the participants during the programme, I formed relationships with them and connected with them in different ways. We joked together and shared parts of our life stories over a period of approximately two months. Writing this chapter highlighted for me the ethical issues involved in social research. Finding a way to begin to present the participants here was not easy. I cannot accurately know the complexity of the people who participated, let alone capture and represent this complexity in text, graphics or pictures in a way that does justice to them. However, having sent early drafts of Chapters 2, 6, 7, 8 and 9 to participants for their comments, I am satisfied that there is no significant misrepresentation.

The participants

As an educator I enjoy getting to know new people through an educational process. In this research, I was also able to explore profound social and political issues with the participants through the interview process that accompanied the educational programme. An important point to make is that the people drawn to the community education programme were people who were already highly motivated and interested in the issue of asylum seekers. They are not a representative sample of the wider community. They had considered the issue and already formed strong views. Given the effort involved in attending the programme, it is very likely that their views were

\(^{41}\) All of the participants’ quotes are from the pre-CEP interview unless otherwise indicated.
stronger than that of the general population. Correspondingly, it may be more unlikely that they would change their opinions.

Their comments show that many of the participants were already anchored in their positions. A number indicated that part of their desire to participate was to have the opportunity to share their beliefs with others. The following comments indicated why some participants decided to be involved:

*It is very much an issue that I like, that I’m interested in. I figured that it is one way that I can get my views across to other people.* (Tony)

*I suppose because of my negative attitudes to immigration, I’m keen to put the alternative point that population growth is an environmental problem.* (Angus)

*Just to learn more about it but also to have . . . I suppose in a selfish way, to have a venue to express my views. Because I’ve found it very frustrating that there is nowhere really to go, actually to discuss things.* (Steve)

To provide a two-dimensional snapshot of the participants, Table 6.1 gives some basic socio-economic indicators. The participants are arranged in the table based on how they positioned themselves in relation to community attitudes to asylum seekers in the pre-CEP interview. Those with attitudes most negative towards asylum seekers come first. The relatively wide range of age, income, religion and educational level of the participants is unusual because adult education programmes which tend to attract well educated, economically advantaged males (Crowther, 2000, p. 479).

Table 6.1 Socio-economic indicators of the participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age*</th>
<th>Born</th>
<th>Annual Income</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Educational qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hal (M)</td>
<td>45–54</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>B/n $15 600 and $26 000</td>
<td>Christian (SDA)</td>
<td>TAFE / trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mel (M)</td>
<td>55–64</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Under $15 600</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Part of high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derek (M)</td>
<td>55–64</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>Part of university degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angus (M)</td>
<td>65–74</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>B/n $26 000 and $ 36 400</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul (M)</td>
<td>65–74</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Under $15 600</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>University degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants in the transformative pedagogy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age*</th>
<th>Born</th>
<th>Annual Income</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Educational qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talia (F)</td>
<td>35–44</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Under $15 600</td>
<td>Own**</td>
<td>Presently at university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron (M)</td>
<td>55–64</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>B/n $36 400</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>TAFE / trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom (M)</td>
<td>55–64</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Under $15 600</td>
<td>Buddhist / own*</td>
<td>Part of high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driandra (F)</td>
<td>35–44</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>Over $78 000</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>University degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lem (M)</td>
<td>25–34</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Over $78 000</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Part of university degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet (F)</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>B/n $52 000</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve (M)</td>
<td>45–54</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>B/n $15 600</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>TAFE/trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony (M)</td>
<td>45–54</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Over $78 000</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances (F)</td>
<td>55–64</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Under $15 600</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>University degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The age categories are those used in the ABS national census.

** ‘Own’ religion indicates that the participant had a set of spiritual beliefs that they did not align to any specific religious tradition.

The broader community

It is useful to consider how the participants are positioned compared to the wider community. Twelve of the 14 participants lived within 5 km of the place where the programme was held. The Victoria Park area is an area of mixed socio-economic groupings. What was a traditionally working class area has, over the last 20 years, become more appealing to young middle-class singles and couples because of its proximity to the city of Perth. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) creates an index of relative socio-economic advantage/disadvantage for all of the statistical areas it surveys. The results from the latest census in 2001 indicate that for a

Note: “The Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage/Disadvantage is derived from the 2001 Census of Population and Housing and measures aspects of social and economic conditions in an area… Low values indicate areas of disadvantage; and high values indicate areas of advantage. . . Deciles are named from 1 (lowest decile) to 10 (highest decile). If a Statistical Local Area (SLA) has a decile ranking of 1 then it would fall within that group of SLAs that comprise the lowest 10% of SLAs in terms of its Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage/Disadvantage… The index value of an area is constructed from attributes of the population in that area such as educational attainment, income, employment and occupation.” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005)
metropolitan area, the Victoria Park Statistical Local Area (SLA) is very much a mid-ranking metropolitan socio-economic area. Of the seven Statistical Local Areas in the South East Metropolitan Statistical Subdivision, Victoria Park is ranked third in relation to its index of relative socio-economic advantage/disadvantage (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003a).

The participants were on average older (median age 45-54 category) than the broader community (34 years of age in 2001 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002)). As with the group of participants, the majority of people in the Victoria Park SLA was born in Australia (63%). Approximately 10% of the population in the Victoria Park SLA was born in Asian countries and 5.5% was born in Europe (excluding the United Kingdom). The United Kingdom was the main country of birth other than Australia with 10.5% of the respondents. Malaysia was the country of birth of the third largest group (with approximately 2%), after the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Figures 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 show selected statistics in relation to religion, educational qualifications and income from the Victoria Park SLA.


---

\[43\] Victoria Park had a decile of seven. On the whole, rural, regional and remote statistical areas have significantly lower rankings on the index of relative socio-economic advantage/disadvantage.

\[44\] This figure is calculated on the number of respondents who provided a place of birth in the census.
Participants in the transformative pedagogy

Figure 6.3  Income – Victoria Park SLA


When comparing the group of participants with the general population, in broad terms it can be seen that the participants were older, with higher levels of education and more polarised in relation to income than the general population.

**Ideological positioning**

How do the participants in this project make sense of their world? And what does this mean for their positions on the issue of asylum seekers? One way of introducing some of the complexity of the participants, and at the same time managing the rich data produced through this research, is to look at the ideological positions shared by certain participants. *Ideology* is used here in the sense of the beliefs and ideas “which symbolize the conditions and life-experiences of a specific, socially significant group or class . . . [and is] very close to the idea of a ‘world view’ ” (Eagleton, 1991, p. 29).

A participant’s position, or identification with a certain ideology, is discussed here in full recognition that this is a partial description – one that is fluid. Such ideological positions are not necessarily stable or definitive as individuals can move between positions. Ideologies themselves are not homogenous but are “usually internally complex, differentiated formations, with conflicts between their various elements which need to be continually renegotiated and resolved” (Eagleton, 1991, p. 45).

There are three ideological positions that I use to group the participants. In presenting them in this way, there is the danger that they may become caricatures.
This is not an attempt to essentialise them as subjects but rather an attempt to provide a means to understand more about them. The three ideological positions that I have chosen to represent the participants are:

- The monoculturalist: When in Rome . . .
- The multiculturalist: Commitment to multiculturalism and international obligations.
- The globalist: Community without nation

If it is to be seen as a continuum, the monoculturalist and globalist are at each extreme with the multiculturalist located somewhere between the two ends. I will discuss the more extreme positions first, finishing with the middle group, which happens to describe the largest number of participants.

Because of the small number of participants in the programme, it is not possible to make any generalisations about the relationship between the particular socio-economic positioning of the participants and their views, experience, and engagement with the issue of asylum seekers or the pedagogy. In any event, such generalisations are inherently dangerous and always in need of qualification.

**The monoculturalist: When in Rome . . .**

There were five participants whose main response to asylum seekers was connected to a strong allegiance to an ideal of a homogenous ‘Australian way of life.’ These participants were attached to an Australian way of life which was white, Anglo-Celtic, imbued with the ideal of masculine mutual support (mateship), and requiring conformity to a particular way of being. This way of life commenced with the British colonising of the continent. The participants in this category wanted to maintain an idealised purity of culture, a British-based monoculture. They were concerned about racial impurity, linguistic impurity, religious impurity, impurity of beliefs and values, and impurity of practices. They saw asylum seekers as a danger to the Australian way of life.

The participants in this group had very clear views on the issue of asylum seekers. To differing degrees this group’s attitudes were characterised by the following:

- antipathy towards Islam;
- concern over the threat to Australia’s security posed by asylum seekers;
• a perception that they have little in common with asylum seekers;
• concern over illegal behaviour – both in the way the asylum seekers arrive and also their actions once they get here; and
• general support for the government policy on refugees.

The five participants in this group – Hal, Angus, Mel, Peter and Derek – were all older men over 50, with two over 70. Four were born in Australia and one was born in Malaysia. It is not surprising that this group had a strong allegiance to a monocultural view of the Australian way of life. All but one grew up in Australia at a time when the White Australia Policy was still in place. They were children or young adults when the practice of accepting migrants from countries beyond the United Kingdom began, with the accompanying expectations of assimilation. As discussed by Jock Collins (2001):

In the first decades of post-war immigration, assimilation was the dominant philosophy of migrant settlement. This was a “non-policy”; the “new Australians” were expected to conform to Australian cultural norms, including language, and quickly discard their “cultural baggage.” (p. 109)

Four of the five participants in this group had a neutral or even slightly positive attitude to immigration, so long as the ‘new Australians’ were from culturally similar countries and assimilated quickly. There was no acceptance of a multicultural society. Their views are epitomised in the words of Paul and Derek below. Paul was Australian born and had been a strong trade unionist and blue-collar worker until he was injured and became a paraplegic. He then completed a theology degree. He was a committed Baptist. He was divorced with adult children and grandchildren. I have taken from Paul the phrase “when in Rome. . .”

When in Rome, do as Rome does. That is what Australia is . . . It’s a good place. If you want to come here you must be a good person. We don’t want ratbags here. We don’t want the baggage from other cultures that are alien to ours . . . I give everyone a fair go but don’t trick me, don’t lie to me mate. If you obey our rules, you’re welcome but if you don’t obey our rules, kindly get on the boat and go back. We’re a generous country . . . but I would expect them to obey the rules.

Derek also was Australian born. He had been in the armed forces. Of predominantly Anglo heritage he had a great-grandfather who was Chinese. He was now on a pension. He was an active member of the local R&SL. He was married with a daughter. Derek was not always consistent in his attitude to migration. In general, he
was willing to accept people from other countries so long as they met his terms. This is seen in his comments that:

Some of them that assimilate into the population are very good friends and very good citizens. I’m very proud of them. I have met some who’ve joined the Commonwealth Defence Forces. They are fighting for Australia, not for anyone else.

Such tolerance of migration, accompanied by an expectation of assimilation, was too liberal and expansive for Mel. Mel had consistently negative views on immigration and multiculturalism, expressed during the interviews and during the programme. Australian born, Mel had worked in various roles and currently did some work as a performer. He was a pensioner who lived in state-provided, high-density accommodation. He was three times divorced. On various occasions Mel spoke affirmatively of his particular view of multiculturalism, but stated that it should not happen in Australia. He indicated this in his preliminary interview by reflecting that:

We actually live in a multicultural world and Australia, by definition, is destroying it. What we need to do is to encourage people to go back to where they are from and encourage them to be proud of who they are.

This perspective is in line with what Ramón Flecha describes as postmodern racism, a modified racism that incorporates a rejection of the old racism, which was based on racial superiority and inferiority. It also conforms to Fazal Rizvi’s analysis, included in Chapter 2. As Flecha (1999) explains:

Modern racism occurs when the rules of the dominant culture are imposed on diverse peoples in the name of integration. Postmodern racism occurs when people deny the possibility of dialogue among diverse groups and reject the possibility of different groups living together in the same territory. (p. 153)

Monoculturalist participants and others expressed to different degrees the belief that diverse groups could not mix. Various comments were made indicating a belief that all migrants wanted to keep to themselves and did not integrate into the community. Derek commented on several occasions about the problem of immigrants retaining their first language and not making the effort to become like Australians. Initially referring to Italian and Dutch migrants after the Second World War he said that:

[They] kept in groups, they’d talk their own language. They even do that now. A group of Asians will be jabbering away to each other and you may not know what’s going on.
Hal had been born in Malaysia where he belonged to a religious and ethnic minority. He was married and had immigrated to Australia with his family. He worked in his own business. Hal was very concerned about the impact of Muslim refugees on Australia and saw that:

Most of them don’t want to assimilate. They want to keep to themselves, they want to have their own Muslim schools.

As the most outspoken critic of multiculturalism, Mel had much in common with Melbourne historian, Geoffrey Blainey. Blainey’s views about multiculturalism became newsworthy in Australia during the 1980s. Blainey’s strong rejection of multiculturalism is based on similar ideas to those expressed by the members of this group. The following newspaper quotes give an idea of Blainey’s position:

The multicultural industry is divisive and parochial. [The Australian, 20 September 1984]

Sadly, multiculturalism often means: “Australians come second”. [Melbourne Age, 21 September 1984]

Our current emphasis on granting special rights to all kinds of minorities is threatening to cut this nation into many tribes. [Sydney Morning Herald, 25 January 1986] (cited in Collins, 2001, p. 121)

These views have become more openly expressed since the attacks in the USA on September 11, 2001 and the London bombings in July 2005 (Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, 2005). Blainey’s worldview clearly resonated with Mel:

One thing that I’m seeing is that migrants find it difficult to integrate with the people. They keep pretty well to themselves. There seems to be a resistance to their learning skills, even learning English . . . let’s go back and have a look at the ones who came here after the Second World War. They still can’t speak English though they’ve lived here. Customs – they are very difficult to offload and take on Australian ways of living life and it’s very strong and they resent having to. And they go to the authorities for back-up to be able to practise their special things and they want privileges to do it.

Mel was quite comfortable with a variety of conspiracy theories, in which the non-Anglo was seeking to attack the Australian way of life. He read various extreme right-wing publications which were a source of much of the (mis)information he held. As described by Donald (1992), referring to Michael Rogin, these views of the
world can be seen in the context of a history of ‘demonology’ and ‘countersubversion’:

The demonologist splits the world in two, attributing magical, pervasive power to a conspiratorial centre of evil. Fearing chaos and secret penetration, the countersubversive interprets local initiatives as signs of alien power. Discrete individuals and groups become, in the countersubversive imagination, members of a single political body directed by its head. The countersubversive needs monsters to give shape to his anxieties and to permit him to indulge his forbidden desires. (p. 118)

Given the preponderance of Muslim men from the Middle East or Southern Asia in the recent arrivals of asylum seekers, this group of participants saw these asylum seekers as posing an even greater danger to the Australian way of life than previous intakes of migrants. Their positions varied from very hesitant to hostile. The issue of Islam and cultural difference was a significant reason for their rejection. I note that participants from other groups also expressed concerns and fears about Islam. Hal and Derek were typical of this group in stating that:

I would prefer not to allow those refugees that are coming recently into this country. Basically this is because they come from a different culture and they practice a different form of religion. I view that religion as very dangerous to the general society because I was born and brought up in a country that practised that particular religion . . . These people do not understand Western democracy, don’t understand Western culture . . . They could be quite a threat in our Western society . . . For example if we allow these people to come in, they have the same rights as we have. So they are able to practise their own religion, carry on their own lifestyle and as years go on when their numbers increase, their numbers could increase so significantly they could turn around and demand to set up an Islamic state and have self-rule in this country. (Hal)

We have Muslim schools, which means the Muslim community is grouping together. The terrorist threat throughout the world at the moment seems to be Muslims. They don’t care who they injure – Australians, Buddhists, Muslims who cares? . . . That person comes from country X and wants somewhere to hide. I’m an Australian. I don’t think that they should be here. (Derek)

Derek had a firm belief that Australia should have a strong and punitive response to asylum seekers. He initially stated:

I don’t go along with blowing holes in the asylum seekers’ boats – that takes money. I’d be running the boats down with our ships. It won’t cost as much.
Mel had a similar solution to the unauthorised boat arrivals as Derek and a similar rejection of Muslims. He too saw them as a threat to Australian security. He thought the appropriate response was to:

. . . hook up the boats and tow them back to where they come from. . .

_The comments I’ve had made to me by these people are – “you Australians, we’ll take over your country. You’re weak, you Australians.” They have already summed us up because we show our passiveness. They’ve had to struggle with life. We’re weak. This is their culture . . . There is a thing there about acceptance of human life itself. We’re seeing it up in Bali because of the bombing there. If they should get killed, they become a martyr. This is not our way of doing things, right._

Paul is somewhat different from the rest of this group. Despite having a clear preference for a monocultural Australian way of life, in relation to people fleeing persecution, he regularly expressed his opinion that we should have a humanitarian response. This more tolerant view did not extend to situations where the refugee or asylum seeker is Muslim. In describing his somewhat conflicting views, Paul stated:

_We should be taking care of refugees, not putting them in gaol, not putting boats in and shooting at them. We should get at the source of the problem rather than seeing them drown halfway here. I think that that is absolutely ghastly. But someone instituted it, a fellow Muslim, instituted a boat full of people. Displaced people and women need a home. Give them a home, but try and take me for a ride if you please and that’s it._

_There are others walking the streets, covered in burkhas, and you can’t see anything but their eyes. I don’t know why they come here. If they are dinky di Muslims, why do they come? . . . You are welcome here but you are thumbing your nose at me because you are wearing that stuff . . . I really think that it is up to Muslim countries to take in Muslims and up to Australia to take in non-Muslims._

Angus was a retired primary principal, the oldest member of the group. He was married with adult children and grandchildren. He came from a long line of well-established Western Australian families. He was a committed environmentalist, active in various organisations. Angus was very outspoken in his rejection of

---

45 Dinky di means ‘authentic.’
immigration, which necessarily included asylum seekers and supported the present treatment of asylum seekers.46

*I have pretty strong views against letting them in.*

After asking Angus to reflect on the similarities that he saw between himself and a stereotypical person who arrives in Australia on a boat, seeking asylum, he responded:

*I can’t think of any . . . They’ve probably paid some criminal to get here.*

This group’s priority was on conserving what they identified as ‘our’ way of life. Any competing considerations were rationalised or given a lower priority than this objective. Via different routes they had arrived at a position that was in keeping with the dominant discourse about asylum seekers – asylum seekers were a danger to Australia and the appropriate response was to reject them. I was interested to see the similarity in their background – in particular gender, age and place of birth. With the exception of Hal, the monocultural white Australia that they had grown up in was disappearing and they did not like it.

**The globalist: Community without nation**

Coming from a distinctly different worldview were two participants who believed in a different kind of Australia, an Australia which was more identified as a member of a global community, less as a nation state. The participants in this group rejected the ideological construct of nation in which certain kinds of people were included and others excluded, on whatever basis. This position was based on the participants’ view of global justice. Two participants, Frances and Tony, consistently positioned themselves within this worldview, while others moved through it at times. Although they came to the same position via different processes, Frances and Tony shared a belief in a world in which social, political, economic, racial and cultural barriers were removed to ensure equality of outcome for all people. They had high levels of formal education although they had different gender, levels of income and ages.

---

46 Angus had been diagnosed with terminal cancer at the time of the programme and was in a lot of pain. This could be a factor in his responses.
This ideological position rejects the legal and other barriers of nationhood that have the effect of creating inequality of outcomes for certain peoples in relation to citizenship and beyond. It is a view similar to that identified by Stephen Castles, Mary Kalantzis, Bill Cope and Michael Morrissey (2001) as “equality plus real communality” in their discussion of Australian identity and nationalism. As they describe it, equality plus communality involves:

The transcending of national identity, the denial of its necessity, the recognition that through the crisis of modernity we are now all in the same boat – economically, ecologically and politically. Human identity must become transnational . . . We need to transcend the nation as an increasingly obsolete relic of early industrialism. Our aim must be community without nation. (pp. 136, 139)

Implicit in this radical position is that it does not matter whether the asylum seeker meets the strict international definition of refugee or is really an economic migrant. In the present global situation they believed that a nation has no basis on which to exclude any would-be resident. Frances was a radical, retired Scot, involved with left-wing politics and active in social justice issues. She had adult children, was divorced and was living with a long-term partner. Frances was the only person who referred to sovereignty in relation to the movement of peoples. She was clearly not sympathetic to the way that notions of sovereignty have been used to exclude asylum seekers from Australia:

I have problems with all kinds of notions of sovereignty. I think that the world is for everybody.

Tony was an Australian-born technical writer earning good money as a consultant and active in the community. He was divorced and had no children. His rejection of the concept of bordered nations was based on his sense of justice – that it is not fair to pick and choose who benefits from a borderless world. He expressed this position as follows:

I think that if governments and corporations want free movement of resources around the world, i.e. cash and commodities, there should also be free movement of people around the world so that they can choose where they can get their best opportunities and not get exploited.

An aspect of the ‘community without nation’ position is an all-encompassing view of humanity, one that includes all people. It sees that everyone ought to be able to share
the same lifestyle that we do as Australians. It recognises the materially privileged position that Australians have as a result of having been born in a rich, stable country and names it as unjust. Tony’s sense of fairness and justice came through in various ways. In describing why he saw the world in these terms he stated:

*I was born with a social conscience . . . you need to provide justice for people that might not be able to provide it for themselves.*

Frances’ rejection of what she saw as an unfair world was firmly grounded in a belief that she was a beneficiary of that world. Seeing her position as privileged meant that Frances was aware that others experienced very different lives. This came out when she was discussing human rights:

*There are people who’ve been denied human rights. Human rights are more important for them than for someone like me who is privileged.*

It is interesting to contrast the globalist position with the concerns expressed by Angus over the negative environmental impact caused by too many people having a Western standard of living. Angus’s deep commitment to environmental sustainability resulted in his preference to exclude people from coming to Australia (and presumably other industrialised countries) because of the comparatively high negative impact that a person in an industrialised country has on the environment through high resource consumption. Instead he supported increased government expenditure by way of aid to underdeveloped countries. This position avoids a re-examination or questioning of our own position of privilege. Angus was very resistant to alternative solutions to the environmental impact of immigration. When presented with one alternative approach to the environmental impact, namely for Australians to decrease the level of consumption, Angus dismissed that out of hand stating that “that wouldn’t happen.” In relation to the connection between immigration and the environment he said:

*I take a very tough line against refugees. Everyone who comes here to Australia is really degrading our environment because there is a 30 times increase in the resources they use.* *(Interview 2)*

Contrast this to the position of Tony, who also advocated zero population growth:

*All these people who are saying that we should close the doors [to immigration/refugees] are doing it out of self-interest, self-financial interest basically. I don’t*
Participants in the transformative pedagogy

want to see the population of Australia grow but I’d rather it grow through
migration than birth rate.

In addition to the aspects discussed above, the ideological position of the globalist
included the following characteristics:

- a high awareness of the role of ideology in society;
- a clear understanding of the relationships between social, economic, historical
  and political factors;
- a strong opposition to the government policy on asylum seekers; and
- a strong suspicion of all public information about asylum seekers.

It is interesting to see how a similar conclusion on the issue of asylum seekers was
arrived at from quite different starting points and through quite different processes.
Frances’ beliefs were a combination of the result of cognitive, emotional and
spiritual processes. Talking about asylum seekers, she started from a relational
description in a way that evokes Rorty’s sentimental education:

They are human beings. They are a mother or a sister or a father or a brother.
They want to live. They have dreams, they have aspirations, they have goals, they
have a history, they have an identity . . . from my perspective they are connected
to me, some more than others but on a human level I believe that we are all
connected and that if someone is hurting, it will affect me somewhere on some
level . . . I see life as an intertwining and interdependent journey . . . I guess it
depends on your level of consciousness, whatever that is. It’s another mysterious
thing.

In contrast, Tony discussed the issue from the point of international obligations and
the vision of Australia he thought we should aspire to. His awareness of the potential
negative impact of refugees was outweighed by his commitment to social justice. His
argument was based on rational arguments as can be seen here:

I think that we have an obligation to accept refugees, whereas I think that we
should take in . . . those seeking a better economic outcome . . . The presence of
refugees/asylum seekers enhances our cultural diversity. Unfortunately it fosters a
lot of racism. But considering that there is on average 12 000 refugees with our
population of 20 million, I don’t think that it has much of an impact at all in
reality . . . I like to think that having a mixture of diverse cultures within the
community also fosters tolerance towards other communities.

The participants in this ideological position emphasised shared rights, including the
right of any individual to enjoy the same privileged lifestyle as they themselves had.
They rejected any suggestion that Australians in some way deserved the standard of
living they enjoyed, so that it could be denied others who were not so meritorious.
They expressed a strong empathy for people in difficult situations. In going beyond sovereign borders they saw themselves as reflecting the reality of our globalised world and an ethically better world. In rejecting so decisively the dominant discourse on asylum seekers, their position was quite rare. Few in the community would believe in a truly borderless world.

**The multiculturalist: Commitment to multiculturalism**

Situated somewhere between the two more extreme ideological constellations is the biggest group of participants, including Lem, Steve, Harriet, Tom, Driandra, Ron, and Talia. The members of this group are the youngest: both according to the group’s average and also because it contained the four youngest participants. The significant point of distinction between the participants in this group and the globalist position is that the participants in this group had some limitations, reservations or conditions that they placed on their acceptance of asylum seekers to Australia. In general terms they were all committed to Australia as a multicultural nation and wanted to see the nation behave as a responsible global citizen that complies with international obligations. When saying that all people in this group were committed to multiculturalism, it is important to note that multiculturalism as an ideology has different strains. *Soft multiculturalism* celebrates difference and accepts diversity, whereas *hard multiculturalism* looks to change the social structures that have ensured dominance by the Anglo-Celtic culture. Hard multiculturalism seeks “equality of social outcomes” [italics added] for citizens from different cultural groups rather than mere tolerance of life styles and the *equality of opportunities* [italics added]” (J. W. Bell, 1997, p. 42).

Subtle differences in their perception of multiculturalism can be seen in the way that participants expressed their commitment to a multicultural Australia. This was consistent with the continuing transformation of Australian society over the last 60 years and the mixed messages presented by the dominant cultural forces on multiculturalism.
Harriet, Australian born and very well educated, was a reflective thinker. She worked at a university and was involved in disability issues. In discussing multicultural Australia, Harriet said:

*What is the Australian way? We are supposed to be . . . we are . . . a multicultural society. We are all immigrants, apart from the Indigenous people . . . Refugees make life a lot more interesting. It is not “chop and 3 veg” sort of stuff. So I think that anybody from a different culture, a different background . . . makes you stop and think about things and question where you’re coming from. I don’t view it is as a negative thing at all but positive. It is challenging at times, certain things that you hear reflected in the media about certain practices and customs, that sort of thing and think “err yuk, not me.” But it doesn’t have to be. It’s ok to have that difference.*

Australian-born Tom was retired and had been in the armed forces. Tom was divorced with adult children. He was active in the R&SL although he was far from the stereotypical image often associated with the R&SL of a reactionary right-winger. Like Harriet and others in this group, Tom regularly referred to Indigenous Australians and the fact that the colonising of Australia by the British was analogous to the position with today’s asylum seekers. This can be seen in his following comments:

*Essentially we are all immigrants here . . . Europeans haven’t been in this country all that long – a few generations at most . . . All up I think that it would be culturally enriching [to have refugees in Australia]. I mean, obviously there are pluses and minuses.*

Lem had had a high-pressure sales job and was taking some time out to spend more time with his family. He was married with children. He was working towards financial independence in the near future. He was Australian-born. He embraced a culturally diverse nation, reflecting more of a hard multiculturalism perspective. This can be seen from his words:

*I always figured that the more diversity you have, the richer the culture and I guess there’s going to be negative elements as well as positive . . . I get jack of people who use terminology like “when in Rome . . .” and that sort of crap because I think that Rome is a very evolving definition. I’ve met literally thousands of people from all different kinds of backgrounds and they all bring so much more to the Australian way of life and it develops.*

Talia was an Australian born university student having returned to study after having children. She was divorced and previously lived in an isolated country town. She
lived locally with her new partner and children. As a mother Talia was actively looking for ways to ensure her children were comfortable with a diverse cultural mix. She expressed her commitment to multiculturalism:

*The multicultural aspect, having different cultures brought into the community is good, particularly for the kids. Socialising with people from different cultures is a good thing for them because they are more open-minded towards different cultures.*

Within this group there were varying degrees to which the participants were suspicious of the public information about asylum seekers. Some of the participants were very well informed and had sought other sources of information on asylum seekers. Others had not obtained alternative information and were therefore more at the mercy of the information available through the mass media. They were able to critique that information to varying degrees.

Tom was widely read. He had quite a critical view of the idealised Australian way of life that was protected by the monoculturalist group. In relation to some of the commonly held beliefs about asylum seekers, such as terrorism and crime, he said:

*I think that it was Kim Beazley [Labor politician] who pointed out that terrorists don’t come in leaky boats. They’ll get off an aeroplane wearing a good suit and a good hair cut . . . If you look at say the Vietnamese . . . If you look at crime rates and social problems across the board, theirs is less than our own . . . than the national average. These people are more cohesive than most of us are.*

Driandra worked part-time at a non-government organisation that provided services for people with disabilities. She was Australian-born and married with a young adult daughter. Unlike Tom, she did not reject the widespread belief of a connection between asylum seekers and terrorism. Nor did she reject the belief that they were economic migrants seeking to exploit the Australian social security benefits. However, she recognised that the basis of her hesitant acceptance of this information may not be well founded:

*We are already open to terrorism, whether we’re here or travelling abroad. Someone could come in that’s a member of a terrorist group . . . I only know what I hear in the media and what people say. But a lot of people say that these refugees are coming in and that they are not coming in with papers and so there’s no way to check. It could be likely that they are in a terrorist group or it could be likely that they’ve just got money. You just don’t know. It’s hard to say . . . They’ll all be on benefits.*
An important part of the dominant discourse about asylum seekers capitalises on the heightened economic insecurity that exists for most workers in a globalised economy and the fear that scarce jobs will be taken. Talia, who was economically insecure, rejected this aspect of the dominant discourse but in a rather unsure way:

*I can understand people being a bit upset about things, if they are losing jobs and things like that. Which I don’t believe is true.*

The uncertainty of Talia and Driandra is contrasted to the clarity with which Harriet rejected the same beliefs:

*I’m not going to say refugees take jobs from Australians. I think that’s bullshit. I’m not going to say that their cultural practices are anathema to the Australian way. I think that’s bullshit too.*

In general terms this group did not agree with the government’s harsh treatment of asylum seekers and believed that Australia should take a more compassionate approach. Even when the members of this group accepted some of the misinformation about asylum seekers, they nonetheless gave precedence to a moral commitment to treating all human beings with dignity, respect and equality. In general, their sense of compassion was linked to a commitment to human rights and solidarity with other peoples, as opposed to paternalism.

Driandra was quite uncertain on many of the popular beliefs about asylum seekers but was very clear in her commitment to a compassionate response. It was clear from her conversation that her compassion came more from a strongly felt response rather than the result of a rational assessment of their situation:

*Taking in asylum seekers is just something that we should do for humanitarian reasons . . . We would be a more compassionate society.*

Steve had emigrated from England to Australia and started his own small business. He was married and did not have children. Steve was very well informed and had taken a lot of time researching the facts on asylum seekers. He felt a commitment to fellow human beings. At different times, he argued from the head or the heart. Both come through in the following extract:

*Accepting refugees is just part of our obligation through the UN and through other international bodies . . . It’s our obligation to mankind if you want to put it that way . . . We are fulfilling our obligations and eventually those people will*
settle and get jobs and be just as good members of our community as anybody else.

In relation to how they positioned themselves, all of the participants in this group, with the exception of Ron, saw themselves as having a more welcoming attitude towards asylum seekers than the community average. Some participants placed themselves at the ‘very accepting’ extreme of the continuum of community views. Steve described his position as “pretty much welcoming anyone who comes.” However, he had limits on this open door position and agreed with a short period of mandatory detention in order to:

. . . check out their bona fides and whether they are criminals or not. [If they were found not to be genuine refugees], they’d have to be repatriated . . . which they are anyway now.

Harriet’s acceptance of refugees was based on her view that they were fleeing terrible circumstances. She put it like this:

I wouldn’t say it’s an extreme – open doors, let people in – but I certainly am close to that aspect. Anybody who’s made the decision to leave their home because things are so terrible for them, and that’s my assumption about refugees, then why are we treating them like cattle putting them out in bloody South Australia. I was born in Woomera and I know what the damn place is like and we couldn’t be more inhospitable than sticking somebody in a detention centre in Woomera, or Baxter for that matter . . . Port Augusta.

Tom placed himself in a similar position as Harriet:

I’d be towards accepting every asylum seeker that lands on our shores.

In a similar vein to previous statements, Driandra was straightforward in how she saw the situation:

My position is probably towards just letting them in, and . . . giving them a go . . . Look, I just don’t care . . . if they come in or not. I think that there’s plenty of room. You know, we’ve got the infrastructure to cope with them, we need more people.

Lem positioned himself, appropriating the derogatory language of right-wing commentators:

I’m just a ‘bleeding heart’ and they should be welcomed in and given every opportunity.
Talia recognised that her views placed her outside the norm:

*I would be halfway between the midpoint and the “letting them in” position . . . I am probably a lot more tolerant and understanding than general views.*

Ron was in a particularly interesting position, very aware of structural inequities, the role of the media and ideology. Born in England, he had at one stage of his life worked for the Communist Party in Canada. His awareness had developed in contrast to his early acceptance of the hegemonic ideology on social issues. He was divorced with no children. He had taken significant steps to inform himself of the reality of Australia’s policy towards asylum seekers. Nonetheless he had very clear views that Australia should not have an open door policy for asylum seekers:

*I would put myself somewhere in the middle . . . I don’t think that it is politically possible to take large numbers of people and also it wouldn’t have much effect on the bigger problem . . . Australian society simply wouldn’t accept [large numbers]. Nobody could get elected and allow those kinds of policies and also it would cause disturbances in the society . . . There are something like 20 million refugees . . . Taking a million wouldn’t solve the problem.*

In being suspicious of the image of the asylum seeker as constructed by the media and government, Ron had nonetheless accepted some of the popularly held beliefs. Reflecting later on his belief when he had commenced the programme, Ron said:

*I thought asylum seekers were mainly rich and privileged . . . There was some doubt in my mind that some of the people were privileged and came here for benefits. (Interview 2)*

Those participants in this group who discussed the difference between a refugee and an economic migrant, generally limited their preparedness to accept asylum seekers who met the definition of a refugee. Other limitations, similar to those expressed by Ron above, on an open door policy to refugees were also made. For different reasons, this group was cautious of any approach that would allow all asylum seekers to enter and stay in Australia. Talia was concerned about the broader community’s response to a high level of refugee entrants and wanted the numbers to be limited. She expressed her reservations:

*There need to be some guidelines because obviously if we let too many people in, then that is going to have a negative impact . . . If there were a lot of people coming in, that could really turn the attitude and it would affect people who were already here. I think it would be better to have fewer people here but, for them to
be treated better, than to have a whole heap of people and then it really becomes a negative issue.

Along similar lines, Driandra was cautious about large numbers of asylum seekers in the community:

If there are a lot of asylum seekers in one particular area in the community and the community doesn’t welcome them, then there’s the potential for conflict.

The need for Australia to retain control of the process was important for Lem. He stated:

I don’t agree with no checks . . . We’ve got a system for a reason. My attitude is that when asylum seekers come, there should be some due process, absolutely. We’ve got to get them on the books so to speak.

Tom considered that the impact on the community of people bringing in disease and the trauma caused by their experiences required the Australian government to manage the process carefully. He raised a number of concerns:

How do you decide if bringing a family here and one member has a terrible disease that is going to cost a lot socially and medically? How do you manage the idea that people from war torn zones, their children may be so traumatised that their capacity to become good citizens is severely compromised?

Although a commitment to Australia as a multicultural society is becoming more and more mainstream, the relatively welcoming attitudes to asylum seekers expressed by this group is not shared by the majority of people in the local community nor in the wider Australian community.⁴⁷ That this position was ascribed to by the greatest number of participants emphasises the atypical character of the group as a whole.

The collaborative team

We have already met the members of the collaborative team in Chapter 4. Although they were all committed to social justice and active in pursuing it in their lives and work, there were differences in relation to their positions on asylum seekers. None of the team expressed a globalist position. In the many discussions that we had, there was an acceptance of hard multiculturalism and the advantages that it would bring for all members of a society.

⁴⁷ As shown by the research referred to in Chapter 2.
Participants in the transformative pedagogy

Donna’s position was based on a very strong commitment to human rights, which in turn is linked to a compassionate empathy. She is a very theoretical thinker who engages daily in a critique of the dominant ideology:

The vilification and gross sensationalism used by Australian media to portray the plight of asylum seekers and refugees is both embarrassing and highly offensive. As a wealthy country that prides itself on being respectful of human rights and holding a commitment to ‘the underdog,’ we have much to reflect upon with respect to our attitudes and opinions towards asylum seekers and refugees... As a country, we lack compassion, understanding, tolerance and respect for cultural difference... We must commit ourselves to upholding the human rights of every person and fighting for them when necessary... Australia is yet to embrace these basic human rights and until we do see them fully realised, it must remain on the political, social and cultural agenda.

Having worked with asylum seekers and refugees, Rod was well informed on the detail of Australia’s policy towards asylum seekers. He placed the issue of asylum seekers in the globalised economic context and also in the context of international obligations:

I believe it is essential that we have an effective international program to assist the numerous refugees that conflicts round the world produce and that all countries, particularly affluent developed ones, make a significant contribution to re-settling refugees as well as assisting the UNHCR with the enormous task it faces in providing temporary accommodation in various countries. We also have to make serious contributions to preventing such conflicts in the first place by working for fairness and equity in matters of world trade, resource distribution, human rights and recognising the rights and needs of smaller countries.

I believe Australia has seriously erred in effectively declaring war on unauthorised arrivals and attempting to build ‘fortress Australia’... Our attempts to demonise asylum seekers demean us all and has done serious damage to our reputation and our self-image as a fair and generous nation.

It was Sonja who offered a positive slant at the same time as critiquing the current dominant ideology surrounding asylum seekers. As with Rod, she too linked the situation of asylum seekers and the community’s response to global economic and political issues:

Australia has a long history of welcoming refugees with open arms, making it possible for them to begin a new life in this wonderful country. The current hysteria regarding asylum seekers is... a reflection of Australians’ fear, frustration and alienation regarding their own national identity, security and the future of their country in an unstable international climate. Although the majority of Australian media has encouraged the scapegoating of refugees, the community
response has been extraordinary, with people across Australia offering their time and care to help refugees. My hope is that through openness and public debate the rest of Australia will come to see the truth – refugees are the victims of the very things we fear, and they deserve our help.

As with Sonja, Murray’s position came informed by his personal connection to the refugee experience. He was cautious at the same time as he embraced difference. Nonetheless, he was clear that the privileged position of being a citizen of a rich country brought with it responsibilities:

My views towards asylum seekers/refugees have developed from working amongst new arrivals and from a bi-cultural upbringing. It involves being inclusive of people in need, as it may be me or you in need one day. This does not mean giving away your possessions or country, but as a rich and well-off nation we can afford to be generous to others in need. I was raised on vegemite, Jason and the Argonauts and footy, and a healthy respect for other cultures, peoples and the many different ways of living an inspired and positive life.

Similarly cautious was Karen. She rejected some of the government policies towards asylum seekers while accepting others. Her position was based on compassion tempered with the need to maintain control of new arrivals. She was very critical of the dominant discourse about asylum seekers:

Social justice and human rights have always been important to me. However, the Howard Government’s harsh treatment, incarceration and ‘politicisation’ of asylum seekers spurred me to focus greater attention and increase my activism regarding asylum seekers. I believe the government’s stance contravened human rights, lacked integrity, respect and compassion for people at their most vulnerable and desperate. Politically incorrect jargon including ‘queue jumpers’ and the ‘Children Overboard’ fiasco were two blatant examples which dehumanised asylum seekers and increased the fears and prejudices of some Australians . . . I believe the majority of asylum seekers are authentic and have genuine fears of persecution . . . All claims should be processed with greater urgency, efficiency and, above all, compassion and respect.

I strongly oppose the incarceration of children in detention centres. I believe our government’s treatment of asylum seekers will have far reaching effects and these legacies (including mental illness, post-traumatic stress and separation of families) will be devastatingly costly to many.

Helen likewise accepted of the need to control the arrival of asylum seekers and have some form of mandatory detention. Her position in support of refugees (not economic migrants) was reached applying a Rawlsian ‘veil of ignorance’ (Rawls, 1973). She critiqued the dominant discourse and the way that language has been used
to deliberately manipulate the public. She believed that cultural differences were significant and that they needed to be addressed through public discussion:

Asylum seekers have every right to seek refuge in another country that they choose because for the most part they are fleeing persecution . . . In Australia, an unbalanced image of asylum seekers has been created by the media and by politicians, both of which are connected in the interests they promote . . . A sense of fear has been created.

I don’t understand many of the cultural practices of some refugee groups and do not want their mores pushed onto me. I would not want to live under an Islamic regime. I feel that there is a silencing of discussion on these issues because people are labelled racist if the issues are raised. We should discuss these different cultural practices and see our commonalities.

Because not all asylum seekers are genuine refugees, it is necessary to assess the status of the asylum seeker via a better process than we have now. The time a person spends in detention should be kept to a minimum and definitely no children should be kept in detention.

My position has largely been dealt with in Chapter 2. My utopian vision comes close to that of the globalist, believing in the ideal of community without nation. I am cognisant of the stress such a policy would place on an existing society, given the existing levels of fear and lack of acceptance of the Other. Like Helen and Harriet, I too feel uncomfortable with some cultural practices of groups coming into Australia. My position on this is that as a nation we can insist on a respect for the basic human rights of all members of society and that any practices that violate human rights are unacceptable.
Chapter 7

The embodied transformative pedagogy

It is the first session of the community education programme. The participants have arrived, some members of the collaborative team are there and the video is running. In this chapter I describe and analyse the lived pedagogy, including a description of the instructional activities and the participants’ experience of them. The chapter includes reflections from facilitators and presenters.

The six evening meetings of the programme were divided into two sessions by a refreshment break. Each session is introduced here with a summary of its aims and the handouts given to participants during the session. Setting out the aims of the programme in this way brings into stark relief the ambitious nature of the programme and the difficulty of trying to include a wide variety of topics and activities in a very limited amount of time. In the short programme we ran, it was understood that we could only begin the process of moving towards the aims.

The description of the programme in this chapter comes from two main sources. The first source is the detailed written programme I had prepared for each session prior to the commencement of the programme. The second is the review of the video of the sessions. The analysis of the participants’ experiences of the sessions is drawn from their weekly written feedback sheets, the post-CEP conversations, the post-CEP focus group discussions, participants’ journal recordings, and contemporaneous observation notes written by Murray from the collaborative team. Unless otherwise indicated, quotes from participants are drawn from the post-CEP conversations.
**Week 1**

**Session 1: Getting started (process, objectives, general information)**

*Aims*
1. Build relationship with others
2. Establish ground rules for the programme
3. Know each others’ expectations
4. Understand the programme

*Handouts*
- Notebook for journal and pen
- Birthday wishlist – scrambled table of participants and wishes
- Folder (for holding programme handouts) and containing:
  * Community Education Programme Outline (Appendix 7.1)
  * Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program (DIMIA Fact Sheet 60)

**Getting started**

After the members of the collaborative team were introduced, the initial activity was designed to start building relationships among the group and facilitators/collaborative team. This activity also allowed the issue of stereotyping to be introduced early in a non-threatening manner. During the information session held the week before the programme commenced, I had collected from participants and facilitators their fantasy birthday wishes and constructed a handout with a table in which the wishes were scrambled (Appendix 7.2). Standing in a circle, each person gave two or three pieces of biographical information from which we had to try and match the person with the wish. At the end of the session I read out the actual list of birthday wishes and we discussed whether we had been able to correctly match the wish with the person. Participants commented on the difficulty of knowing something about someone with limited information and the stereotyping that can happen when we have little knowledge.

Those participants who wrote about the activity in the week’s feedback sheets indicated that the activity did cause them to reflect on the problems associated with

---

48 A referenced list of handouts is contained in Appendix 7.10
stereotyping. The following quotes record what participants learnt:\footnote{Each asterisk indicates a different participant.}

* Check assumptions. Given the very little info that we gave out at the beginning, it was almost impossible to get the ‘Birthday wish list’… But, we often assume a lot from a date of birth, country of origin and gender.
* People make assumptions too readily.
* Various facts about several people – only correct with guessing a few wishes.
* Showed me not to judge a book by its cover.

In contrast to these participants, Angus felt disconnected and bored during this session. As his journal records: “I could not see the point in guessing the birthday wishes.”

**Introducing the programme**

Some of the underlying pedagogical principles and practices were then discussed. It was stressed that our approach aimed to create a participative process. It was important that it was fun and social, notwithstanding the serious nature of the issue. I emphasised that we believed that all present would be learning – facilitators and participants. I explained that the activities of this first week were designed so that we would start to get to know each other by working with at least three or four participants and thus develop some social connection amongst the group. The programme outline (Appendix 7.1) was discussed and basic information was given as to its duration and timing. I requested that participants provide me with input on what they would like to cover in the programme and I encouraged them to keep a journal of their experience.

**Establishing ground rules**

Given the contentious nature of the topic we were discussing, it was important to work out jointly some ground rules for our interaction within the group. People’s sensitivity to the issue was high and most people had a clear position. We discussed that bringing together a self-selected group of people had the potential to create confrontation and conflict. Participants discussed with a partner the basic ground rules that were important to them. All ideas were then brought back to the group and put on the whiteboard. A joint list was agreed (Appendix 7.3).
Discussing expectations

Half the participants then changed tables so that they would continue to meet other participants. After writing down their individual expectations of the programme – why they had chosen to attend and what they were hoping to get from the programme – they again worked in pairs and discussed their expectations. Each pair then noted their expectations on the whiteboard – only noting what they had discussed if that added something new to what was already on the whiteboard (Appendix 7.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 2: Who am I/you? Our identities and those of asylum seekers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aims</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Examine our own identity and subjectivities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Deconstruct our identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Consider the relationship between identity and worldview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Consider the identity of an asylum seeker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Handouts</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Life Worth Living (<em>The Age</em>, 27 May 2003)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Individual identity**

One of the ongoing topics of the programme was that of identity. We began the second session of week 1 by looking at our own identity through brainstorming the influences that contributed to it. These included: family, socio-economic status, culture, religion and education. Participants then drew a sketch of themselves and depicted graphically their identity according to these criteria. After drawing a picture, the participants formed pairs, viewed their partner’s sketch and discussed what they understood from it. Focusing on the aspect of how culture affects identity, participants discussed with the same partner aspects of their culture about which they were proud and not proud. Stereotypes about their cultural group were also discussed. Each pair then brought back to the wider group interesting issues that they had discussed. In this session, our existence within socio-historical processes was central to an understanding of our identity. From this point of departure, the rest of the programme continued to provide opportunities for us to ‘reinterpret our lives’, an important part of Kincheloe and Steinberg’s (1993) ‘post-formal’ thinking in which cognition is politicised.
Following the discussion, Rod (from the collaborative team) read out a modified version of the newspaper article, A Life Worth Living (handout), which described the flight from Afghanistan of a young man threatened with involuntary conscription by the Taliban. We discussed various issues about his identity. This activity of deconstructing identity was included early on to encourage an understanding and acceptance of other identities as opposed to a distancing or an ‘othering’ of identities different from our own. In looking at the process of identity formation, there was the potential that asylum seekers would be seen as “human beings and as women and men with a legitimate interest in social change and their own self-determination” (McCarthy, 1998, p. 46). It was also designed to encourage recognition of identity as a function of arbitrary factors and that:

The dialectical interplay between existence and context reveals that any given situation, including one’s identity and self-understanding, is not a necessity. Situations and identities congeal in the course of time under the press of history and culture, but most importantly also under the influence of human action, and they are thus susceptible to human intervention, to the power of freedom. (Glass, 2001, p. 17)

During the broad discussion around identity, in particular cultural identity, a critical incident occurred. Hal explained that because of his Chinese ethnicity he felt collective responsibility for the acts of Chinese migrants in Australia. This incident allowed the issue of the dominant culture to be introduced and problematised, along with the issue of how minority cultures are depicted and positioned within the dominant culture.

Vignettes

The need to draw in the second session elicited a strong reaction in at least one participant. Driandra felt uncomfortable during the session because she did not like drawing:

*I felt pensive. I don’t draw. I don’t like drawing . . . I had a look to see what other people were doing . . . because I think that when we did it you wanted symbols . . . and I just couldn’t do that. I’m more a writer . . . I’m not creative.*

Similar feedback had been provided to me when I piloted that session. As a result, I had changed the instructions to the participants to minimise the importance of the drawing. Participants were told that “a stick figure would be fine” and that the
important part was for them to reflect on the different aspects of their identity. It was salutary to me to find that even playing down the creative aspect of the task, it still created anxiety for at least one participant. Notwithstanding her rejection of the task, and her negative affective response, Driandra stated that:

*It was interesting during the session . . . Actually putting something on paper and seeing it was good.*

Talia felt uncomfortable reflecting on her identity, but for very different reasons. She commented that during the session she felt "heaviness, tightness, that knot in the stomach" and went on to say:

*It wasn’t that it didn’t work for me but that it was probably more confronting than anything; the “who am I?” . . . I’ve got issues with my past that I’d prefer to leave but . . . I had to actually think about them . . . The one positive thing that I really enjoyed was that . . . the pictorial that I had in front of me was very positive and it was almost like a contentment . . . Looking at this picture now, today, it’s looking pretty good.*

The participants’ responses as to how they felt during the first week’s sessions were generally positive. The feedback sheets included:

* Very comfortable even with some hard views
* Rather tired
* Happy, inspired, argumentative
* Bit nervous, little worried – what am I getting into sort of stuff
* Non-committal
* Stimulated
* Interested, challenged, embarrassed
* Curious, interested
* Amongst friends

**Commentary**

During the sessions I had felt comfortable, if a little unsure. Participants seemed willing to participate and offer ideas spontaneously but I was uncertain as to whether they felt any enjoyment in participating. The feedback sheets indicated that for most participants we had created some sense of safety and pleasure. Before the session I had been wondering how a group of strangers would interact. I thought that they mixed reasonably well during the refreshment break. It was reassuring to see that the group had initiated the discussion on the issue of stereotyping and its associated
problems, something that I would be able to refer to later. You never know if an underlying pedagogical strategy will be effective.

**Week 2**

**Session 3: The power of listening: Your thoughts about asylum seekers and refugees**

**Aims**
1. Identify the effects of exclusion we have experienced in our lives
2. Encounter the experiences that contribute to a pattern of exclusion, prejudice and intolerance
3. Discuss views on asylum seekers with an active listener
4. Be an active listener
5. Possibilities of healing/release from our own blockages

**Handouts**
- Overstayers and People in Breach of Visa Conditions (DIMIA Fact Sheet 86)
- Unauthorised Arrivals by Air and Sea (DIMIA Fact Sheet 74)
- Pre-CEP Interview Schedule

**The power of listening: Your thoughts about asylum seekers**

The second week commenced with a session facilitated by Rod from the collaborative team. Rod introduced us to a model of internalised oppression derived from re-evaluation counselling (Jackins, 1965), and applied it to asylum seekers. Re-evaluation counselling recognises how powerfully our own experiences of oppression can be internalised and later acted out in excluding others (see also ‘story and healing’ Saury & Alexander, 2003). If it is the case that prejudice is “a feeling trying to find a reason” (Wignall, 2000, p. 7), then trying to understand those feelings is vital. The impact on our worldview and behaviour of the psychological aspect of our subject formation was touched on in this session and also in Session 11. Otherwise, it was not a key focus of this education and research project.

Rod’s session gave us the opportunity to reflect on how our experiences of being hurt and excluded impacted on our present reactions, behaviour and attitudes. Rod discussed the theoretical basis of re-evaluation counselling and then explained how the listening process worked; the listener concentrates without interruption or feedback, while the other person talks. The two people then swap roles, the listener becomes the speaker and vice versa. This way both people take turns and get an

---

50 Distributed in response to a request from a participant.
equal amount of attention. We then broke into pairs and talked about our feelings about asylum seekers and anything in our childhood experiences that these feelings reminded us of. The non-judgemental, receptive listening skills Rod taught and his explanation of the causes of oppressive behaviour were experienced by the participants in distinctly different ways. Derek reflected on the importance of what he had learnt about listening beyond the context of the session:

*That bit we were taught on listening . . . If you don’t listen, you don’t hear. You can sit alongside somebody and while they are talking and say “yes, yes” and never hear a thing. But by listening you’re actually hearing.*

As with Derek, Mel found the listening practice experienced in the pair work useful:

*I know a particular way of listening and hearing what people are saying. But listening from what Rod was saying was completely different from what I was expecting and it is a very good one. Carrying out that exercise really brought out how we normally jump in and have things sitting there because our emotions and feelings start to come up. . . And you’ve got to restrain yourself. I thought that was very good.* (Focus Group)

Steve was interested in the theory as well as the listening practice. He found that the process of talking about his initial feelings about asylum seekers created a high level of anger:

*What Rod was talking about, your early childhood or previous experiences, how you’re treated, and how that can affect your views, formulate your views . . . it was interesting . . . Frances [partner in the activity] was picking up that I was really angry, partly with the way that asylum seekers are being treated but also with the government lying to us.* (Focus group)

Driandra misunderstood the theoretical basis of the process and was concerned that it meant that many people would not be able to be empathetic:

*I liked Rod too. The power of listening, that was good . . . I was internalising what he was saying, thinking of me in it all. I remembered thinking that we’ve got to be damaged . . . to have empathy. Because I think that’s what he was saying . . . That to be able to identify with people, like asylum seekers, who’ve had a hard time, you’d have to have had a hard time yourself . . . I was a bit worried about it actually. I don’t know how many damaged souls there are in Australia but if the majority aren’t damaged, then these asylum seekers are never going to get anywhere because people aren’t going to welcome them because they won’t understand their position.*
Driandra and Harriet commented on how they had taken the listening practice into their work. Harriet commented on how she had found it useful in the short time since Rod’s session:

*I’ve taken some of the session on active listening on board and find myself sitting back and rather than jumping into the question, letting that conversation go a little longer. People feel like they have been heard a lot more.*

One of the participants, a self-identified introverted character, felt “shy and uncomfortable” and did not enjoy having to give opinions and talk about his ideas for a set period (Feedback Sheet). Another felt that the session helped him to “understand the enormous emotive issues involved” concerning asylum seekers (Feedback Sheet).

Contrary to the other participants, Angus disagreed emphatically with Rod’s approach and described Rod’s session as a “load of rubbish” (Journal).

*Did I learn anything? No, I certainly did not from Rod. To put it bluntly, what he said was nonsense! He seemed to be espousing the medical model of examining the background of the ‘patient’ to work out what procedures to adopt . . . The justice system fails because it takes background into account and lets criminals off with warning so they continue in their criminal ways.*  (Journal entry – Thursday, 21 August 2003)

*One of the things I feel, when somebody does wrong you come down on them like a ton of bricks the first time and you follow it through . . . I believe in behaviour modification.*

In reflecting on his facilitation of the session, Rod stated:

*I found the group was generally pretty interested in what I presented to them and most seemed at least willing to engage in the processes I offered. What I presented was pretty challenging and was a new experience for most. And we only had an hour to engage in a very different way of looking at the world! It was hard to gauge how much they took in so it was useful to read the feedback. Most seemed to get a lot out of it, clearly one misunderstood what I said and one vehemently disagreed – which is fine!*

*I felt pretty good about the session – it was hard to fit into a short time so I had to talk more and listen less than was ideal. Naturally I was a bit scared as I know the topic is so emotive and challenging for so many people. Consequently I think I was a bit less clear than I wanted to be. Fear is very effective at clouding my thinking and making me repeat myself or say things more tentatively or vaguely than I would want to! (which is appropriate as I have little doubt that it is fear*
that clouds our thinking about asylum seekers and related issues) I definitely didn’t want to get drawn into fruitless discussion, and succeeded in that – phew!!


I’m even pleased that Angus was so fired up in his rejection of what I was saying – strong feelings are very useful and can be a pre-cursor to a shift in view. Driandra’s comment about people needing to be damaged in order to be empathic obviously missed the mark by a mile and worries me a little – it shows just how people (probably all people) process what we hear through our own feelings, attitudes and experiences and can therefore get it very wrong!

I guess the feedback gives some support to my contention (and that of re-evaluation counselling) that attitudes to issues like asylum seekers are often based in deep distress (e.g. Angus – who probably was come down on like a ton of bricks!) which has been around most of our lives and are powerfully reinforced by broader societal distresses such as racism and nationalism. These distresses will often require a lot of in-depth reflection and some attention from others so that the hurt that surrounds them can be identified and healed. Then the issues can be thought about more rationally. These attitudes take a lot of shifting, particularly when there are so many oppressive forces at work fanning the flames!

Session 4: Knowledge/Beliefs/Power (exploring their use in refugee issues)

Aims
1. Examine power – personal, institutional, group – hegemonic power
2. Consider how power is exercised in relation to / by asylum seekers
3. Consider the relationship between power and knowledge

Handouts
Social Capital Quotient (Dr J Bell) (Appendix 7.5)
Martin Luther King Junior quote on power and love

Knowledge/Beliefs/Power

To introduce the concept of knowledge and power, I designed an activity that Donna (from the collaborative team) and I facilitated with half the participants each. Within each group, participants were allocated a persona, such as Chief Executive Officer of a major international company, casual factory-hand, housewife in a very high socio-economic suburb and asylum seeker. They imagined a stereotypical newspaper story about their character and described the character to the group in terms of age, gender, race, education and economic position. Participants ranked the persona in terms of power and influence which society generally ascribed to people with those characteristics. They received the Social Capital Quotient handout (Appendix 7.5),
which required them to consider how factors such as race, class and gender affected the position of their character. The group then discussed the type of power and influence of four of the characters. How power related to knowledge, and ultimately truth, was raised either by the participants or by the facilitators. We discussed the ways in which people who are positioned as relatively powerless within society exercised their limited options. In particular, we explored the position of asylum seekers in detention centres and their behaviour, such as self-harm and destruction of property.

**Vignettes**

Through the session, Hal resisted any positioning of the asylum seeker as not being powerful. This would appear to reflect his concern shown here of the danger asylum seekers present to Australia:

*The session about power was another interesting session. That was an eye opener for me as well . . . I think that the refugee was rated as the lowest when it came to the ranking of power but I don’t quite agree because I believe they have quite a lot of power too. We see on the news that they break up the detention centres.* (Focus Group)

The activity caused Derek to question his previous understanding of how power is exercised in our society:

*I was surprised how low a person can rank in the community depending on what their position is. How a Dalkeith housewife has more weight than a school teacher . . . I was down quite low on the scale with the character I had . . . I was the school teacher . . . But it was very interesting to go through it and I’d like to go through it again without any character.* (Interview 2)

*My conclusion was that everybody needed to know about it. Not just those of us who were in the community education programme but the population.* (Focus Group)

Similarly, Mel had new ideas and posed himself new questions as a result of the activity:

*Doing the exercise I felt that I was pretty down there. That was rather interesting, where we actually focused and saw ourselves and saw other people in the community . . . Why am I down where I am? . . . I didn’t think refugees would be very high on the list especially when they were locked up. They didn’t have much, did they? We take freedom for granted. But it was interesting to see where the fruit picker came in relation to the housewife.* (Focus Group)
Angus felt that the activity gave him the “opportunity to view situations from a
different point of view” (Feedback sheet). Although the activity was designed to raise
issues of structural power based on class, race and gender, Angus focused on
individual power:

The role play on the status of people’s vocations was interesting and thought
provoking. But, in many ways it was false and outdated. Fifty years ago, rating
the power of people on their vocational positions would have been legitimate but
not now . . . Power is exercised by people who are persistent, politely aggressive,
and people who acquire knowledge . . . Power depends mostly on individual
characteristics. Self-confidence, persistence, knowledge, and group support are
the main attributes. (Journal entries between 20 and 23 August 2003)

The general issues raised by this activity had already been well considered by Ron
who had been exposed to Marxist economic critiques:

The one where we were given different personalities and we had to work out
where they rank . . . I didn’t get a lot out of that one. I saw it as fairly obvious. But
there are a lot of people in certain positions who don’t realise how powerless
people in other positions are . . . I would say that people who retired before the
changes in the labour legislation would find it quite stunning to come back under
current working conditions.

The participants reported to have enjoyed the session. Only one person had felt
uncomfortable and shy (during the session on listening). Participants feedback sheets
described how they felt in positive terms:

* Stimulated
* Involved
* Comfortable
* Interested
* Devoted to learning

At the end of the evening Mel asserted a link between asylum seekers and terrorists.
As a result, I suggested that participants may like to investigate the factual basis of
that link for next week. In addition, I requested that they consider what questions
they would like to ask people who came to Australia as asylum seekers or refugees
and to bring them. They were aware that the programme included a session with
people who had come to Australia as asylum seekers or refugees. I explained that I
was going to provide the questions to the presenters prior to the session as the
experiences that they would talk about may be difficult and I wanted to ensure that
the process was not distressing for them. It was important that the situation would be safe for the invited presenters.

**Commentary**

As a participant in Rod’s session I found the listening activity very effective. It helped me to reflect on my inadequate listening skills. Also, my partner, who was strongly anti-asylum seeker, spoke about his experiences of being the victim of the town bully and that he felt that it was his responsibility to avoid the bully rather than that the bully should be stopped. This assumption of responsibility to avoid oppressive uses of power, fitted with his acceptance of the structures of power as being immutable. It seems that the place where the psychological meets the sociological is one of those messy intersections, very relevant to transformative pedagogy.

In the second session I was interested to see the use of a more Foucaultian analysis of power by those participants who held anti-asylum seeker views in arguing that asylum seekers were powerful in particular ways. The voicing of the dominant discourse by Mel through the linking of asylum seekers and terrorists was not unexpected. The likelihood that the dominant discourse would be asserted kept me alert through the whole programme. I was aware that the challenges faced by a facilitator in those moments can be significant and often are not successfully met. I was aware of the available information with respect to the alleged asylum seeker/terrorist when I suggested to participants that they investigate it themselves.
Session 5 commenced with a discussion of the two ‘homework’ tasks from the previous week. Four participants and I had investigated the alleged link between asylum seekers and terrorists that had been raised the previous week. The information showed that the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) individually checks every asylum seeker (unauthorised arrival) for the security threat posed to Australia and had found no persons of concern. This information was discussed with the group and compared with the public perception.

I then provided brief information on the background of the people who were coming in week 5 to share their experiences as asylum seekers and/or refugees. They were advised of a change in the programme, in that I had invited a barrister who undertook pro bono work for asylum seekers in detention to come and discuss the legal system with them the following week. I had also invited a solicitor from the Australian Government Solicitor’s Office to provide an alternative view but that was not possible with the short notice given.

51 Adapted from the Racism No Way website (Racism No Way, 2005).
Vignette

Harriet was one of the participants who investigated the alleged link between asylum seekers and terrorists. She thought that this was a good way of gently addressing some of the fears present in the community:

*I think it was good to see the ASIO side of things. This is where the skills of the facilitation come in. The fact that some of the people were saying that “black is black” and “white is white” and the materials were saying “in actual fact dudes, did you realise that people . . . who overstay their visas, are more significant than the folks who are coming in by boat, plane.” That was a subtle way of addressing some of that fear. (Focus Group)*

As Harriet’s comments imply, as facilitator having researched the issue already, I knew what the available information would say.

**Australians, who are we? Our cultural/national identity**

Developing the theme of identity further, we looked at issues of cultural and national identity. We also discussed issues of Indigenous Australians, the White Australia Policy and multicultural Australia. The session commenced with a broad discussion of Australian culture arising from ‘generating questions’ distributed to the participants (Appendix 7.6). The resulting conversation was quite unusual as it is not common for migrants to critique Australian culture in front of Australian-born people. This was quite confronting for two of the monoculturalist participants. A short video clip of a famous Australian actor of Greek ethnicity followed in which he discussed the homogenous way Australian culture is depicted, its structural causes, and what impact that has on non-Anglo Australians (Appendix 7.7). Participants talked about the myths of the dominant culture and how that dominant culture projects a white Anglo macho image both externally and within Australia.

Participants then worked in pairs to create a group timeline of Australia’s cultural development. As a group we then discussed what we considered important and what was missing. The newspaper article dealing with the Riot at Lambing Flats (a little known incident in which Anglo-Celtic gold miners looted and brutally assaulted Chinese miners in 1861 in New South Wales) was then read and discussed. This was compared to the conclusion of an address given in 1998 by Philip Ruddock, then

---

52 Adapted from the Racism No Way website (Racism No Way, 2005).
Chapter 7

Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. Further discussion was engendered using generating questions around the issue of dominant culture and the relationship of the activities to the issue of asylum seekers. The session covered a lot of material and went well over the time allotted.

**Vignettes on the historical time-line**

A number of the participants particularly enjoyed this session. Frances stated that:

*I quite liked moving around. It’s not a real adult thing, not a real part of my learning experience. I grew up in the 50s and we sat there like that. So it’s interesting when people have to move around and pick things up and look at things. So I found that quite invigorating. And anything to do with history . . . It’s a kind of excitement or something. The session created a bit of energy. That topic infiltrated other sessions. It seemed to hover once we looked at it. (Focus Group)*

Driandra also was engaged by the physical nature of the activity, pair work and the freedom that the session permitted:

*I liked doing the time-line. I thought that was good . . . pairing up with that fellow and getting up and moving around and writing a bit . . . It was the spontaneity of it, and working in pairs.*

Although Tom had enjoyed the session, he felt that he was put on the spot when asked to identify what the Australian cultural identity was. Normally articulate and ready to offer his opinion, he felt anxious during this session:

*I had a few uncomfortable ideas about our cultural identity – I don’t know if we have one . . . cultural cringe . . . I felt uncomfortable for myself, not for others . . . I always feel uncomfortable when I can’t answer questions, when I really don’t know. (Focus Group)*

This session caused Steve to reflect on his ignorance of Australian history which left him feeling self-conscious:

*The dates I didn’t remember. I did feel a bit embarrassed about that. I’ve been here for 18 years and I know about the Eureka Stockade. That’s it. (Focus Group)*

**Vignettes relating to Riot at Lambing Flat**

Angus had not significantly engaged with the programme prior to this session. However, he really enjoyed this week’s programme and was quite inflamed about the
historical cover-up over the Riot at Lambing Flat:

*The one thing that really makes me angry is when people will not stand up to the mob . . . the cruelty and brutality of people because they follow other people.*

As with Angus’s heightened passion, Tony was also quite affected by the content of the Riot at Lambing Flat article. This was one of two sessions where Tony responded emotionally:

*I might have burst into tears at the plight of . . . where we talked about the incident with the Chinese people.*

Paul looked for excuses to justify the actions of the Anglo/Irish mob which he found difficult to comprehend. Derek did not try to excuse the behaviour, perhaps because of his personal connection with discrimination experienced by Chinese migrants to Australia:

*What they did was disgusting. The same thing happened to my great-grandfather. They couldn’t care less about him. He was a Chinaman, fair game, get in the way, get rid of him.*

During the various discussions, one of the participants stated that there had been an official policy of ‘Asianisation’ of Australian culture and that the white Anglo culture was a thing of the past. This is a concern raised by ultra-right wing groups such as the Australian Nationalist Movement. 53 I suggested that we could do some research into this over the next week.

---

53 Ultra-right wing material was sent to me after I had publicized the community education programme in the community newspaper. This included a flyer making claims of Asianisation during previous Labor governments and an 8-page National Action News newsletter with articles decrying the poor position of White Australians and the dominant position being given to minority groups.
Stories and myths about asylum seekers

This session was significantly shortened because the previous session went well over time. As a group, we brainstormed commonly held beliefs about asylum seekers in Australia. The next step would have been to look at the factual basis of those beliefs and, as a group, separate them into myths or truths. The limited time meant that this was not possible and the beliefs identified were left hanging – including myths and prejudices. Handouts addressing the myths were given at the end of the session for participants to take home to read.

Concerned that this activity was unable to be finalised, I created and distributed in the following week, a table for each participant that contained the beliefs the group had identified in one column and space for the participant to comment in the next column on the factual basis of the belief (Appendix 7.8).

Vignettes

Although engaged in the activity, Derek felt uncomfortable with the process of listing the commonly held beliefs and showed a more sensitive response to Muslims than expressed previously:

\begin{quote}
The knowledge and the beliefs that we talked about on the whiteboard, that was interesting. The amount of stuff that came out there fascinated me, just how much was there . . . I was looking forward to the next session . . . I didn’t like that bit about the Muslims having . . . a backward religion . . . As far as I’m concerned it’s their religion and they’re entitled to it . . . I felt uncomfortable because I thought there were some things going on that board that were wrong. (Focus group)
\end{quote}

Steve expressed similar but stronger disquiet in his journal. He unfortunately was unable to attend the final session where we returned to this activity. He
understandably found the lack of closure unsatisfactory:

*We didn’t seem to have enough time for the second part, due to overrun on the first section. Stories and myths about asylum seekers are a very important part of this exercise. We need to explore this more.*

Just before finishing the session Angus brought up the issue of visa over-stayers. He had brought in a recent newspaper article reporting that 19 000 people, mostly from the UK, US and China, had remained unlawfully in Australia after their visas expired. A short discussion ensued comparing the numbers of visa over-stayers to the much smaller number of asylum seekers. It was noted that the language and treatment by the media and government clearly singled out asylum seekers for unfavourable attention while over-stayers were rarely mentioned. Some participants described the differential media treatment as an example of [structural] racism.

This week’s session resulted in a number of people commenting in their feedback sheets on the diversity of the views in the group. From these comments, it appears that the different positions held by the participants had not previously been clear:

* . . . people hold vastly different opinions to me when mine appears to me self-evident.
* Learnt others have strong, diametrically opposed views to mine.
* Learnt the views of other people.
* Variety of strongly held opinions among group.
* Disagreed with opinions of other members of class.
* Enjoyed listening to others’ viewpoints.

All participants reported in the feedback sheets that they enjoyed the session although for one participant his enjoyment was less than for previous sessions.

**Commentary**

I had been a little unsure how the more active Session 5 would be accepted by the group, given that the participants’ median age was in the 45 to 54 category, and had anticipated some resistance. The participants’ engagement and obvious enjoyment challenged my assumptions. This reinforced that pedagogically sound strategies are generally more enjoyable for most people, whatever the age.
This week opened up the debates around asylum seekers and other marginalised groups. Participants offered diverging opinions and the diversity of the group became apparent. Notwithstanding this strong difference of opinion, interaction was characterised by respectful communication and tolerance of different positions. In not having time to reflect on the validity of the community beliefs in the last activity, a risky situation was created whereby the dominant discourse was expressed and not critiqued. I chose to leave it up to the participants to investigate in the following week, hopeful that individual discovery would be more powerful than mere provision of information.

**Week 4**

**Session 7: Asylum seekers in Australia – the global context**

**Aims**
1. Examine the global context of forced migration and the situation of asylum seekers in Australia in that context
2. Assess Australia’s compliance with its international human rights obligations
3. Imagine oneself in the position of having to flee persecution
4. Consider the relationship between the global economic system and social issues

**Handouts**
- The Muntham Outrage (Newspaper Article provided by Derek)
- Table of Beliefs held by Community about Asylum Seekers
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Abridged)
- Temporary Protection Visas (DIMIA Fact Sheet – 64)
- Quotes from: 2002 UN Report; Martha Nussbaum; Sir Ronald Wilson; and Paul Heller

Note: Various additional materials were provided to each group for the group work (documented in Appendix 7.10)

This week’s programme commenced reading a newspaper article entitled the Muntham Outrage. This article was shown to me by Derek during the pre-CEP interview. It related to the inquest of his great-grandfather, described in the article as the ‘Chinaman,’ who died as a result of assault by two Anglo-Celtic workers on a sheep and cattle station in Victoria, Australia. A number of the participants commented on the article.

A further short addition was made to this session as a result of a change in the composition of the group of people invited to come in the following week and talk about their experience as an asylum seeker or refugee. One of the guests, invited by
The embodied transformative pedagogy

Tom, was a person on a temporary protection visa. Basic information was therefore provided about temporary protection visas.

In the principle activity of this session, participants were divided into three groups of four or five people. Using material provided and their own understandings they answered questions, documented in Appendix 7.11, on the following topics:

- **Group 1**: Global patterns of forced migration (Tony, Driandra, Steve and Derek)
- **Group 2**: International obligations/human rights (Frances, Lem, Tom, Harriet)
- **Group 3**: What if...? An exercise in imagining being a refugee (Mel, Paul, Angus, Hal, Talia)

The group that worked on global patterns of forced migration found it a very powerful activity in which they discovered information vastly different to the dominant discourse. Derek was the only person in this group with a strong negative view of asylum seekers and the session significantly affected his thinking (see Chapter 9).

The group that worked on International obligations/human rights found it interesting but there was some frustration caused by the group dynamic. From the comments of the group, it appears that the group did not work well together and spent some time on issues extraneous to the topic.

To the group that undertook the imagining exercise, I deliberately assigned four of the five monoculturalist participants. Their task was to imagine themselves forced to flee their homes. Talia, an extroverted multiculturalist, also worked with this group. To provide some institutional support for Talia, I commented to the group that the men should take care not to dominate. There were diverse responses from the group. Hal sat through much of the process with his arms crossed, disengaged.

**Vignettes**

Unlike Hal, Mel attempted to engage with the process of putting himself in the shoes
of a refugee but was unsuccessful:

*I just found that impossible to do . . . And we had that young girl who did a
terrible job. She just knew exactly what it was all about writing the stuff down
and she was “one of the boys.” During the session I felt frustrated . . . annoyed . . .
this hopelessness that I just couldn’t make any sense . . . I just couldn’t put myself
in that scenario . . . I was like a log floating out on the ocean, all over the place.*
(Focus Group)

Paul who is naturally empathetic and has strong feelings of compassion reported that
it was new for him to consider himself in the shoes of a refugee. He said:

*The session* made a lot of sense to me because I have seen, heard and read a lot
of reports of people in awful situations . . . where they have just got to get out.
And had to leave your own home, which is the love of your life and you care for,
and be forced to leave for fear of your life, I could identify with that and thought
that it was a very interesting session . . . I could put myself in their position quite
easily. I’m so comfortable here . . . I felt extreme distress, of body and spirit, of
leaving your own place. (Focus group)

### Session 8: Human rights and the legal framework in Australia

**Aims**

1. Understand the international context – Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees /
   Universal Declaration of Human Rights
2. Understand the legal process in Australia for asylum seekers
3. Instil a sense of agency
4. Debunk some myths about asylum seekers

**Aims**

Preamble and Article 1 of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

### Legal framework

There is a complicated legal system that applies to asylum seekers who arrive in
Australia and make a claim for refugee status. Over the last 15 years the Australian
government has regularly tightened up the legal regime, limiting the options that are
available to asylum seekers. Matthew Howard, a commercial barrister who
undertakes pro bono work for asylum seekers in detention, came and spoke to the
group about his work and the legal system that applies to asylum seekers. He is a
confident speaker whose self-deprecating comments appeal to the Australian view of
equality, which includes the notion that one’s occupation does not set a person above
any one else.
Vignettes

The former Minister for Immigration had implied that rapacious lawyers were causing the courts to be clogged up with unmeritorious appeals. For the group to understand that most lawyers who assist asylum seekers do so on a pro bono basis was new information. Here we see Angus holding on, in part, to the idea of lawyers as greedy:

*The only thing I was surprised at . . . about that lawyer . . . he wasn’t making a lot of money . . . out of refugees. But the other side . . . they probably make a lot.*

The reaction of the participants to Matthew’s presentation was mixed. Paul felt admiration for Matthew’s dedication whereas Mel could not understand it. Harriet and Driandra were quite depressed by the presentation but Harriet seemed to be motivated to look for ways to improve the situation:

*What can be done? How can we make a difference? How can folks get more fair say in the system? . . . How do you get properly qualified and sensitive people to do this work?*

Driandra, on the other hand, with a lesser sense of agency, was weighed down by a sense of hopelessness from the session:

*Oh, just the complexities of it all, the whole legal system. The tribunal and how that seems to be unfairly weighted . . . by . . . friends of government perhaps . . . The appeal process too seemed to be very difficult . . . I thought, “these people haven’t got a chance.”*

As with Harriet, Paul found Matthew’s presentation quite inspirational, notwithstanding that he is ambivalent towards refugees. Paul’s strong sense of community service and personal agency appears to have been affirmed by Matthew’s presentation:

*That lawyer was quite good, putting his time in for refugees. That takes time, courage, and guts and get up and go and financial sacrifice as well. I thought that he was outstanding . . . I would like to know more on the legal process. The public should know more. (Focus group)*

Talia, who came to the process with some desire to work in the refugee area, was further motivated by Matthew’s session:

*I really enjoyed . . . the legal session with Matthew that barrister . . . that was a*
totally different angle on it. I think there are parallels between you and Matthew. For somebody like me, people like you guys who have actually got up there and are actually doing something and passionate and devoted to it, are really inspirational. I can see it’s really hard work but if you keep at it . . . you can make a difference.

Steve too found this session very interesting:

That was probably the most interesting, what Matthew was saying, because you don’t get too much of an insight of the workings of . . . the legal side. When he said if the populous knew the truth of the matter, 70% of them would be pro rather than 70% against asylum seekers. That was crucial.

In reflecting on his experience of presenting to the group and on their comments, Matthew stated:

I was apprehensive about addressing the group. I have limited experience with community groups and was concerned that I pitch my talk at an appropriate level and try to be as objective as possible. I am always concerned that I not be seen as seeking out the limelight by talking about this issue. The group seemed interested and asked a number of questions which I enjoyed – I enjoyed the chance to hear what was in their minds and to engage with that. That gave me a chance to talk directly to their issues. I thought, given the time allocated, I probably spent too long on giving information in the first part of the session.

I think it would have been better to have spent longer all up. That way I could have introduced the system a bit more slowly . . . and given them the information I think they needed as a base. Then there could have been longer on the interaction part of the exercise.

On reading the comments by the participants, I was flattered by a number of them. I was also surprised that the session seems to have had a significant impact (as I read it) on some of the participants . . . In my experience (really since this session) people are generally receptive (and surprised) to hear that some of the ‘facts’ communicated by the Government are not true or are not completely true.

All except one participant recorded in the feedback sheets that they enjoyed the sessions that week.

At the end of the evening, participants were given a task to do outside the programme for the next week. Participants were asked to choose one of four quotes critiquing the global economic situation (Appendix 7.9) and consider how the quote related to the social issue of asylum seekers in Australia. In addition, I gave
participants the Table of Beliefs I had prepared from the previous week for them to complete (Appendix 7.8).

**Commentary**

From my perspective, Session 7 was one of the least successful. This may well be influenced by the fact that my role was minimal and so I was less engaged with the process. I included too much in the evening and we did not spend sufficient time looking at the issues raised by Derek’s newspaper article, the Muntham Outrage. This is a major regret of my facilitation. I wasted the potential of that moment by not using his material more fully. I used the institutional power of facilitator in a way that contradicted the premise of the pedagogy – that participants would also be teachers in the process. I discussed this with Derek in the post-programme conversation and he said that we would come to the next course I ran and we could use it there! From beginning to end I felt that I was rushing the participants. The amount of reading material I gave the first two groups in Session 7 was overwhelming (over 50 pages per group). It would have been more effective to have given the participants less than half of that volume for the group to work through. However, I was pleased with the allocation of participants to the groups. Talia worked well with the monoculturalist participants in her group to engage them in the imagining of the task. Derek’s exposure to the global statistics was significant in challenging the dominant discourse (see Chapter 9).
Week 5

Session 9: Talking with asylum seekers/refugees

Aims
1. Discover intergroup similarities between the dominant Australian culture and asylum seekers/refugees
2. Humanise the face of the asylum seeker
3. Provide a space for the subjugated voices of asylum seekers/refugees to speak
4. Break down stereotypes
5. Foster empathy for people who have to flee persecution

Handouts
Questions from the participants for guests

Talking with asylum seekers and refugees

This session had been discussed with the participants at various times in the weeks leading up to week 5. They were advised that a number of people who had come to Australia as asylum seekers and/or refugees would be coming to talk about their experiences and that participants would have the opportunity to ask questions. In bringing a group of Australians from the dominant culture together with a group of refugees, it was hoped that we could highlight the “between-group similarities and within-group differences.” In her research into racial prejudice Frances Aboud highlights this technique of prejudice reduction (cited in Cahill, 1996, p. 118). This contact also had the potential to make explicit the privileged position that Australians citizens occupy.

Prior to the session I compiled the questions participants gave me and went through them with the presenters. Some of the questions were re-phrased and others were dropped. Where I dropped a question, I contacted the participant prior to the session and discussed the reasons for this. For example, I deleted the following question posed by a monoculturalist participant because the assumption behind it was highly questionable and it was potentially offensive:

If you are not prepared to accept the Australian way of life and culture and convert to the Christian religion, are you aware that you are a cause of disunity and dissent in this country?

I knew three of the four presenters either socially or from previous work with refugees. A fourth was invited through an Afghan community leader who was known
to Tom. They were chosen to show some of the diversity of refugees. I invited an older Catholic Timorese woman, a male middle-aged Muslim Iraqi lawyer, a young Afghan man and a young Salvadorean woman married to an Anglo-Australian. This use of a diversity of images has been effective in anti-racist work (Pederson, Walker, & Wise, 2003). The greater diversity clearly enhances the possibility of breaking down stereotypes, which Berger (1966) sees as resulting from the anonymous typification or reification that occurs with outgroups. Each presenter commenced by addressing the general question: ‘Why did you leave your home and come to Australia?’

The presenters were invited to stay for refreshments, providing an opportunity for participants to initiate a relationship with them. This opened up a space “to establish the source of contact between persons or the source of interpersonal meaning” wherein one can find the ethical (Beavers, 1990). This session was clearly the most powerful for the vast majority of participants.

Session 10: Presentations of the three groups (from previous week)

Aims
As per Session 8

The guest presenters from Session 9 chose to stay on for the rest of the evening. They watched the groups present the topics that they had worked on in the previous week. These presentations were brief and generated some group discussion on the issues.

Commentary

My reflections on the session with the presenters who had come to Australia as asylum seekers and/or refugees are contained in Chapter 8. In Session 10, a behaviour I had previously noticed in some participants was apparent. A small number of the participants, rather than contribute to the particular discussion that was being held, would make statements that were unrelated. The same people, rather than answer direct questions, would comment on other matters. It may have been useful to provide more unstructured space for those comments to be expressed. It is one of the unknowables as to whether that would have been useful or whether certain
participants would have continued to digress, whatever the approach taken. The frustration these digressions caused participants and me is discussed in Chapter 8.

**Programme break**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Aims</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Critical reflection and analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Examine the relationship between the global economic system and the social justice issue of asylum seekers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To change focus and emphasise a different approach to the dialogical, participatory process of the pedagogy to date, we had a two-week break in the programme. This was designed to allow for individual reflection of a more abstract nature. As discussed by Brookfield (2002b), Marcuse highlights the importance of isolated reflection as well as abstract or philosophical development in critically transformative processes. This is in contrast to a dialogical approach based on the learner’s own life experiences and identity. Marcuse takes a different approach to Freire (1987), who states that “without dialogue there is no communication and without communication there can be no true education” (p. 81). Believing that no particular pedagogical approach can be all things to all people I included multiple strategies to be as accessible and effective for as many people as possible.

It had initially been intended that during the break, participants would choose to read and reflect on an article relating to asylum seekers. However, because we were behind schedule I suggested that they spend the time considering how the quotes they had chosen in week 4 critiquing the global economic system related to asylum seekers.

**Commentary**

Feeling that I had already overburdened the participants with reading material and issues to consider, I did not give this individual activity sufficient introduction or emphasis. Not surprisingly a number of the participants did not fully engage with the activity. My more open and less directive approach on this activity may have been
welcomed by some participants but others may have just been confused as to what the task was.

**Week 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 11: Media – language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aims</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. To make explicit the link between language and dominant discourse ‘commonsense.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To consider the role of media in creating reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Handout</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Kristallnacht’ plot to attack synagogue foiled. (18-24 September 2003) <em>Guardian Weekly</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Media – language**

A much-abridged activity on media and language was used to start this week’s sessions. It commenced with a Chinese Whisper\(^{54}\) – “Doublespeak uses language to smuggle uncomfortable ideas into comfortable minds” (Burnside, 2002) – followed by a short discussion as to how that phrase related to the topic of asylum seekers. Terms such as ‘border protection’ and ‘illegals,’ were analysed for accuracy, image and emotional content.

I then read out a newspaper article from that week’s *Guardian Weekly* that reported on a neo-Nazi plot to blow up the inauguration of a new synagogue in Munich to which Germany’s president had been invited along with hundreds of other guests. Other targets were mosques and Greek schools. The article was discussed in terms of how widely such a serious plot had been covered in the media in Australia (not at all) compared to plots involving Muslims that receive significant media attention. A more general discussion of the role of the media in creating a discourse conflating terrorism and Muslims followed.

\(^{54}\) Not aware of the origin of the term ‘Chinese Whisper’, on reflection I wonder whether it is discriminatory. It refers to an activity where a person whispers a phrase to another person who then passes it on to a third person and so on. The last person to receive the phrase repeats out loud to the group, what is usually a significantly modified version.
**Session 12: Prejudice**

**Aims**
1. Identify the causes of discrimination and prejudice: both of an individual and of a structural nature
2. See the relationship between stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and scapegoating
3. Examine social exclusion as both an individual and a structural issue

**Handout**
Biscuit recipes

---

**Prejudice**

In this session facilitated by Helen from the collaborative team, we looked at different kinds of prejudice. Helen spoke powerfully from personal experience as a wheelchair user and, in a more general sense, of the causes and impact of prejudice. She had the participants reflect on their own experiences of prejudice, in being a victim and perpetrator of prejudice and then share that experience with a partner. General discussion was generated.

**Vignettes**

This session was the only session in which Angus responded in an empathetic way to a particular situation. He commented during the session that it highlighted for him our need to be more open. The following does not capture well the impact on Angus but gives a glimpse:

> Even though I know a lot about that area through working with handicapped children, when you look at the difference between standing up and sitting down [in a wheelchair] . . . Well, it made you aware that . . . you're in an inferior position because you're not . . . one’s sitting down and one’s standing up . . . You tend to overlook those things.

Linking his learning on prejudice to Helen’s session and the programme as a whole, Tom stated that:

> The speaker that I admired the most was Helen. It was like she came out with an impassioned statement about prejudice and trying to get through the idea that unless you’ve actually been there you can’t really understand it. You can try and you can imagine but experiencing it is not the same . . . She was describing how some of these people must feel . . . I was probably relating it to childhood issues of my own . . . The big message I got was how stupid it is . . . to be prejudiced anyway . . . to have some fixed idea in your mind that doesn’t match reality.

(Focus group)

---

55 These were provided in response to participants’ requests.
In reflecting on the session from the position of facilitator, Helen stated:

> I would’ve liked a bigger group because the dynamics are different: there are more points of view, more ideas, more discussion, a better cross-section of the community . . . It is more difficult to engage people to participate in smaller groups. I found it a bit of an effort to draw the participants out. During the session I felt excited at times but also frustrated with the lack of participation. I was mindful of not being too provocative because it wasn’t my group and it was a very sensitive and highly volatile subject. I didn’t want to make them wrong for their views and therefore held back. Within those limitations, I pushed them as far as I could. I used my situation because people can’t argue against it. I was pleased that the participants saw something in it, saw another side or another way of viewing the issue of prejudice and gained a better understanding of the experience of prejudice . . . It is nice to know that I made a difference.

### Session 13: What does it all mean? (and wrap up unfinished activities)

**Aims**

1. Identify how the values of economic rationalism (neo-liberalism) often conflict with our needs and values as human beings
2. Locate the dominant discourse about asylum seekers in Australia in the economic context
3. Debunk some myths within the commonly held beliefs concerning asylum seekers
4. Instil a sense of agency
5. Understand the productive role of power
6. Provide concrete opportunities to work to transform the dominant discourse

**Handout**

Organisations and Email lists in the area of Refugees/Asylum Seekers

The final session was modified to allow time to wrap up a couple of activities that had been left over from previous sessions. This included going through the factual basis of the beliefs held by the community about asylum seekers (week 3 – Session 6). In addition, the participants discussed in small groups the quote relating to global economic issues that they had considered in the break between weeks 5 and 6. Each small group then presented their reflections on the link between the global economic system and the situation of asylum seekers.

A short debrief was held of the previous week’s session with the presentations by the refugees/asylum seekers on our new knowledge and our affective response to the session. The participants responded positively to the suggestion that we meet again with the guest presenters in a couple of month’s time.
We reflected on the overall learning process of the 6-week programme and what it meant for us and in particular what we would do with it in the future. A couple of people talked about what action they had taken to challenge the dominant discourse and to make asylum seekers/refugees feel more welcome. Other people discussed how they would like to become more active in the area. There was some critique of individual, isolated social change action, as opposed to collective action. The difficulties of collective action and the feelings of impotence that accompany isolation were discussed.

Among the comments made on the feedback sheets from the final week’s programme, a number commented on the need for further action. This did not include any participant who was positioned in the monoculturalist category:

* Since the last week, I attended a lecture and thought that one way of valuing difference is to encourage talking with those people.
* I have pushed forward my action plan to get in touch with CARAD and do a bit more.
* I have thought more about taking some structured action to counteract the many social injustices in this country.
* The task of getting here was just the beginning.

**Commentary**

Helen’s session highlights how the role of the facilitator is multiple. Her position as a person with a disability was significant in providing participants with an experience of seeing the world through the eyes of a person whose perspective is generally invisible.

For me, the final session of the programme had the feel of being highly disjointed because I had to finalise a number of activities from previous weeks. I felt that I did not give enough attention to what we can do and how we can engage in a way that will ‘transform our reality’ which was a major aspect of the pedagogy. This was particularly acute for me in relation to one participant’s comments that there is no point in taking individual action and that collective action is so difficult. However, some participants were already thinking about or implementing strategies to challenge the dominant discourse. I was pleased that they were willing to discuss this with the wider group.
Reflections

The pleasures and frustrations that are present in all pedagogical endeavours arose in this programme too. I realised that there were lost opportunities and occasions where, usually due to time constraints, I was more directive than I would have liked. I enjoyed seeing the interaction of the group and reading the feedback sheets and identifying those moments of insight that some participants experienced. I was relieved to see that the feedback sheets indicated that the vast majority of participants, irrespective of their ideological positioning, enjoyed the programme. It was also an unexpected bonus that a number of participants found aspects of the programme of practical use in other areas of their lives.

My major self-critiques as facilitator are firstly that I did not allow Derek and the group the space to discuss his newspaper article. Secondly, I should have devoted more time to what action people could take if they wished to be become involved in the issue of asylum seekers.
Chapter 8

Pedagogical spaces

Introduction

The notion of pedagogical spaces is used as a tool of analysis to better understand how the transformative pedagogy may have interrupted the dominant discourse. It explores how this pedagogy was able to enhance openness and contribute to a commitment to social justice. It also examines the metaphorical place where I hoped to develop critical sensibility with the group. Using the concept of pedagogical spaces, I look at the relations, feelings, power dynamics, atmosphere and tensions within the community education programme and the processes that produced them. The concept of pedagogical spaces includes not only the “physical environment or the setting in which things are arranged [but also] openness to put something forward for consideration or study” (Lepp & Zorn, 2002, p. 383). McLaren et al. (2004) discuss the importance of the pedagogical space created in terms of the political objective of critical pedagogy. They see the challenge as being “to create pedagogical spaces for linking education to the praxiological dimensions of social justice initiatives” (p. 150).

In designing the programme I sought to create productive pedagogical spaces which contributed to, and supported, social justice processes. The ways that we experienced the pedagogical spaces are narrated through the words of the participants and presenters, including my own reflections. The categories I use to describe the pedagogical space are not discrete but are characterised by significant overlap and interrelationships. Thus, I am attempting to disentangle some useful ideas and elements within the transformative pedagogy. This exploration can only be incomplete and messy, despite the following deceptively neat categories discussed:

- Safe space
- Dialogical space
- Democratic space
- Empathetic space
These spaces were deliberately created as part of the pedagogical design and also evolved organically. Each space is both a product and a producer within the transformative pedagogy. In so far as I set out to create certain kinds of spaces, the resultant spaces are a product. However, there cannot be any certainty as to the nature of the space that could have developed. It was a product of conscious and unconscious elements, limited at the same time as it is made possible by the people present, the location and other contextual elements. The resultant space was also generative, playing both a facilitating and limiting role. There was an interplay between the participants, presenters and facilitators, and the form of the transformative pedagogy. How this interplay was to develop was unknowable in advance but crucial to the resulting pedagogical spaces in terms of safety, dialogue, democracy and empathy. This chapter critiques the pedagogical spaces of my transformative pedagogy and identifies elements that either enable or constrain them as productive.

In postmodern consumer-based Western cultures our lives pass with limited time to pause and reflect on issues, central to our existence. By taking time to pause from our hectic lives and consider deeply one social issue we were going against the speed, superficiality and materialism of our times. The postmodern condition acts as a limitation on the creation of productive pedagogical spaces by devaluing the human connection I was promoting. The subjectivities that we form through the hyper-consumer-based discourse often make it difficult for us to dedicate time to such projects.

**Safe space**

Due to its facilitative role in creating other productive pedagogical spaces, I introduce the notion of safe space first. The topic of asylum seekers is one that causes passions to rise. Educational processes that challenge dominant understandings of society and encourage participants to reject prejudicial and exclusionary attitudes are very uncertain processes. If participants do not feel safe and acknowledged they may become nervous, anxious and fearful and are unlikely to be open to examine their beliefs and consider alternative worldviews. Effort was made to ensure that a relaxed, non-judgemental, respectful space was created. In this
I was looking to address some of the issues that often go unexpressed within critical pedagogy. As noted by Ellsworth (1989):

As long as the literature on critical pedagogy fails to come to grips with issues of trust, risk, and the operations of fear and desire around such issues of identity and politics in the classroom, their rationalistic tools will continue to fail to loosen deep-seated, self-interested investments in unjust relations of, for example, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. (pp. 313-314)

The radical potential of transformative pedagogy is impeded where participants do not feel safe. The creation of a safe pedagogical space will necessarily be limited in reach. Most factors causing a sense of personal insecurity will be external to the pedagogical process. As previously discussed, politicians and journalists have deliberately created a sense of insecurity around the issue of asylum seekers. The dominant discourse acts as a serious obstacle to the creation of a broader sense of security in relation to the issue of asylum seekers. Rorty (1998b) discusses the impact that personal insecurity can have on a willingness to engage with human rights issues:

People who don’t believe in human rights etc are not irrational (in terms of their world view) but are “deprived”. They are deprived in 2 concrete things: security and sympathy. Security = life sufficiently risk-free as to make one’s difference from others inessential to one’s self-respect and sense of worth. . . Security and sympathy go together. The tougher things are, the more you have to be afraid of, the more dangerous your situation, the less you can afford the time or effort to think about what things might be like for people with whom you do not immediately identify. (p. 180)

It was important to deal with the concerns and fears that existed in relation to this topic so that participants, guest presenters and facilitators felt comfortable to discuss openly the issues relating to asylum seekers. As Brookfield (1995) has noted: “For critical reflection to happen, there has to be a trustful atmosphere in which people know that public disclosure of private errors will not lead to their suffering negative consequences” (p. 250).

A space is not safe unless it is safe for all concerned. Our society is not safe for all. It is experienced differently depending on a person’s race, gender, class, and sexuality. Similarly, participants’ different positionality will influence how safe they feel in a pedagogical situation (Ellsworth, 1989). The creation of a safe space is influenced by
many factors including the diversity of the group, considered here by Margaret Lepp and CeCelia Zorn (2002):

In considering activities intended to create safe space in educational environments, educators must acknowledge diversity in classrooms. Students come to class with their lived experiences. With a more heterogenous student population, creating safe space may require additional thought, sensitivity, and strategies for conflict management . . . Developing an environment in which participants could comfortably disclose and explore their true feelings and thoughts . . . was crucial. (p. 385)

Except for Hal, the participants in the programme were from an Anglo-Celtic background. Having a group of participants and facilitators with high cultural homogeneity assisted the creation of a safe space. Safety is often created by the assumption that we have a high level of shared experiences, values and beliefs – a shared cultural code.

To develop trust within the pedagogical process, the facilitators participated in activities, modelling that they were willing to trust and be open to others. Lepp and Zorn (2002) discuss the crucial role of trust:

Safe space makes it possible for both students and teachers “to dare,” to share lived experiences, ideas, and opinions by “having neither to weigh thought nor measure words” (Nerburn & Mengelkoch, 1991, p. 37). The learning environment must be a safe space for expressing personal experiences, developing a feeling of trust, and accepting each other’s differences, such as gender and cultural backgrounds. Only when learning space is perceived as safe are vulnerabilities exposed and masks removed. (p. 383)

Physical location impacts on how we feel in any situation. The hall we used was comfortable, warm and ‘middle-of-the-road’ – nothing that would make most people from the dominant culture feel uncomfortable. We freely used the whole space available, including the kitchen area. The participants assisted arranging the physical space at the beginning of each session. The room was set-up with groups of four or five participants around tables. Most participants moved between groups during the six sessions, sitting in different seats, indicating a high level of comfort in the space. This may well have been the result of the several mandated moves during the very
first session. Mel felt that changing seats contributed to the comfort participants felt with each other: 56

At the beginning, your ice breaker – getting to know each other – meant you got out of the chair that you’d been sitting on and not staying there for the whole period. That actually was a good one to get everybody up and moving. (Focus Group)

The physical layout with small groups around desks was chosen for practical as well as pedagogical reasons. In a number of the sessions participants needed some form of desk to work on. Also, people tend to feel physically secure sitting at a desk. Although the open circle has advantages in terms of creating a more egalitarian space, it also has the potential of leaving people feeling exposed and vulnerable. We did use the circle during the birthday wish list activity, one of the first activities. The non-hierarchical nature of the circle was reinforced by the nature of that activity – a way to start getting to know each other that was not hierarchical and did not disclose participants’ socio-economic status, education or occupation. By not reproducing these common forms of division and ranking in our society, the space created was safer for a broader range of people.

The first session was important in setting the foundation of a safe space. In raising explicitly the potential for conflict and agreeing on ground rules for how we would operate, participants were reassured that their safety was important. The key ground rule was that if we had a disagreement, we would not focus on the individual but rather challenge the issue. Mel commented on this aspect of the programme:

I was very interested in your comment at the beginning that it could raise some anger, people get hot under the collar. I was pretty surprised to hear that. I thought “Gee, that’s interesting.” The rules that we had, setting it all down, I was pretty impressed with that.

The nature of the instructional activities also influences the creation of a safe space. Some participants felt uncomfortable and unsafe because of the nature of certain exercises (e.g. see Driandra’s comments on drawing, p. 143). Others reported feeling uncomfortable speaking in front of more than one or two people; others were anxious when they had to report their group work back to the wider group; and another felt nervous sharing personal information in pairs.

56 Unless otherwise indicated, quotes in this chapter are from the post-CEP conversations.
Rod (facilitator of Session 3) gave participants an important reminder during the plenary time of his session. Instead of recounting his own experience, one participant recounted that of his partner. Rod reminded us that before disclosing information about someone else, it was necessary to check with the person and obtain her or his permission to disclose the information. This reinforced the message that we needed to protect participants’ confidentiality. It highlights the role of the facilitator in nurturing such a space through the use of her or his authority when necessary.

The weekly feedback sheets showed the extent to which a safe space was created. The comments from participants during the first half of the programme included the following:

* Very comfortable – even with some hard views; Comfortable; Relaxed; Amongst friends. (Week 1 – comments from four participants)
* Interested and respected; Happy, relaxed and interested. (Week 2 – comments from two participants)
* Motivated, able to put forward my ideas without being criticized, judged or condemned – great interaction with fellow members. (Week 3)

There is a tension between creating a feeling of safety for the participants and encouraging open and honest discussion. By being too protective of the participants’ comfort, a safe space could stifle open and frank dialogue. This tension was highlighted in the first week when Hal expressed collective responsibility of all Chinese immigrants to Australia for the unlawful acts of a few Chinese. A number of participants rallied around him and expressed the view that he should not feel responsible for the actions of Chinese immigrants to Australia. This strong show of support for Hal as a member of the group could have had the contradictory effects of making him feel safe and welcome in the group, and at the same time may have had the effect of silencing him because the participants could be seen to have not validated his views. As the only non-Anglo participant, he remained a relatively passive participant for the rest of the programme. This is a situation in which I believe problematising questions could have been effectively employed to generate a dialogue to explore the issue of when individuals are seen as representatives of a cultural group and when they are permitted the freedom of being individuals.
Social space

For the purposes of this discussion I have located the *social* within the larger concept of safe space. A sense of safety can be fostered through the cooperation and connection of social intercourse. Social space relates to the communal sense engendered amongst the people present. By creating a space in which people feel a sense of community with the other participants, we engage with the humanity of others. The development of a sense of community is a step beyond mere tolerance. In this respect the social justice potential of the social space would have been greatly enhanced had the group of participants included people who had come to Australia as refugees and asylum seekers. The culturally homogenous nature of the group (with the exception of Hal) facilitated the development of a comfortable social space.

In trying to create a productive social space, we used a number of strategies. Our desire to have fun was central. This helped maintain a lightness that enabled people to remain open. Another strategy for creating a productive social space was to include participants and others in as many tasks as possible. By *doing* incidental things together, such as rearranging the physical space, people were drawn into social relationships. This aspect of relationship building is just as important as the more deliberately planned aspects such as working in pairs, sharing refreshments and specific ‘ice-breaker’ activities. There were many opportunities, both deliberately created and naturally occurring, that encouraged people to mix in friendly conversation using first names. A final factor that must not be forgotten in any social setting is the role of food and drinks. The role that shared eating and drinking plays in cementing communities is substantial. From the start there was a good solid feel to the way that the group socialised and included each other.

Harriet’s appreciation of the opportunity for relaxed social interaction provided by the refreshment break was indicative of that of the group in general:

> *Having the break to have tea, coffee and food is a nice way of reducing barriers between people. Because you’re not under scrutiny in strictly the same way . . . you can relax over a cup of coffee . . . It would have been nicer for [the programme] to have been a bit longer and then to develop more of those relationships. Because there were some good people in there. Especially given that they are local.* (Focus Group)
These sentiments were echoed by Angus, notwithstanding that he appeared to be a bit of a loner at times and reported that he did not always enjoy the sessions:

*It was a very close knit group towards each other. What was interesting was the friendly atmosphere.*

The facilitators and presenters who stayed on during the break were important in contributing to the informality and relaxed atmosphere of the social space:

*During the break I continued to talk with the person who was very negative towards Muslims. Other people in the group came up and were quite supportive. Overall I think that the interaction was very positive. (Iraqi presenter)*

Through the social interaction between guest presenters and the participants, Derek became aware that mainstream Australians can be an obstacle to different cultural groups becoming part of Australian society. This realisation challenged some of his preconceptions that immigrants must integrate:

*I thought that the young woman [Salvadorean presenter] was speaking openly, from the heart. She was very polite. I thought, she’s supposed to be a guest . . . she was handing out things [during the refreshment break] and . . . I thought, she has accepted us but we haven’t accepted her.*

The forming of social connection and relationship can play an important role in how and what a person learns. In reviewing studies based on Jack Mezirow’s related theory of transformative learning, Edward Taylor (1997) found that *relationship* was the major factor in student learning:

*These findings contradict the self-directed nature of transformative learning as we presently understand it, and instead reveal a learning process that is dependent upon collaboration and creation of support, trust, and friendship with others. Transformative learning is not about promoting and striving for individual autonomy, but about building connections and community. It is through relationships that learners develop the necessary openness and confidence to deal with learning on an affective level, which is essential for managing the threatening and emotionally charged nature of a transformative learning experience. (p. 53)*

The link between relationship and the development of openness and capacity to take on new ideas came through in conversation with Derek. It may well be that the significant opening up of his thinking on the issue of asylum seekers was related to
Pedagogical spaces

the strong sense of connection that was created within the social space. He expressed the strongest connection with others in the group.

I hope that after I’ve left the group I’ve made many good friends. It is a very friendly group. (Focus Group)

Social connection plays an important role in fostering a safe space, which in turn contributes to the possibility of productive dialogue, to which I now turn.

**Dialogical space**

In the Freirean tradition, a dialogical space would be loving, problematise the social issues under study, be critical and criticism-stimulating. The role of the facilitator in guiding this process is important (Shor, 1987, p. 95). Drawing on the Freirean and critical pedagogy traditions, the productive dialogical space I sought was one in which:

- participants would speak from their own experience;
- participants could experience the freedom of speaking their minds and express themselves from their hearts;
- the thoughts and views of participants would be challenged in a way which was non-judgemental of the person;
- through giving voice to their thoughts, participants would be able to clarify them;
- the dominant discourse about asylum seekers would be problematised; and
- the power imbalance in society, and in the pedagogical process, would be acknowledged and the facilitator would seek to minimise hierarchy between participants and between participants and facilitators and practise non-oppressive, egalitarian processes.

Before looking at the concept of **productive** dialogical space, it is important to note that dialogue can be employed in ways that are contrary to the aims of a transformative pedagogy. A fundamental critique of dialogue comes from its character as a technology of teaching that can be utilised from a range of political positions, including conservative and individualistic positions. As described by Alastair Pennycook (2001) the approach of some educators to dialogue and voice leaves the existing socio-political structure unchallenged:

The version of voice used in critical pedagogy has been criticized, particularly in Australia (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Luke, 1996), for what is seen as an inability to escape a North American individualistic idealism. From this perspective, critical pedagogy seems more concerned with just letting everyone “have a voice,” and it is unclear how this enunciation of marginality can actually bring about social change...
voice and the notion of dialogue (the engagement with voice) are often treated trivially. (p. 131)

To avoid the dialogical space becoming acritical and merely focused on ensuring individual voices were heard, I carefully watched the dynamic of the dialogical space in my role as facilitator. I ensured that while encouraging all to speak, views that exhibited oppressive, prejudicial or discriminatory characteristics were challenged in a way that kept the speaker engaged. For example, Mel suggested that Australia had ruined multiculturalism because it was the world that was multicultural, not nations. He stated that Asians should go back to their place, Arabs to their place and Africans to theirs. I posed, with mock horror, “Oh no, what does that mean for me? Where do I go, a white Australian?” Other participants supported my questioning of Mel’s position. Mel acknowledged the problem but responded with equanimity indicating that it was acceptable for Whites to be in Australia given the length of time since settlement. In challenging his position I tried to ensure he remained open.

By problematising the dominant discourse whenever it was raised in discussion, the dialogical space remained productive for the creation of critical sensibilities. Coupled with the provision of material, some from official sources and some that challenged the dominant discourse, the dialogue was grounded in information and rigour (Mayo, 1999, p. 48). The materials provided were compared and contrasted, through dialogue, in ways that challenged the ‘commonsense’ of the discourse on asylum seekers.

The concept of dialogical space has problematic aspects. There is clearly danger for such a space to exclude people who are not skilful or confident in articulating quickly their views. There is the likelihood that certain individuals will dominate. Socio-economic factors produce individuals who have a greater level of comfort with public dialogue. The sexist, classist, and racist nature of society favours White, middle-class, well-educated males who are generally more comfortable expressing their views publicly. A number of participants indicated that they were not comfortable talking in a public setting, not even the informal setting of the programme. Steve’s experiences of school had left him silenced, something in
common with many working class students (Willis, 1977; Shor, 1992), which continued to impact on his ability to participate fully in a dialogical space:

_ I really don’t like public speaking. I’m alright one to one but when there’s more than one or two people I find it really hard. I think that goes back to certain things that happened at school. So I found that a little bit hard sometimes. I’ve got my views and I’m not frightened to say them but . . . I’m not comfortable in a big group of people._  (Focus Group)

These comments from Steve support Shor’s (1987) conclusion that “in a critical classroom, where mutual dialogue is a key learning process, the mass inexperience with ‘talk’ poses serious problems” (p. 72).

With this group of participants, structural factors which work to privilege certain subject positions (gender, race, class) did not appear to have a significant impact on who spoke. Although there were some individuals who spoke more than others, gender did not seem to be a factor. However, there was a tendency for three of the men with less formal education to speak less. In their focus group discussions, all participants stated that they did not think that the space was dominated by anyone. Steve and Tom agreed that there was no domination although Tony was a little less sure:

_Tony: I think that you do get a few dominant people within the group who tend to dominate. That is all part of democracy. Steve: But you never really felt that anyone was really taking over and trying to run it. Tony: I think that Kathryn did a good job if people were spending too long, or going off track, you redirected things . . . Possibly there were one or two people who didn’t speak much but on 95% of occasions you coaxed information out of . . . everybody . . . on a fair and equitable basis. I can’t think of anytime where I thought somebody is not getting a go or somebody’s going way too long or anything like that. Tom: I agree. There were . . . all these different personality types and I tend to be quiet, other people tend to be noisy. So . . . that’s ok._  (Focus Group)

Although the productive dialogical space I was seeking would provide freedom to speak from the heart, dialogue is a process that can easily become weighted in favour of analytical and logical processes. Because of the Western educational focus on reason it requires significant skill and attention to create a dialogical space that includes communication that is more intuitive or affective. Lem’s preference for logical reasoning came through as he expressed his discomfort with more affective ways of communicating:
If people . . . focus their passion rather than just get emotional about it, there’d probably be greater steps taken forward in issues such as this.

The ability of the facilitator to encourage and validate dialogue that is broader than the Enlightenment model of public communication is vital in creating an open and multi-dimensional dialogical space. From my perspective, the dialogical space that was created was characterised by a tension between reasoned argument and discussion generated from emotive responses to the issue of asylum seekers. However, although I believe that dialogue is potentially more productive with the inclusion of emotion, my comfort is with logical, analytical discussion and I unconsciously favoured those participants and moments that exemplified logical reasoning. I found it frustrating at times to have the participants raise issues that were not related to the topic of conversation that had been generated through the problem-posing questions. Lem and other participants had a strong reaction against participants who did not follow a logical dialogical process:

*The programme confirmed that I get very angry when people dilly-dally.*

A case in point of how certain people are disadvantaged within a dialogical space is that of Mel. Mel missed out on contributing to the discussion on various occasions because he did not speak up quickly enough. Possibly compounding what Mel describes as his ‘personality’ is his relatively lower education level and socio-economic position:

*I still haven’t got it down to an art that if you’ve got something to say, say it. I’m still inclined to hold back a bit instead of getting up there. Because I think about saying it, and while I think about saying it the moment’s gone, I’ve lost it . . . And everybody says “what are you talking about” and I’m coming back “just a minute I’ve got this idea.” I know that I’m that sort of personality.*

One of the techniques that I employed to ameliorate the domination by the quicker thinkers was to distribute in some sessions, written problematising questions. This gave participants time to reflect and to prepare an answer rather than to be on the look out for an opening in the dialogue for their input.

Obstacles to creating a productive dialogical space come from the way that dialogue is practised in our society. Common counter-productive practices include: talk in the presence of an authority figure tends to be hierarchical and directive; men tend to
voice strong conclusions rather than engage in open dialogue; and we have a culture
of humiliation of others who express views different to our own (Shor, 1987, p. 73).
This results in a lack of practice and even fear of the open dialogical process in
which understandings and beliefs are challenged and critiqued. However, there are
experiences of more generative and interactive forms of conversation which exist and
from which we can learn. These include the dialogical practices of women, some
minority groups and many other cultures where discussion is more circular and
iterative. The community education programme was a *public* space, which meant that
there was higher likelihood for the dominating forms of talk that Shor identifies to be
the norm. In seeking to create a dialogical space in which the dominating forms of
talk were minimised, I was aware, as the facilitator, of the need to leave open
opportunities for input and not shut off participants from voicing their thoughts, no
matter what views were expressed. As a woman, and from a traditionally feminised
position, I am very comfortable in the (socialised) role of supporting and
encouraging conversation. While employing these techniques, I was alert to the
opportunity to throw in a question designed to change the focus and assumptions of
the discussion (as a critical feminist would).

### Listening

*Don’t say you are right too often teacher.*

*Let the students realise it.*

*Don’t push the truth:*

*It’s not good for it.*

*Listen while you speak.*

Bertolt Brecht (cited in Rees, 2004, html document)

I have located the analysis of *listening* and *authority* between the discussion on
dialogical and democratic spaces because they are relevant to both and can act as a
bridge joining dialogue with democracy. Listening is also a key element of an
empathetic space. The importance of listening as a goal separate but related to
dialogical and democratic space is one of the important things that I learnt from this
research. It seems trite to argue for the centrality of listening within dialogical space
and democratic space, and yet it is an activity undervalued both in the literature and
in practice. And while theorising about dialogue and democratic processes may
necessarily imply a listening component, the focus is more often on the talking and
expressing aspect of these activities than the contribution of listening. Dialogical processes are impossible unless people are prepared to listen. Neither is it effective to provide a space for normally subjugated voices if no one listens. Democratic notions of plurality, and of providing all concerned with the opportunity to participate, likewise imply listeners. The role and importance of listening in critical pedagogy has not been significantly theorised.

By discussing listening in its own right, I support the work of Michael Welton and others in putting a theoretical spotlight on this activity. Welton (2002) argues that:

1. communicative interaction is the dynamic driving vital civil societies;
2. sustaining this vitality hinges on deepening our knowledge and understanding of dialogic processes;
3. listening is a seriously neglected side of communicative action;
4. as human beings we have the capacity to learn to listen and heed others;
5. but if everyone talks and no one listens, or the powerful and privileged remain deaf, talk falls into dead space. (p. 198)

Although Welton deals with listening as a rational process, listening is also important as a relational process (Dunlop, 1999) and as an affective process; processes valued highly in my transformative pedagogy. In critical theory, listening has been relegated to a secondary place to seeing, in the same way that affective processes are less valued than reason. Stephen Crabbe (2004) highlights the importance of hearing, a close companion of listening, in the creation of an empathetic space:

In our civilization, the visual sense is the way to get a grip on objective reality, to identify practical solutions, to gain certainty. Hearing, however, is a means of relating to ourselves and others on a feeling level, of coming to know their values, joys, fears and desires . . . A more deliberate emphasis on hearing, as opposed to seeing, will help us to build a more humane, more profound, and more creative basis for the world. (html document)

Of relevance to critical sensibility, listening is both facilitative of, and facilitated by, openness to challenge the dominant discourse. Kincheloe’s (1999) approach to how listening can play a role in undoing white privilege is relevant to undoing other forms of privilege and exclusion such as that relating to asylum seekers:
A key feature of a pedagogy of whiteness involves inducing white people as a key aspect of their analysis of their subjectivity to listen [italics added] to non-Whites. Such a process will be difficult in Western societies where the dominant culture has encouraged speaking over listening and has rewarded domination over sensitivity to the position of others, especially subordinated others. Such listening will involve both taking seriously those who have been silenced out of fear and developing an empathetic imagination that sees from the perspective of the other . . . Having no tradition of adapting to what they have historically deemed inferior cultures, Whites will find this process difficult. (p. 184)

Listening was explicitly incorporated into the programme through the re-evaluation counselling activity that Rod facilitated (week 2). That activity required participants to listen attentively and actively to a partner without interrupting, commenting, rephrasing or even questioning. It was a very useful session and gave us an opportunity to listen in a way little practised in general communication. It helped prepare us to be open to information and to listen to others without looking for the opportunity to jump in and talk. This activity was vital in establishing a productive listening space that was needed throughout the programme. It helped us work toward the kind of communication that Welton (2002) refers to, noting: “resourceful and respectful communication not only pursues the ‘best argument’; it also produces human solidarity” (p. 207). In Chapter 7, Derek and Mel’s comments on Session 3, week 2 showed the link between respectful communication and solidarity. The participants’ willingness to listen was apparent in their communion with each other, with presenters from the dominant culture (Matthew), as well as with those not in powerful positions (the refugees/asylum seeker presenters). In the context of talking about participants’ preparedness to listen, Derek linked the listening to an open attitude:

*I thought that . . . everybody there was open . . . they didn’t hide anything.*

The emphasis on listening was also instrumental in solidifying the safe space created. One participant expressed his enjoyment at the novel way of communicating: “*That we can discuss and not put [each other] down but listen – a pleasure to be part of*” (Feedback Sheet week 3). These comments from participants support Ledwith’s (2001) view as to the impact of listening which is open, affective and rational, namely, that: “Through the process of dialogue, we listen from our hearts and minds, connecting with people through our common humanity” (p. 177).
Using authority

Like listening, the facilitator’s use of authority plays a key role in the establishment of productive, dialogical and democratic spaces. Throughout the programme, facilitators did not adopt a hierarchical approach but emphasised the importance of each person’s contribution. In every pedagogical situation, power is present and being employed by all involved. This is a fluid condition in which power can be exercised in different ways at different times. I am not suggesting here that there is an equitable ability to use power. Even in the context of a community education programme, power and authority exist in the position of the teacher. As Robin Usher (1985) indicates:

> The question of authority is obviously very sensitive and involves sociological as well as psychological factors. The teacher’s authority is not just a matter of students’ conceptions of ‘expertise’ but is also based on the fact that he [sic] embodies the institution in the classroom. (p. 178)

It is clear that I had significant power arising out of the institutional support of the university for the project. As facilitator, I also had the traditional authority arising from the position of teacher. All of this is, complicated by the fact that I am a woman and as Susan Stanford Friedman (1985) has observed, “any kind of authority is incompatible with the feminine” (p. 206). Notwithstanding my relative youth and being a woman, I was aware that I had institutional power and the power associated with the position of teacher. These I used to create spaces characterised by social justice processes. Although not comfortable with the notion of liberating others, like Lewis (1990) I have “no problem justifying the use of my institutional power to create the possibility for privilege to face itself . . . Using power to subjugate is quite different from using power to liberate” (p. 480). This awareness of my authority means that, even when I took a step back and left the space relatively free from my presence, I knew, as did the participants, that I could step back into the space and re-exert the power associated with the position of facilitator-researcher.

In an educational programme where participants are drawn from the dominant group, it would have been dangerous to leave the space free as the oppressive practices and the ‘commonsense’ of hegemonic views could easily re-assert themselves. I was not willing to have the pedagogical space reproduce social inequities. Heeding
Brookfield’s (1995) warning that his “unwillingness to intervene too directly in class discussions . . . actually allow[ed] for the perpetuation of differences of class, race, and gender that existed outside the classroom” (p.xi), I played a more active role. I remained very present and ready to step in whenever necessary. The power inherent in the position of facilitator made it possible for me to gently challenge prejudicial or discriminatory views. Where participants were less comfortable offering their opinions or thoughts, I asked them by name if they would like to add anything. Previous comments were used to highlight inconsistencies and material/information provided was used to challenge prejudicial views and the dominant discourses.

During a focus group session, Harriet and Frances discussed the way in which the facilitation modelled a respectful problematising approach:

*Harriet: It’s also a model in itself. Frances: Absolutely. Harriet: This is how you deal with opposing views. Harriet: You don’t shout out in somebody’s face, you reason. Frances: That’s right. Harriet: Think about it, put a different spin on it and refocus. Harriet: In doing that, you’re sort of giving people a blueprint for dealing with conflict. Frances: Absolutely.*

As previously mentioned, some participants were frustrated by the inability of others to ‘stick to the point.’ They would have preferred greater use of my authority to stop this. This confirms Usher’s (1985) reflection: “Students can become irritated at each other’s contributions and resentful that the teacher does not play a more active and direct role” (p. 69). Driandra clearly expected the facilitator to intervene when participants were not keeping to the point:

*Some people don’t listen to the question . . . They don’t answer the question. “No, that’s not what she asked you!” . . . They just liked to hear their own voices . . . You have to pull them back to the question because they go off on little tangents about themselves.*

This illustrates the tension that can occur between social justice processes and participant preferences. I am aware that at times my use of authority closed down discussion and may well have contributed to some people choosing to self-censor rather than to speak openly. The balance each educator seeks will inevitably suit some participants and frustrate others. This is part of the delicate balance within a pedagogical process.
Democratic space

The kind of public space that emerged through the programme and the ways that it may typify and contribute to a society characterised by radical democracy are examined here. I share Shor’s (1987) concern that many politically radical positions do not advocate politically radical processes:

This radically egalitarian method is not automatically grasped by left or dissident teachers. The act of study needs to be thought of as an act of cultural democratization; democratic relations in class legitimize the critique of oppressions; students experience freedom while examining the forces which impede freedom. The practice of democracy in study is the study of democracy in practice. This dialectic action disrupts the routine submission to authority in and out of school . . . The extraordinary disruption of familiar order empowers students. (p. 96)

Social justice incorporates the notion of radical democracy. In what ways was a radically democratic space approximated and how did that occur? As with dialogue, ‘democracy’ is not necessarily productive in terms of a transformative pedagogy. Living in a representative democracy accustoms citizens to arguments that sovereignty rests in the people but is exercised on their behalf by elected representatives; that it is sufficient to have decision making carried out at a distance by those representatives; that the combative, even personalised point scoring, nature of parliamentary debate is a sign of a healthy democracy; and that the people are an integral part of the system only through the electoral process. If this were applied to a pedagogical situation, the democratic space would be characterised by the domination of a few well-resourced individuals who use their power aggressively to achieve their desired outcome. For this reason the qualifier of ‘radical’ is necessary to ensure that a more truly democratic space is aspired to.

A productive democratic space would be characterised by a plurality of voices – a situation in which all voices can speak and no one is silenced. There needs to be a respectful tolerance in which different views are allowed to co-exist. In her journal, Harriet discussed the role of respectful tolerance and the vulnerability that a person can feel with the expression of competing ideas. Although the experience of being in a situation where diverse views were expressed caused her some anxiety, it was also
stimulating:

*Probably a sense of being confronted with an opposing view and still living to tell the tale . . . Interesting. But taking a step back and thinking about it afterwards, it was important to hear opposing views and have some of that stuff challenged rather than not hearing it. I respect people for being prepared to stick their neck out when I think there was a lot of people with fairly positive views about asylum seekers and so to stand up and say “why are they doing this, and why are they doing that?” was an interesting balance.*

Given the significant imbalance of power, authority and resources within our society, the approximation of a radically democratic space in practice will always be limited, and any attempts run the danger of merely allowing the powerful to assert the dominant voice. The strong feminist critique of democratic processes (Luke, 1992) highlights some of the problems of seeking to use them in societies marked by the exclusion of certain groups from public life. Ellsworth (1989) and others have argued that the “democratic communication process” is unable to be emancipatory as it inherently excludes certain marginalised groups who have had difficulty having a voice (p. 306). The greater number of men in the programme underscored the potential for the democratic space to be dominated by the men. It was significant that this did not occur. Amongst the women who participated, two in particular were very forthright in expressing their opinions. It is interesting to note in this context that two of the male participants commented on the outspokenness of one of the women. Whether they were reacting solely to what they perceived as intolerance or whether they were also reacting to the very presence of her articulate and forceful voice is an interesting question.

Although there is no indication that the male participants dominated the democratic space, the issue of the impact of ethnicity is not so clear. The only non-Anglo Australian participant, Hal, was one of the least active participants. He spent much of the time physically separating himself through actions such as positioning his chair slightly away from the group and by crossing his arms. He remained reserved during most of the sessions and the major way that he participated was to make long assertions, usually relating to the dangers of Islam. It may be that this lack of active participation was due to his belonging to a different ethnic group. Hal stated in the focus group that he felt that the process was not dogmatic nor advocated any particular set of views and so it is unlikely that he felt alienated.
When participants are drawn from the dominant social group, there is a strong likelihood that tolerant acceptance of a plurality of voices will result in the dominant discourse being asserted in such a way that it becomes difficult to dislodge (Brookfield, 2002b; Cale, 2001; Cale & Huber, 2001; Luke, 1992). Prior to convening the group of participants, I had no idea how many would support the dominant discourse about asylum seekers. After the pre-CEP interviews, I knew reasonably well the positions of each of the participants and thus knew that approximately two-thirds of the participants were either not completely comfortable with the dominant discourse or rejected it. Given the problems identified by Brookfield (2002b) and others, it was extremely beneficial to the project’s goals that the majority of participants were already challenging the dominant discourse. Whenever the dominant discourse asserted itself, there were voices that challenged it, relying on their own understandings and research, as well as referring to the materials provided. They presented an alternative way of seeing the situation. This made it significantly easier to approach Marcuse’s pedagogical vision of total immersion in the alternative perspective (Brookfield, 2002b).

Being positioned outside the dominant discourse on any social issue can be quite an isolating and tiring experience. A radically democratic space should allow such dissent to be accepted, without marginalisation. Many participants felt grateful for being in a space where an alternative perspective to that of the dominant discourse was encouraged. Steve felt this strongly and made a number of comments along the following lines:

\textit{It was good to meet like-minded people . . . In the work that I do, I don’t get much of an opportunity to meet people with those views . . . Generally it was good to be able to talk to people and find out that there are like-minded people out there, with a bit of compassion, and people who can see through the lies and deceit. (Focus Group)}

Frances also commented on the novelty of being able to discuss a key social issue:

\textit{It was good to have an opportunity to engage with other people . . . about something that’s really been getting to me for a good while . . . there are limitations to my life because of the way I feel our communities are set up. It was great.}
Merely hearing a voice that is different to the dominant discourse could challenge a person’s previously held understandings. The position from which this voice speaks clearly affects how it is heard or read. When the dominant discourse is pervasive and it accords with the position of the listener, there is no incentive to hear alternative voices. In the productive democratic space created, the alternative discourse presented in the programme had the institutional support of the university (including the presence of my supervisors at the final session); experienced facilitators; and a wide variety of factual material. It also had some degree of support from the majority of the participants. These factors amongst many meant that the challenge presented was difficult to discount even by those who were extremely comfortable in their agreement with the dominant position.

For Mel, hearing an alternative to the dominant discourse was a novel experience and challenged his existing beliefs:

*They fascinated me some of them with the information that came out. And some of my beliefs were quite different, so there was a realisation that what I was thinking and what was actually happening were two different things. (Focus Group)*

There was a strong commitment to the presence of a plurality of voices that came through in the post-CEP conversations. Participants felt that the process benefited from the presence of all, even the individuals who they found frustrating. Notwithstanding feeling frustrated, all supported diverse views. As Frances said:

*I don’t have any bad feelings about anybody or anything. Whereas in the past . . . I would have held onto a little bit of frustration longer.*

The comments from Lem are indicative of the group’s unanimous agreement that the programme benefited from the presence of all participants:

*I don’t think it would have been better without certain people present. It was important to have those outspoken people as well as those who I got partnered with and I thought “oh no, I can’t believe that I am partnered with this person.” And then all of a sudden I had this great conversation for 1/2 an hour and we talked as if we were long lost buddies. That was fantastic. So I think at the end of the day, the more people you get there, the better the group is going to be.*

**Self-censoring**

Even within a radical democratic space it may be necessary to be careful in what you say. Self-censorship had an impact on the democratic space created because some
participants choose not to express certain thoughts. This included participants from the three ideological groupings. However, one conclusion drawn from reviewing the responses of the participants is that the combination of lower levels of education or ability to articulate quickly one’s thoughts, coupled with being positioned differently to the majority of participants combined significantly to increase the likelihood that participants would self-censor.

There is a tension arising from the practice of self-censorship. On the one hand, self-censorship works against a transformative pedagogy in repressing important concerns of the participants. If participants do not express all of their thoughts and concerns, there is no way to respond to them. On the other hand, some level of self-censorship is a normal aspect of social discourse that facilitates all societies and can strengthen the social connections that bind us in community. Appreciating the tension between smooth social interaction and speaking one’s mind comes through in Mel’s words:

*In the earlier days I would have jumped up and made a lot of comments but I’ve learnt to curtail and bite my tongue and let other people have a say and hear what they are on about. So it’s self-discipline. Not jumping in and making a rash statement and climbing over people’s boundaries, discounting them, what they’re saying. I think that they are just as entitled to their views.*

Being positioned differently to the rest of his group during the group activity in Session 7 caused Derek to self-censor his participation:

*Everybody was in favour of asylum seekers. I was the odd one out. I didn’t speak out, but I do think that I should have. They can’t change my mind. I may have said something and they may have taken up on it and said “Well look, that is not so or . . . you are right.” I thought that was what we were to do, provoke each other . . . If I had spoken up, I would have got thrown out . . . Now I would question. There were some figures there that I would have questioned.*

The issue of self-censorship overlaps with the question of conflict within the democratic space. Where participants are not practised in expressing and hearing points of view in a way which is not inflammatory, speaking out may create more communication barriers, closing down the possibility of productive democratic space. The ability to disagree in a way which did not attack the person and left open the space for further engagement was a strong characteristic of the democratic space
created. Mel was surprised that alternative, respectful ways of dealing with difference were possible:

*She saw things different to the way I saw them. And it did come up because she said “I see it differently to the way you see it.” And I was impressed with the way that she said it. She wasn’t pushing me down, dismissing me out of hand ‘you’re an idiot.’ I thought that was very good. You need to respect each other.*

**Exercising tolerance**

Although participating in democratic processes inevitably caused some frustration, it was accompanied by significant tolerance. Within the democratic process a number of participants commented on the tolerance experienced. Angus had expected greater antagonism during the sessions:

*I was surprised how tolerant the people in the group were. I thought there’d be sparks flying. That tolerance was a positive.*

Frances found in the tolerant interaction with the other participants an opportunity to address some of her personal characteristics:

*I learned a number of things. Be tolerant Frances. Be patient. It was another opportunity for me to learn the lessons that I constantly have to learn that I have to be patient and be prepared to listen to people.*

Derek identified the plurality of voices as a positive experience. As a result, his desire and capacity to participate in a democratic space was enhanced. He now felt more comfortable speaking with people with different ideas. The social aspect appears to have clearly facilitated the development of tolerance, demonstrating the overlap between social and democratic spaces:

*I’ve learned more. Also to accept other people and I’ve had some good friendship with all the people there. If there was something they thought, they said so. And that’s how I know some had the same idea as me. Although there were some who were totally different. Before this programme . . . some of them I wouldn’t have spoken to because they had different ideas to me, funny ideas.*

A number of participants and I also found that by practising tolerant behaviour within the democratic space, our tolerance of the different opinions of others increased. Talia reflected on this when discussing the group dynamic:

*I really enjoyed watching the dynamic between different individuals. It wasn’t that difficult for me, because I consider myself to be a non-judgemental person. There were quite a few comments which I totally disagreed with, but I was conscious*
that I had to respect other people’s opinions. I found that as the programme went along I was more accepting that this is the way that this person feels . . . I did sense within individuals who had a different opinion than me that as we progressed I could see a slight change. I could see that they were swaying in a different direction.

There is a tension that exists between having a considered view based on explicit values and behaving with tolerance towards others who do not share your views. The importance of expressing the views that you are committed to is counter-balanced by the desire not to impose. Talia’s very strong views on the issue of refugees was combined with a commitment to tolerance:

During the sessions, I’m thinking “no you’re wrong, you’re so wrong, but you have the right to be heard and it is not for me to say that you are wrong.” Because it is all about a person’s perception, their own worldview and because I haven’t lived their lives.

Similarly for Tom, there was a regular process of self-talk to keep him grounded in his commitment to tolerance:

I had to continually keep reminding myself . . . not to feel badly about what anybody might be saying but thinking and understanding that’s where they’re coming from and they couldn’t be any other way. (Focus Group).

The limits to tolerance were reached by one of the participants during the session with the asylum seeker/refugee presenters. She/he “needed to challenge what another person was suggesting . . . I felt awkward about some of the questions others were asking but felt that the questions were important to ‘clear the air’.” (Feedback sheet)

The ability to tolerate difference comes in part from an ability to stand back from one’s self and see one’s self in community. Such a capacity is also important in order to empathise, discussed below.

**Empathetic space**

Through a convergence of political, historical and social conditions, the dominant discourse has created a powerful image of the asylum seeker as a dehumanised object to be feared. This image ensures that many Australians feel a seemingly unbridgeable gulf between themselves and asylum seekers, minimising any possibility of empathy. The mandated silence and invisibility of asylum seekers in detention, a silence and
Pedagogical spaces

invisibility largely replicated for refugees in the community, is one of the factors that facilitates the dominant discourse. In week 5, a direct challenge was made to this silence by inviting four guests to come and talk about their experiences of coming to Australia either as refugees or asylum seekers. This opened up the possibility to think and feel ourselves into the inner life of those Others – Heinz Kohut’s description of ‘empathy’ (referred to in Vannoy Adams, 1996, p. 185). This description recognises both the affective and cognitive dimensions of empathy.

It is difficult when you are part of the dominant culture to meet refugees and asylum seekers. They do not conveniently place themselves in the way of those who tread the dominant path. Through listening to the subjugated knowledges of the people who suffer the Australian policy toward asylum seekers we may gain the “cognitive power of empathy” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993, p. 308). By providing participants with the opportunity to learn more about the reality of being a refugee/asylum seeker directly from people with such an experience, it opened the possibility for people to discover what “connects us across cultural borders – our shared humanity” (Shapiro, 2000). As Shapiro writes:

> While there are those who are dismissive of the more transcendent vision of our ‘human-ness’ it is hard to see how we can live without some version of this. It speaks, after all, to that profound quality that connects and unites human beings while, or after, all our distinctions have been given their due recognition . . . To see in every person the ‘face’ of God, as the French-Jewish philosopher Emanuel Levinas has described it, is to grasp just how ethically desensitised we become when this face is turned into the ‘other’. The latter is the dehumanized being of our world that we can now exploit, violate, dominate or murder. (p. 61)

By creating a space in which people who had come to Australia as asylum seekers or refugees could speak, I hoped that a space conducive of connection, empathy and deeper understanding would arise. In the words of Lil Brannon, this would open possibilities, for “affective consciousness raising” (cited in Ferruci, 1997, p. 199). There is no recipe for generating empathy and the proposal to bring asylum seekers into the group carried with it the potential that a contrary reaction could occur. The cultural differences between the participants and the presenters could well have inhibited an empathetic response, as empathy is more difficult with people who do
not share cultural norms (Vannoy Adams, 1996, p. 185). Nonetheless, it is not impossible.

In this session I positioned myself as a cultural worker who does what she can to lift the barriers that prevent people from speaking for themselves (Lather, 1991, p. 47). The great narratives of emancipation and enlightenment that emanated from a centre of wealthy European masculinity were characterised by their valorisation of one voice – that which represented the position at the centre. By providing a space in which the silenced could have a central role, I was implementing Lather’s (1991) suggestion that in a postmodern sense “who speaks is more important than what is said” (p. 47).

Although I sought to create an empathetic space throughout the whole of the programme, through their presence and voice, the refugee presenters consolidated that space in a way that was not possible via other media and processes. Through a productive empathetic space I wanted to challenge and interrupt the dominant discourse. The mere fact that asylum seekers and refugees were present and talking to Australians from the dominant cultural group would start the rupture. The alternative worldviews and experiences they presented would further that dislocating process. Ultimately the potential exists, through such rupture, for an alternative humanised discourse to be generated.

How each of the participants experienced and responded to the empathetic space related to their positionality and subject formation. As a minimum, I wanted to establish a respectful and open communication. The greater potential was for those participants, open to other ways of relating to people, to experience what Parker Palmer (1983) describes as a deeper, loving knowing:

This is a knowledge that originates not in curiosity or control, but in compassion. It aims not at exploiting and manipulating creation, but at reconciling the world to itself . . . The act of knowing is an act of love, the act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own. In such knowing, we know and are known as members of one community, and our knowing becomes a way of reweaving the community’s bonds. (pp. 7-9).
As anticipated, the participants expressed many different affective responses. Here we can see Angus grappling with his strong initial rejection of all non-Anglo immigrants when he discusses his somewhat tempered negative reaction to the presenters. His equivocation supports Shor’s (1992) contention that the introduction of “personal narratives” lowers resistance to a critical approach:

*I don’t think I had any emotional response during the session with the refugees. If anything I felt slightly negative, but it was certainly mixed . . . I suppose it emphasised that . . . people no matter what their race, they are still individuals . . . but because you don’t know them, you’re always suspicious.*

Angus’s qualified acknowledgement that people should be seen as individuals not stereotyped was not taken up by Hal in relation to the Muslim presenters. Hal maintained his rejection of Islam and Muslims after meeting the presenters:

*I have no qualms about any kind of any race or any culture coming into this country, whether they are refugees or they come as genuine immigrants. The only thing I’m worried about are those who come with the Islam religion . . . I tried to balance my view . . . and whatever bias that I had in my mind I tried to translate it into a question and get the information from them personally. I didn’t have any feelings towards them but I was curious. I wanted to find out why they chose to come to a Western country instead of a Muslim country.*

Such relatively closed responses from participants located in the monoculturalist category contrast strongly with respect and desire to connect with the presenters shown by Frances:

*The young fellow . . . with his story . . . I think that they have a real ability to articulate their inner world and their real experiences . . . I just think they are great and . . . I wish that more people could appreciate them . . . The fact that they were sitting there, facing a room of strangers, I think they were very brave and very courageous. And I felt honoured to be able to be there. (Focus Group)*

Steve similarly connected with the presenters, experiencing a strong emotional response:

*To hear the stories of the asylum seekers was very emotional. Empathy (now there’s a word) is badly lacking in today’s Australia. People need to use a little imagination and think how they would feel and react in these people’s shoes. (Steve – Journal)*

Steve demonstrates the imagining that Rorty (1998b) suggests, as part of his sentimental education. This imagining is a key characteristic of empathy and works to create an expansive space, one that has the potential of expanding consciousness.
as well as conscience. Implicit in a productive empathetic space is the challenge posed to notions of cultural superiority through the imagining of being in a different cultural situation. Within the empathetic space the opportunity is maximised for participants to project themselves into the situation of somebody completely different, to begin to recognise the humanity of that person and to feel connection rather than revulsion for them. Through this process it is hoped that:

People of different kinds [will become] sufficiently well acquainted with one another that they are less tempted to think of those different from themselves as only quasi-human. The goal . . . is to expand the reference of the terms “our kind of people” and “people like us.” (Rorty, 1998b, p. 176)

Recognising the ordinariness of the asylum seeker or refugee is a step towards accepting that they may be within the category of our kind of people. Paul saw this:

*The way they looked, they dressed, their body language . . . spoke friendship and . . . pain. Their body language was plain . . . empathy comes out for them . . . We are all just ordinary folks if we are left alone, just given a fair go.*

Like most Australians, Driandra had no previous contact with refugees. As it had for Paul, the contact with them brought for her reassurance of their ordinariness:

*I’ve never spoken to a refugee before. And I think that was reaffirming more than anything else. Just by listening to them and seeing that they were normal human beings and that they’ve been through quite traumatic times.*

The physical presence of the presenters reinforced their humanity for Harriet, which in turn made the issue real:

*The session with the refugees/asylum seekers . . . made the issues real. They are real people. They weren’t something on the TV screen or presented in black and white and that had an impact.* (Focus Group)

A useful tool by which the dominant discourse is able to dehumanise asylum seekers is our propensity to stereotype whole groups based on a few aberrant individuals. Stereotypes are easy to hold when you have no direct contact with the group, the object of the stereotype. As with other outgroups, asylum seekers have undergone a process of anonymous typification, and subsequent reification (Berger, 1966 p. 31 and p. 91). Through this process, the dominant culture reacts to an individual case of an asylum seeker on the basis of ‘known’ characteristics about all asylum seekers. The face-to-face contact weakened the anonymity and stereotyping that occurs
through typification and reification. However, there were limits with this de-
reification. Some participants maintained the stereotypes and the presenters were
seen only as exceptions to those stereotypes. It is notable that those participants who
questioned stereotypes during the interviews or focus group conversations were
already challenging aspects of the dominant discourse.

Hand-in-hand with the humanising effect of personal contact goes a breakdown of
stereotypes. Talia shows this clearly:

This stereotypical picture that you would imagine a refugee or an asylum seeker
to be . . . well, these were just normal, everyday people who have had these
terrible experiences and have managed to get where they are today and give up
their time and share it with us.

The variety of refugee experiences demonstrated by the presenters was important for
Frances and Harriet in contradicting the stereotypical image of a refugee or asylum
seeker:

Harriet: I thought that it was important when meeting the refugees/asylum seekers
. . . in that we had discussed in an earlier session some of the characteristics or
stereotypes that people had. Somebody asked for a show of hands to do with who
was from an Islamic background and not all the refugees/asylum seekers put their
hands up and it tended to actually confront some of that stereotypical thinking.
That wouldn’t have been achieved by just stats. It made it very real.

Frances: I think that that was a good presentation – a couple of women from
different parts of the world. And all of those Muslim men were very open. They
were just nothing like the stereotype, whatever that is, which I think was positive.
And I’m just like everyone else, I’m caught up in the stereotypes too. (Focus
Group)

Although he expresses it in the second person, Tony links a sense of connection with
the destruction of stereotypes:

It softens people’s approach when you actually meet someone. It is easy to hold a
stereotype when you don’t know the person or haven’t spoken to the person or
listened to their story. But once you’re in a situation where it is face-to-face, then
you can’t hold a stereotype unless it applies and I’d say that in all the instances it
didn’t apply. (Focus Group)

In creating an empathetic space, the idea of compassion or caring is central: caring
for ourselves; caring for each other; caring for our communities; caring for our
world. This opening of ourselves to others provides an important balance to the
autonomy and individualism that traditionally dominates Western forms of education. The alternative approach proposed by Roger Mourad (2001) is relevant to the empathetic space created:

We have had two hundred years of modern educational principles, and two hundred years of profound suffering along with them. The problem of the individual calls for a new formulation and for a proper response – one that cares [italics added] for the individual rather than makes it competent. The “modern project” of betterment through competency and opportunity must be challenged and replaced by an emotionally intelligent ethos that expressly and fundamentally acknowledges suffering and limitation in philosophy, policy, and practice. (p. 756)

The participants, with the exception of Hal, Mel and Angus, expressed a sense of caring and compassion engendered through contact with the presenters. Talia said:

The stories of the people definitely had an emotional impact, in a positive way in that now, not that I wasn’t before, but I feel compassion and empathy for the situation of the refugees.

Paul’s selective empathy is discussed further in Chapter 9. He clearly connected with the individuals who came and spoke with the group:

I felt empathy with those people. Empathy to all of them. They needed to be here . . . you need to walk three miles in someone else’s shoes to know what it is like . . . But I don’t feel the same for others who just lob on our shores. (Focus Group)

Angus did not talk in terms of empathy. For him the most positive feeling generated towards the presenters was admiration; admiration when they studied and started the process of assimilation:

I did admire those who went to university. That was really good. They’d made an effort to go to university, which means that you get a more lateral view . . . you know, you’re mixing . . . After being here for five years they realise that if they are part of Australia you’re expected to . . . join in.

The insistence by Angus throughout our post-CEP conversation on the importance of refugees becoming like ‘us,’ like the dominant culture, in order to be accepted, raises the issue of what are the conditions that must exist for connection to be possible between people from the dominant culture and Others. Angus’s words exemplify the position that for any connection to be possible, the Other must adopt the dominant culture or at least be able to negotiate successfully that cultural code. Applebaum
emphasises (2004) this factor in suggesting that without the ability to conform, a person does not attain subject status:

Having subject status depends upon complying with and participating in dominant norms and conventions. One speaks and acts intelligibly (that is, one is a subject) only insofar as one is able to conform to the norms that regulate discourse. As such, social norms are both enabling and constraining: they enable a subject to speak insofar as they constrain the subject as a subject. (p. 64)

Similarly bleak are the views of Gayatri Spivak (1988) who explores the issue through the question “can the subaltern speak?” She sees the potential for resistance by the outsider to the dominant discourse as severely limited. Gloria Filax (1997) explores this further:

The subaltern can speak within her own discourse but in order to speak with those who do not countenance her values and assumptions, she must abandon her own discourse or not be understood. Yet, what is understood as she speaks into the dominant discourse are the terms of the dominant discourse. (p. 265)

Listening to the participants confirms that the terms of the dominant discourse mediated the communication with the refugee/asylum seeker presenters, especially for Angus, Hal and Mel. Nonetheless, I believe that even for the monoculturalist participants the mere presence and voice of the outsider began to rupture the dominant discourse. For people comfortable within the dominant discourse, the simple act of listening respectfully to people whose voices you have never heard is a radical act. All of the participants, with the exception of Angus, recorded in their feedback sheets for the week that they enjoyed the session. The participants unanimously agreed that the inclusion of the voices of refugees and asylum seekers was an important part of the programme. This amounts to an implicit recognition of their right to speak and potentially their subject status. The following examples are included here because of the monoculturalist positioning of the participant speaking:

*The session with the refugees, you had to have. It’s about refugees, and that’s what they were. [Without them] it would be like having a class to learn to write without a blackboard.* (Derek – focus group)

*I was amazed to hear you say that we were going to meet those people in . . . that session there. I think that it was an excellent idea and I was really curious.* (Mel – Focus Group)
If we had gone through the whole session without these people coming, you’ll be exactly like . . . doing the theory subject without any practical. (Hal – Focus Group)

The participants’ recognition and acceptance of the presenters’ voices was a necessary component for the empathetic space. This allowed the presenters to relax, facilitating a greater possibility for connection. Two presenters give some of their impressions:

In the beginning, even though I have experience talking to people about these kinds of things, I was a bit nervous. Things improved when I started talking. I found the group to be good listeners and they asked good questions. (Iraqi presenter)

At the beginning I was a bit apprehensive about talking with the group. The refugee image is very negative and I felt out of my comfort zone. It was both scary and exciting at the same time . . . The group was ok to be with and paid attention. They seemed to listen and imagine what it was like to be in my situation. I was expecting more aggressive questions but they were quite gentle and asked sympathetic questions. (Salvadorean presenter)

The political impact for the presenters of telling their stories goes beyond the specifics of the situation and is linked to wider social issues. As Pennycook (2001) states:

Voice . . . is understood as far more than just speaking; rather, it is a broader understanding of developing the possibilities to articulate alternative realities. And since it has to do with gaining the agency to express one’s life, it is less about the medium of voice (speaking, writing, etc.) and more about finding possibilities of articulation . . . [Critical pedagogy] is a pedagogy of inclusion. (p. 130)

For a sense of connection to arise between the participants and the presenters, the voices of presenters must not only be able to speak but they must also be listened to. This focus on listening, on widening the potential sources of valid information to include those dehumanised Others, brings together productive dialogical, democratic and empathetic spaces. By developing our ability to listen to people with whom we do not have a shared cultural code, we strengthen a human rights culture. I agree with Welton (2002) that by listening to Others, our openness to seeing them as equals and
potential teachers has profound democratic implications:

[The] other, then, ought to be listened to because of the ‘possibility of learning’, not only from members of our own culture, but from groups with radically different histories and sensibilities. We can now approach these with the same ‘anticipation of completeness’ with which we approach texts and the interpretations of those we know and trust . . . Listening to the other assumes that we can understand and learn from each other . . . Even the most private of conversations carry the potential to break out into public space. (p. 204)

In the short time available we could only begin to expand our capacity to hear Others and learn from them. Because there was insufficient time to develop the capacity to hear others more fully, the people I invited to present were all competent in negotiating the dominant cultural code, accommodating issues of language, demeanour and dress. They were quietly spoken, grateful to be in Australia and not aggressive. The importance of this came out explicitly in one of Paul’s reflections:

*I enjoyed meeting the real refugees, the people. Though I wonder how . . . I’d like to see a real test done when those Muslim men come in, in the Muslim robes, the headgear and the dress that they wore at home . . . Would we have felt the same? I don’t think I would have.* (Focus Group)

In discussing her sense of connection with the refugees, Talia also commented on their demeanour:

*Just hearing the actual stories and the whole . . . I don’t know how to put it . . . the demeanour . . . they were just so willing to share their knowledge.*

The political nature of listening noted by Welton (2002) came through from the responses of some of the participants. Listening to asylum seekers and refugees, whose treatment had become a ‘political football’, raised some strong political feelings:

*I felt angry at times . . . Yes, it was bringing it back. These were the people that he [Prime Minister Howard] was talking about.* (Ron)

*Yeah, there would be anger there that people’s lives are so manipulated because of lousy politicians and governments everywhere.* (Frances – Focus Group)

To be productive and to lead to constructive action, the feelings of compassion or empathy must be informed by reason. Similar to Buddhist teachings and those of other great spiritual traditions, compassion and empathy must go together with
wisdom to be productive (Feldman, 2005). Without wisdom, compassion can render a person subject to indiscriminate sentimentality. The programme’s cognitive learning component, along with its value base, provided balance to the affective learning. Empathy without wisdom can also create overwhelming feelings of despair that can potentially paralyse a person and destroy their sense of agency. This potential is hinted at in the comments of Frances:

> How other people are treated affects me every day. I feel emotionally quite distraught some days. Not incapable of functioning but quite sad. (Interview 1)

A contentious area is whether empathetic processes allow people comfortable in the dominant discourse to see injustices as a problem resident in some aberrant individuals rather than society-wide problems, requiring action. Applebaum (2004) suggests that empathy without critique *encourages* people to remain ignorant within the status quo:

> Megan Boler, correctly I believe, criticizes the arousal of empathetic emotions as the predominant pedagogical method in the social justice curriculum because such emotions often terminate in exonerations and denials of complicity. Empathy encourages students to ignore the ways in which they indirectly and unintentionally contribute to social injustice. But moral intention and moral sentiments can be the first tools that educators employ to arouse critical awareness of social injustice. Educators must not be tempted to stop there, however. Instead, they must continue to encourage privileged students to interrogate these moral motivations, to complicate the ways in which such students see themselves as good. (p. 71)

The programme ensured that the empathetic space created was accompanied by critique. There was nothing from this research to indicate that the empathy aroused in the participants was used to distance themselves from the issue. Paul who was not keen on asylum seekers, especially Muslims, stated after meeting the presenters that:

> The more I know, the less distressed I become about the future of Australia, if I’m sure that we’re getting good people.

Likewise, Talia, who notwithstanding wanting to be compassionate, had nonetheless previously felt very unsure, stated:

> I feel very positive and open towards refugees now. Not so before, I was a little bit confused and nervous. I feel more confident now.
Pedagogical spaces

Although the caution expressed by Filax (1997) and Applebaum (2004) are important to bear in mind, I am optimistic as to the possibilities that are opened through listening to voices that have been silenced by the dominant discourse. For some people such an experience will be the first time that they have had the opportunity to imagine an existence different to their own. The dislocation that this causes is in itself a challenge to what previously was perceived as a hermetically sealed dominant discourse. Understanding that other valid ways of living exist, challenges the cultural superiority of the dominant discourse. For some, this will lead to more questions about other previously taken for granted assumptions. For those already looking for cracks and ways out of the dominant discourse, the rupture caused by the contact and informed imaginings that are possible in an empathetic space can aid significantly in that process.

**Reflections**

The importance of listening as a part of social change pedagogies has become very clear through this research. I intend to put more emphasis on listening in future work. I would more explicitly address the blockages to listening that exist and include more activities to allow the opportunity to practice and discuss the ways that we listen. It is worth reflecting on our usual poor listening habits and making explicit what are generally understood but under-analysed realities, such as: that we often hear only what we want to hear; that we justify being sceptical about information we disagree with; and that there are structural blockages to listening which include unacknowledged privilege and individual experiences of oppression.

Given my preference for learning processes based on reason, it was difficult for me to integrate intuitive and affective processes throughout my pedagogy despite the importance I place on them at a theoretical level. My facilitation may have been limited by my irritation with non-rational communication styles. Rather than seeking to make the discussion conform to some rational ideal, those more emotive and less logical thoughts expressed by some participants provided an opportunity to explore the emotional foundation of many of our views. It was a weakness of my facilitation that I did not have a more productive strategy for dealing with this. Similarly I shied away from opening up more controversial issues, which thus remained unspoken.
From the participants’ final interviews and focus group discussions it appears that the participants’ deep emotional content of their opinions were left unspoken. Leaving this unspoken was both a conscious and a subconscious decision on my part and is discussed further in Chapter 10.

A final set of reflections arises from the discussion on democratic space. It was surprising to me to reflect in conversation with critical friends how important and profound had been my experience of enhanced tolerance. The process of being with a group of people who were different to me and listening to them attentively, patiently and respectfully created tolerance and understanding of them. My respect and acceptance of difference was enhanced in relation to the participants as a result of behaving tolerantly. Individuals who in the beginning I had categorised as having views which I see as detrimental to society, at the end of the process I felt greater acceptance of, notwithstanding that I continued to disagree strongly with their views. My tolerance of political difference was enhanced as was my commitment to a plurality of views. I imagine a group in which the difference present is not that of socio-political opinion but rather of the ethnic or religious composition of the group. Based on my enhanced tolerance, I suspect that the involvement of Indigenous people, people with disabilities, or Muslims, in a process in which they come together over time with members of the dominant group, in a space characterised by respect and listening, would increase tolerance and understanding of these groups. I believe that the tolerance we practised in this group will (to varying degrees) infect our beings and make us tolerant in other situations.

Connected to the question of tolerance, my participation in the programme furthered my ability to see the world as complex and from multiple perspectives. I feel reasonably secure and am not fearful of this rapidly changing world even though there are aspects to it that I abhor. By really listening to people who do not have that same sense of security, I was better able to understand their concerns and fears and at times, what it is that has caused those fears and concerns. On reflection, this compassionate tolerance is a vital part of social change pedagogy, with its strong commitment to a fairer world. It helps to mediate the tendency to an authoritarian approach possible from a clear set of values.
Despite seeing tolerance as an integral part of a democracy, there are limits to
tolerance as there are limits to pluralism and cultural sensitivity. We must expect in a
democracy that vigorous but civil debate can occur (Trout, 2002). Donald Horne
(2003) expresses well the tension that exists between healthy debate and the
sensibilities of the participants:

The tolerant should be expected to be intolerant of intolerance. They should
not be expected to think that one belief is as good as another. And they
should not make the error of confusing tolerance with indifference. If
minorities are being ill-treated or repressed, the truly tolerant should stand up
for them. (p. 69)

That intolerance is preferable in certain unjust situations is consistent with my
definition of social justice given in Chapter 1. There will always be disputes as to
what those situations are and how far intolerance can go. Rounding off these
reflections on democracy, I raise but do not answer some doubts. What does it mean
for a so-called democratic process that the space created was the result of deliberate
and controlling facilitation by someone in power? Was the result more akin to
representative democracy than to radical democracy? Can a facilitated process ever
be radically democratic or does radical democracy require the messier and more
organic processes of people coming together in grassroots-type movements?
Chapter 9

Challenging and being challenged

The ordeal of freedom, the burden of choice . . . It’s frightening to be free, to take responsibility for your decisions.


Introduction

What occurs when you bring educator, student and an educational process together is unknowable in advance. We can make some predictions as to what might happen based on experience and theory. But any predictions remain uncertain, particularly when the three come together for the first time. This chapter focuses on the relationship between the pedagogy’s content and the participants’ responses and actions. Having experienced a transformative pedagogy, what knowledge was created and what did the participants do with that knowledge?

Questions arise linking the participants’ responses to the construction of critical sensibility. Did the transformative pedagogy facilitate a greater understanding of the dominant discourse about asylum seekers and enhance awareness of relations of power and knowledge? Did the transformative pedagogy create a sense of agency for those who participated – a belief that the dominant discourse and associated relations of power could be changed? By combining the political and the pedagogical was there an opportunity “to mobilize instances of collective outrage, if not collective action” (Giroux, 2004, p. 34)?

To recap: critical sensibility is an openness to new experiences, feelings and understandings based on an awareness of the relationship between power and knowledge. It is based on a complex and multifocused, rather than a simplistic and unifocused, view of the world. It involves a developed consciousness and conscience coupled with an engagement to transform oppressive discourses.
I examine questions of consciousness through an examination of reflexivity and self-awareness. The section on questioning the dominant construction of asylum seekers explores the complexity of the participants’ worldviews. Issues of power and knowledge come out in the section on ideology critique. The development of a conscience and engagement to transform oppressive discourses is discussed in the section on engagement and disengagement. The critical sensibility of the participants is examined here as they engage with the transformative pedagogy and look afresh at the ‘commonsense’ understandings that constitute the dominant discourse about asylum seekers.

In addressing these issues, I also address Lather’s construct of catalytic validity. The notion of catalytic validity refers to the social change objectives of the political project underpinning the transformative pedagogy. It considers whether the participants furthered their self-understanding and self-determination through participation in the research (Lather, 1991).

There are as many different stories to be told about the learning that occurred and the knowledge that was created through the programme as there are participants and facilitators. Our ability to know an experience of learning, and the language we have available to us to describe it varies in part according to our capacity to engage reflexively in learning and in life. The transformative pedagogy was teaching against the grain of our accelerated consumer culture in asking participants to stop, think, critique and make connections. The learning I am investigating goes beyond an increase in knowledge to include abstraction of meaning and a more complex “interpretive process aim[ed] at the understanding of reality” (Usher, 1985, p. 64). One of the objectives of ideology critique and conscientisation is to be able to better interpret reality. The rhetoric of the major political parties with the deliberate use of incorrect information, innuendo and the unsustainable conflation of concepts about asylum seekers has created a false reality. The reference to reality raises again the postmodern rejection of universal truth and reality. Agreeing that one true reality or one real truth is a fantasy, it is important nonetheless to reject total relativism and know that some realities are more manipulated than others.
Reflexivity and self-awareness

Reflexivity and self-awareness are based on an ability to distance oneself from one’s experiences and responses. Clearly, it is part of the general human condition that we have the ability to reflect on our experiences and thoughts. Reflexivity and self-awareness is shown in the understanding that we have of ourselves as individuals situated historically, whose subjectivity has been formed by a myriad of social and other processes. They are important in the process of ‘desocialisation’ discussed by Shor (1992). Some of the participants had greater reflexivity – greater ability to stand back and reflect on their learning and themselves – than others. It was fascinating to talk with these participants as they related their new understandings to new social and personal contexts. Consistent with Giroux’s (2004) border pedagogy, they made connections across time, place and areas of knowledge. Although the content and processes of the transformative pedagogy sought to encourage reflection and self-awareness, this was incidental to the other pedagogical objectives and strategies. Rather than see it as a secondary objective, Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg (1993) call for post-formal teaching in which “[s]elf-reflection would become a priority with teachers and students” (p. 301). This research supports their call.

The relationship between reflexivity and self-awareness manifests itself in the ability to connect what we learn with our experiences. The programme sought to show how we are all implicated in social processes and in particular, justice issues. By questioning the worldview that normalises Anglo-Australian culture, the result is to see that normalised position as part of the problem. A heightened (self)awareness and questioning of their position on the issue of asylum seekers and other social justice questions can be seen from the comments of some participants. For Derek and Paul, their reflections showed new awareness of their prejudicial attitudes. Derek had begun questioning the dominant discourse by at least the third week of the programme. His reflections in his feedback sheet raised the question: “Have we done the right thing?” In conversation with me he commented:57

I learnt that I was just a little bit one-eyed and bigoted.

57 Unless otherwise indicated, quotes from participants are drawn from the post-CEP conversations.
Paul’s reflections likewise show increased awareness of his worldview, his own identity and his lack of openness:

Yes, I’m still prejudiced. I’m much more welcoming of those asylum seekers dressed like me than someone who comes dressed in those long shirts, with their typical Muslim dress . . . I am old-fashioned and conservative . . . I’m hard to change. I freely admit that. I think that I am still reasonably objective.

Tom had exhibited high levels of reflexivity in the pre-CEP interview. He was a great reader and enjoyed thinking beyond the confines of mainstream concerns. His comments included some difficult reflections on his own prejudices and an awareness of how they operated:

Sometimes there’s an element of denial in it for us – they are like that but I’m not . . . Whereas you should really examine yourself in my view . . . I can be just as subject to prejudices as anybody else. *(Focus Group)*

His reflections also made connections between the content of the programme, his attitudes and his childhood experiences:

*I was probably relating it to childhood issues of my own . . I was a refugee from my own family.* *(Focus Group)*

Another participant with significant reflexivity was Ron. Throughout the programme he revisited his opinions and attitudes, past and present, in light of what he was learning:

*During the session on Australians and our National Cultural Identity, I started getting into the opinions that I used to hold, and used to hold to an enormous extent when I was younger. I went to a traditional-thinking school and a guy came down from the Anti-apartheid movement. I was probably about 17 and everybody there believed that whites should retain control in South Africa and that it was the right thing to do and the poor guy just couldn’t believe what he’d stepped into. So I did start reflecting back on the way I used to judge things and what my beliefs and identity were.*

The experience of listening to the views of some of the participants who wanted a monocultural White Australia made Ron reflect on the attitudes he held when he lived in New Zealand many years ago:

*It was a very comfortable feeling to be among people who lived similar lives and held similar opinions that you knew and could agree with. The idea that this could be called xenophobic didn’t occur to me at all. And the idea that people who couldn’t get along in society would have to go and live somewhere else seemed quite natural.*
Due in part to his highly developed reflexivity, Ron was aware of the changing nature of his identity and his formation as a subject. He stated that the programme provided:

*reinforcement of the conviction that my 'situation' is the sum of a number of individual stories and should be viewed as such.*

Drawing connections between the situation of asylum seekers now and his own family’s experience was one of Derek’s many comments that demonstrate a high level of reflexivity. Despite strongly agreeing with the dominant discourse, what he was learning made Derek reflect on the inconsistencies between his life experiences and that discourse. Derek is an example of the way in which the hegemonic voice convinces even those not powerfully positioned of its commonsense nature. The following relates to Derek’s reflection on the Riot at Lambing Flat:

*I thought “the same thing happened to my great grandfather.” They couldn’t care less about him. He was a Chinaman, fair game, get in the way, get rid of him . . . That’s what made me start to think “well, where did my own family come from?” There was no such thing as an asylum seeker in those days, once you arrived that was it, you’re there.*

Participation in the programme caused Derek to reflect on the consequences of his own particularly harsh attitude to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants:

*In the first interview I would have said no, I’ll have no-one. I think that I did say that I wouldn’t even have immigration. But then we wouldn’t have Hal here. I wouldn’t be here. And it made me reflect upon my own family, how we arrived here – refugees anyway see. It made me think upon myself there.*

The weekly feedback sheets were among the strategies that encouraged reflexivity. Although all of the questions fostered reflexivity, the most directed was the final question which asked ‘Since last week have you thought about what we did during the last session? What were your thoughts?’ One of the monoculturalist participants noted in the weekly feedback sheet for week 5: “*Is Kathryn leading us in new thought processes? Yes. Good for us.*” There was also a growing awareness of the privileged position that we hold as citizens of a safe and stable country. A number of participants spontaneously commented on this. Talia noted that she felt “*fortunate for the privilege of being a White Australian*” (Feedback sheet, week 5) whereas
Driandra expressed it in terms of gratitude:

*I just think we have so much to be grateful for.*

Harriet was very analytical and reflective about the entire educational and research process. She linked what was going on in relation to asylum seekers to other examples of systemic discrimination and the Australian population’s responses to different social issues. The heightened reflexivity of some of the participants is in contrast to others who appeared not to reflect on the pedagogical process and how it connected to the topic. There were instances when the participant could not understand the point of an activity as shown by Angus’s comments on Session 1 (p. 141).

As a result of different levels of reflexivity and self-awareness some participants’ learning was at a much deeper level. Others had a more superficial level of learning. Higher levels of self-awareness and reflexivity seemed to act as accelerators in the development of critical sensibility. For example, Ron, Tom, Harriet and Derek, with high levels of reflexivity and self-awareness, considerably challenged the dominant discourse and considered how they could act to change it in the future. Because these issues arose during the analysis of the data and had not informed the data gathering, there was a paucity of explicit discussion of these issues by the participants. However, the glimpses possible from the analysis reinforce that greater emphasis should be placed within a social change pedagogy on explicitly developing self-awareness and reflexivity.

The approach of Richard Edwards, Ranson Stewart, and Michael Strain (2002) supports the suggestion here that by including more deliberate reflexive practices within a transformative pedagogy, deeper engagement will occur. They argue that “it is through self and social questioning (reflexivity) that people are able to engage with and (en)counter – be affected by but also affect – contemporary uncertainties” (p. 527). In order to further this questioning they emphasise the importance of a dialogical process to facilitate “what is beyond the self and the here-and-now, in time and space” (p. 534). The integral part that dialogue played in the transformative pedagogy is likely to have worked to achieving this end.
Questioning the dominant discourse about asylum seekers

There was considerable misinformation about asylum seekers in Australia that was presented as reality. The popular education concept of *conocimiento de la realidad* (or understanding the reality of the particular situation) was used to challenge specific issues. A key strategy was to provide factual information that presented a more complete picture of asylum seekers. This section presents how the participants responded to some of the new information that challenged the dominant discourse and sought to show a more accurate and complex reality. Through encouraging a complex and multifocused worldview as opposed to a simplistic and unifocused worldview, participants’ critical sensibility was being developed. As an educator, what was particularly interesting to me was whether their learning emerged as I anticipated or was incidental and unplanned. The new understandings of some of the participants were unforeseen and paralleled the unpredictability and inherent uncertainty of pedagogical processes.

Global context

In 2002, of the refugees, asylum seekers and other persons of concern to the UNHCR, fewer than 0.4% were in Oceania (including Australia). The majority was in African countries and Pakistan. Source: UNHCR (2004a)

The mass media usually presented the global situation of asylum seekers in a way disassociated from what was occurring in Australia. The media had created an image of large numbers of asylum seekers overwhelming Australia. Many of the participants had accepted this image, including participants with positive attitudes to asylum seekers. Session 7, week 4, required a group of the participants to closely examine the global situation of refugees. They were given UNHCR statistics on the numbers of refugees in various countries, their countries of origin and also information on the numbers of people applying for asylum throughout the world.

Driandra had not been aware of the large numbers of refugees in other parts of the world and had thought that more refugees were coming to Australia than was the case. She reiterated several times in the post-CEP conversation how important examining the global information was and admonished me for not placing greater emphasis on this during the programme:
People think that there are hundreds of thousands of them coming in when in fact there aren’t. I think there are a lot more moving to other countries. Australia doesn’t get too many at all in comparison. We saw that because that was our group topic but I don’t know if you communicated that to the rest of the group and whether they had time to digest it . . .

It was important information – Australia’s place from a global perspective . . . Those numbers and the amount of people suffering may have changed some people’s attitudes.

These comments were echoed by other participants. One of the participants wrote on the weekly feedback sheet: “In our group it was enlightening to find out just how few asylum seekers Australia takes.” Tom, for example, now had a different understanding of the global reality, as did Tony and Lem:

I don’t think I realised how small the numbers are compared to other parts of the world . . . We’ve got a drop in the bucket compared to Europe. (Tom)

The numbers of asylum seekers that we have in Australia, and that other countries have around the world, that was fairly eye opening. (Tony)

Coming back to the numbers . . . I do like numbers. I was quite fascinated by the fact that there are so many countries that are either less resourced or are taking in a much higher ratio per capita of refugees. (Lem)

It was interesting that even the participants above, who did not agree with government policy towards asylum seekers, had accepted the ‘reality’ that disproportionate numbers of asylum seekers were overwhelming Australia. This shows the power of the hegemonic discourse. Those participants who agreed with government policy also had their understandings challenged. They dealt with it in different ways. Derek had accepted that Australia takes a disproportionate number of refugees. When he discovered that most refugees were living in Third World countries, he was appalled:

I thought that we were taking quite a few refugees. Those statistics say “no, we weren’t.” Those statistics said that Third World countries were taking refugees . . . They can’t survive themselves, let alone take anyone else in. We should be taking people from Third World countries and helping them, and they are helping others. It is unreal . . . That was a revelation . . . It is far from . . . ok.

Mel found the global situation of refugees to be quite different from his previous understanding, constructed largely from the mass media. The information provided
during the programme challenged his previously unquestioning agreement with the dominant position. He felt that he had been:

... caught up in the boat people type of thing. Hearing what was going on in the other side of the world, from Africa to Europe... We don’t really have a problem... being overwhelmed... It was ok bringing that into focus.

Unlike Derek though, Mel rationalised the new information in a very different manner. He assimilated this potentially contradictory information into his existing worldview in a way which avoided the need to re-assess his fundamental beliefs. (This is discussed further below under the heading Resistance and Denial):

For me, [the refugees] going to another third world country, that’s what they understand and know. They just gravitate down there so it didn’t surprise me. (Focus Group)

Looking at alternative sources of information as to Australia’s relative position in the world caused participants understanding’ of the situation became more complete and complex. Derek, Driandra, Tony, Lem and Tom’s new knowledge about the global context significantly challenged the validity of the dominant discourse. For them, this contributed to a reappraisal of their overall understanding of the issue.

Asylum seeker – terrorist link?


The information obtained by the participants on the alleged link between asylum seekers and terrorists continued the process by which the simplistic image about asylum seekers was contested and rejected. Two of the guest presenters described their traumatic journey from Iraq and Afghanistan, which complemented the ASIO information. Although there was no explicit connection made during the session between the dangerous journey and the improbability that terrorists would use such a process to enter Australia, some participants made such a connection. This was one of the interesting reflections that I had not anticipated.
Driandra had previously accepted that there was a link between terrorism and asylum seekers. Her acceptance of this ‘reality’ was replaced by a more informed understanding:

*There was still fear about them being terrorists, someone being a terrorist and coming in. Everybody’s got to be screened. That still rings true. But thinking about it now, if these people are funded by some organised group, they are not going to be put in a leaking boat for 20 days. They are going to get on a plane and come across. They are going to get here in some way that is better looked after.*

A number of other participants gave similar responses. When asked what it was that had caused her to change her mind about the terrorist threat posed by asylum seekers, Driandra responded:

*Probably meeting the asylum seekers and listening to what they had to say. If there was a plan to take on Australia, they wouldn’t put their soldiers through that. It would be a little bit more sophisticated. It probably is just ludicrous to think that you would come in a boat if you’re a terrorist.*

**Asylum seekers as privileged and not genuine refugees**

In 1999, 97% of asylum seekers from Iraq and 93% from Afghanistan were recognised as genuine refugees. Of all asylum seekers, 84% are found to be legitimate refugees.

Source: Edmund Rice Centre for Justice & Community Education & School of Education of the Australian Catholic University (2001, p.1)

Through the language of *queue jumpers* and talkback radio stories of asylum seekers arriving with ‘bags of gold’, part of the ‘reality’ created though the dominant discourse was that asylum seekers were privileged and not genuine refugees. It was claimed that asylum seekers used their good financial situation to get on a boat and come to Australia to take advantage of the welfare system. This image of asylum seekers as privileged was not something we specifically addressed. However, it was implicitly critiqued through the first-hand accounts given by the guest presenters. As a result, such understandings were replaced by a more complex reality.

During one focus group discussion, Tom described his previous understanding, and the process and information that had caused him to modify his view:

*I tended to think that many of the people that made it onto the boats were privileged, a privileged few, wherever they came from. They’d had the money to*
Given that Ron was proactive in seeking alternative sources of information that went against the dominant discourse, it was surprising the extent to which he had accepted the image of asylum seekers as privileged. Through the programme his understanding was changed:

\[ \text{I was still very suspicious of what kind of people were coming across. I thought that there were lots of mainly rich and privileged. Yes, I think there was some doubt in my mind that some of the people were privileged and came here for benefits. Now I think that the majority of the people, nearly all the people, who come, particularly the ones who come by sea, are genuine refugees. I can't imagine someone putting themselves into the hands of people smugglers, attempting that crossing, just for the adventure or just for the benefits that they might get out of it . . . So my opinion is definitely solidified that most of the people are genuine refugees.} \]

These comments highlight the importance of the silencing of asylum seekers in establishing the dominant discourse. Even people who rejected Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers had accepted the dominant discourse’s version of reality.

**Continuing the ideology critique**

Having interrupted the factual basis of participants’ worldviews, the process of ideology critique/conscientisation had already begun. It was augmented with a further level of abstraction in which the dominant discourse was problematised and seen as a social construction and not neutral. The ‘commonsense’ nature of this hegemonic position was challenged. The role of the mass media and the government in the construction and maintenance of the dominant discourse was something that was raised throughout the programme – by the participants themselves and by the facilitators.

**Selective use of facts and information**

Leading on from the heightened understanding of the misinformation built into the dominant discourse, several participants discussed a new awareness of its partial nature and how important information was excluded. Tom commented on the process whereby an image is created by the selective use of certain information:
What it’s brought home to me is the difference between what is really happening and the hype you see in the press. The numbers and the attention that is paid to certain aspects in the press and what doesn’t get said about other matters. It is like, let’s have everybody paying attention to this and we will keep you in the dark about as much else as we can. (Focus Group)

In a similar vein, Tony saw that a hegemonic position is possible because relevant factual information is suppressed:

There has just been such a shortage of facts in the wider community that people have been moulded to think the way that the media and the government want them to. (Focus Group)

Mel was one participant who became aware that in accepting the dominant discourse he had been misled. Because he was comfortable with the hegemonic position, what he does with this new understanding is very interesting (discussed in the section on Resistance below):

I also got hooked in with some of the stuff because you haven’t got anything else to compare it with . . . You just take it for what it is. It was surprising for me how I just took it on as being factual and it is a bit of a worry because you need to stop and ask questions . . . I’m now more aware what the real situation is, what is going on there.

The emphasis on the role of factual information in challenging the dominant ideology was also discussed by Talia:

I’m thinking from an evidence base now that I’ve got the facts and the reality as it is, rather than misconceptions or an ideology of what I thought an asylum seeker was. All I’d known was from the media and from what you hear from the government . . . It became very clear that the message . . . that I’d received from the media and the government was very different from the evidence that was put in front of me which was obviously . . . well, I felt was factual.

Role of mass media

Several comments have already alluded to the role of the mass media in creating and supporting the negative image of asylum seekers. As one of the significant cultural institutions, the mass media was seen to be both influential and distorting. Specifically referring to the image that asylum seekers were overwhelming Australia, Mel was critical of the role that the mass media had to play:

The way it’s promoted and the knowledge and information given and the talk-back radio stuff, you’d think that we’re being swamped. But we’re not. But it gets a lot of airplay.
Challenging and being challenged

Talia raised the problems of accessing alternative sources of information and the significant effort needed to do so. She placed great value on the access to information from other sources obtained through the programme:

*Unless you’re actively seeking it, it’s just a part of the culture that you live... The normal person doesn’t go actively looking for it and that was the wonderful thing about the programme. It was actually brought to you. That was really valuable.*

Likewise, Lem was grateful for the provision of additional information from sources other than the mass media:

*It was nice to read stuff that you don’t read in the newspaper... And nine times out of ten you either don’t have the time or you couldn’t be bothered finding it... The availability of resources that either had a different spin or had no spin and just seemed like it was the facts was quite interesting.*

Harriet connected the slanted nature of the mass media with the need to look for alternative sources of information. She felt that her participation in the programme had given her a greater critical awareness of the complexity of the issue:

*You listen to the media stuff and then, “crap” or “that’s interesting”... tracking down websites on the net and looking at some of the positive stuff... [I am] being more critical of the information that we receive through the media. What is the story? How were these stats put together?*

These comments illustrate how participants’ enhanced their awareness of the constructed nature of the dominant discourse and its interrelationship with the mass media.

**Interaction with the global economic system**

Ideology critique traditionally focuses on the inequalities caused and maintained by economic structures. The global economic situation is particularly relevant to the situation of asylum seekers and participants individually explored the relationship in the activity during the two-week break between weeks 5 and 6. Participants chose from a number of quotes that critiqued economic rationalism/neo-liberalism and were asked to consider how the quote related to asylum seekers. Steve reflected on the link between the economic system and forced migration:

*I chose the quote from Paul Hellyer. This to me highlights the massive hypocrisy and contradiction in so-called globalisation. At the same time that national economic protection is being eroded and free-market philosophies are the order*
of the day, with more and more power being given to unelected institutions, such as WTO, IMF, World Bank and Multinational Corporations, physical national boundaries are being strengthened. The message being – we must be as open as possible economically to create our financial “global village” but we can be as closed as we like with regard to the human “global village”. This illustrates how warped our thinking has become. We have become economies first and foremost and societies second. (Journal)

Comments from Tony, Ron and Frances demonstrated their awareness of the link between the increasing economic insecurity of the general workforce and the fear of asylum seekers.

**Dominant view of history**

The superiority of a monocultural White Australian way of life is assumed within the dominant ideology concerning asylum seekers. That ideal has a strong historical tradition and is associated with a number of positive attributes: egalitarianism, mateship and respect for the rule of law (as distinct from respect for authority such as the police). The sanitised view of the Australian colonial history that supports this idealised image was problematised through the programme. This was most explicit in Session 5, week 3 in which we read the newspaper report of the riot at Lambing Flats involving serious assaults by groups of British gold miners against Chinese miners.

It is interesting to see Angus’s use of language when he describes his new understanding of the atrocities committed against Chinese miners, an understanding which goes against the dominant view of Australian history. Whether it is deliberate or not, Angus’s positioning within the dominant ideology is reflected in his use of ‘we’ in the last sentence:

> I was very interested in that session we had about . . . distortion of history . . . I’ve read a lot about the terrible treatment of Aboriginals and how they were strung up together with rope. But some of those other stories, no I’d never heard of. It’s just . . . you don’t hear about them . . . I was amazed that I didn’t know that one about the Riot at Lambing Flat . . . That was very interesting, yes, yes . . . Well, it just shows you how we distort history.

**Critique**

Hegemony is facilitated by an unquestioning approach to the world. A critical or questioning approach to information, beliefs, and views, and the interests that are behind them was an inherent part of the transformative pedagogy. Participants were
encouraged, explicitly and implicitly, to question and challenge all knowledge. Derek discussed how he was adopting a newly critical approach:

_ I will look at information differently. I will digest it before making a decision . . . The only thing is, how do you work out what is true or not? That’s the tricky part. Because it’s in the newspaper doesn’t mean to say that it is true. Because you see things on TV doesn’t mean to say it’s true._

For Harriet, already a critical thinker, participating in the programme gave her the space to slow down and think. She believed that the cumulative effect of the programme was to encourage critique of the image created around asylum seekers:

_We need to be more critical of the information that we receive through the media. What is the story? How were these statistics put together? . . . If anything people could’ve taken from the workshops, it’s just stopping and thinking about the information and how it is used. And if people got that, then it’s been a positive experience for critical thinking . . . touch wood._

Ron was already well informed from sources outside the mass media. However, he felt that his participation had caused him to examine how he viewed information. It had resulted in:

_Quite a large change because it really does mean . . . nothing is as it seems. It seems that there is no such thing as information, there are only opinions, views . . . You treat it particularly sceptically and test it before you take it onboard._

Ideology critique is traditionally seen to be a rational process, one which requires more and better factual information. However, it is clear that other forms of information and experiences that present the world from a different perspective are also an effective part of ideology critique. The strongest implicit critique of the dominant ideology probably came through the experience of hearing first hand the perspective of people who came to Australia as asylum seekers or refugees. Ron related how he saw the refugees compared with the dominant images:

_How different they were to the image that’s being put forward of refugees._

The reactions that participants had throughout the programme, as they dealt with information, experiences and knowledge which were new and often contrary to the dominant discourse, caused a variety of responses. I turn to those now.
Engagement or disengagement

Having examined some of the new knowledge created through the programme, the second part of this chapter looks at what that knowledge meant for the participants. Given their different ideological positions, the participants’ experience of the programme would be expected to produce different responses, different thoughts, and different actions. Those who were comfortable within the dominant discourse would have their ideological position challenged and would respond in quite distinct ways to those who found minimal or no challenge to their ideological position. For example, participants in the monoculturalist group, given their strong identification with the idealised Australian way of life, may have felt their identity challenged by an approach which problematised some of the dominant culture’s beliefs.

Resistance and denial

Given the pervasiveness and power of hegemonic forces, resistance to alternative views is common. To ‘go with the flow’ and accept the dominant view may be the more comfortable approach. As explained by Maurianne Adams (1997), critique and understanding the world in more complex ways is intellectually and emotionally challenging:

The journey from a dichotomous to a contextual way of thinking also takes a student toward a broader and more inclusive ethical perspective (see Kohlberg & Higgins, 1989), and from an external to an internal locus of authority and responsibility. It helps account for students’ initial resistance to multiple perspectives, explains some of a student’s anxiety in the absence of certainties in social justice problem-solving, and sheds light on the cognitive skills needed for abstract thought in an emotionally charged, personalized domain such as social justice education. (p. 42)

Our formal education system is based on an assumption that the norms of our culture are universal, unassailable and natural. To deconstruct culture with a strong critical perspective is a novel process for many. In addition, we have been trained to accept authority through the absence of open dialogue with the powerful (Shor, 1987, p. 73). The hectic lives of the third millennium consume all our energy just to maintain them, allowing little time and space for reflection (Shor, 1992). Those lives are inhabited by desires created by the dominant discourse; desires that seem to be fulfilled by embracing the worldview on offer. Situated in this way, resistance to
alternative positions is created by largely unconscious processes (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 144-5) and is far from straightforward. Lather (1991) says that “resistance to critical theory is multi-sited: understanding it requires much attention to the intersection of ‘individual consciousness’ and social context” (p. xviii).

There may be some commonality between the resistance I am discussing here and resistance to formal education (Willis, 1977). Lusted’s insightful discussion on pedagogy opens up the possibility that resistance may be less about the content of the pedagogy and more about the process. His critique reinforces the pedagogical principle repeated throughout this dissertation of the importance of coherence in form and content. Lusted (1986) challenges critical pedagogy as being just as autocratic as conventional teaching:

No surprise, then, that in a teaching pedagogy conforming to the shape of the theory of which it is a product, the learner can only accept/reject the terms offered. Nor any surprise that teachers experience as much resistance to this form of critical education as others experience with forms of conventional education. (p. 10)

Adding to Lusted’s point, Filax (1997) notes that “resistance may be because of pedagogical approach, gender, interest, race, learning styles, class, approaches to social justice, sexuality, and so on” (p. 264). Some writers (Cale, 2001; Shor, 1992; Lather, 1991) have discussed outright resistance to their pedagogy in terms of student silences, absences and refusals to cooperate. This kind of resistance did not occur in the programme. With the exception of Hal’s occasional withdrawal, participants remained engaged and contributed to the process. I believe this to be due to the non-judgemental approach combined with the fact that the participants were self-selected.

Although their experience of the transformative pedagogy created greater awareness of the misinformation that makes up the dominant discourse, participants from the monoculturalist group on the whole were not ready to countenance alternative ideological positions. The conflict created for these participants arises in part from the attachment that we all have to an ideological position. Eagleton (1991) discusses this in the context of racist ideologies:

A racist who believes that Asians in Britain will outnumber whites by the year 1995 may well not be persuaded out of his racism if he can be shown
that this assumption is empirically false, since the proposition is more likely
to be a support for his racism than a reason for it. If the claim is disproved he
may simply modify it, or replace it with another, true or false. It is possible,
then, to think of ideological discourse as a complex network of empirical and
normative elements, within which the nature and organization of the former is
ultimately determined by the requirements of the latter. (p. 23)

It was in the monoculturalist group where the issue of resistance and denial arose – a
resistance to the challenge that was posed by the pedagogy. This was accompanied
by attempts to assimilate the new knowledge within their existing ideological
position rather than adjusting those attitudes through “critical accommodation”
(Kincheloe, 2001, p. 579). These participants sought to limit the potency of the
challenge to the dominant discourse and maintain their ideological positions. Their
responses lend support to Eagleton’s (1991) suggestion that an ideological position
remains firm, notwithstanding empirical challenges to its foundation. Participants
dealt with the contradiction between their position and their experience in the
programme in a variety of ways. Looking at the methods they used below sheds light
on resistance in other social change projects. The conflict that occurred for these
participants and the resistance and denial that they exhibited is not something unique
to such pedagogical situations. It is something we all experience when our
ideological position is challenged by information and experiences.

Conflict with identity

Our ideological position is an integral part of our identity. It is the lens through
which we view social issues. Although our sense of who we are in the world may
never be “fully constituted, separate and distinct,” it is not always experienced as the
fragmented, multiplicity of identities discussed by cultural studies theorists (such as
Stuart Hall and Donna Haraway cited in Grossberg, 1996, p. 89). It seems that,
notwithstanding the fragmentation of identities, we also have a relatively clear sense
of self. Suggesting that identities were in previous times less fractured, Hall (1996)
states that “identities are never unified and, in late modern times [italics added], [are]
increasingly fragmented and fractured” (p. 4). If it is the case that the characteristics
of late modern times, such as globalisation and multiculturalism, cause our identities
to become less fixed, we would expect younger participants to experience this
fragmentation to a greater extent. On the other hand, older participants may have
greater difficulty imagining other ways of being, other identities, because they have had less experience of this multiplicity. The four oldest participants were in the monoculturalist group and may have had more fixed senses of self.

The monoculturalist group felt that asylum seekers threatened the Australian way of life. This is not only a threat to a collective cultural identity but also to their personal sense of self. Their individual identities were formed within a framework of White superiority. For this group, this makes the question as to whether or not asylum seekers should be allowed to become part of the nation all the more significant. In challenging the dominant discourse, the pedagogy was also implicitly challenging their sense of identity. It is not surprising that those whose identity was challenged by the social phenomenon and the pedagogy would experience some resistance to looking at the issue from a different perspective. Taking this somewhat more psychoanalytic approach allows us to “discern the unconscious processes that create resistance to progressive change” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 144). As illustrated by Ingrid Johnston and Terry Carson (2000), critical researchers are using a post-structural psychoanalysis to understand resistance to change:

> Psychoanalytic theory points out that resistance is neither naive nor ignorant, but an active rejection of a knowledge that threatens the self with disintegration. In making this observation we do not deny the political dimension of the argument – there is a defense of white privilege at work . . . – but we do caution against misidentifying this as a power struggle that will be discursively settled. A passion for ignorance will not be won over by rational argument or information alone. (p. 81)

The fearsome image of asylum seekers, when combined with the sense of identity that views the dominant culture as the superior culture, causes an emotional resistance to alternative discourses. This is coupled with a denial that the status quo is unjust. The participants who resisted the challenge posed by the pedagogy have an investment in protecting the dominant discourse. As Adams (1997) says, “not surprisingly this identity may be vigorously defended against discordant information or experiences presented in the social justice classroom” (p. 40). In a more extreme version, Parker Palmer (2001) argues that we all have within us a “certain fascism of
[When] the difference between you and me gets too great, when your version of what is good or true or beautiful, becomes too threatening to mine, I will find some way to kill you. I won’t do it with a bullet. I won’t do it with a gas chamber. But I will do it with a label. A dismissive name. A way of rendering you irrelevant to my life in order to reduce the tension between your view of reality and mine.

The ways in which participants in the monoculturalist group sought to maintain their ideological identity are explored below.

**Deliberate ignorance**

It is relatively easy for members of the dominant cultural group to only hear the dominant discourse and to be isolated from countervailing information and contact with alternative views. Likewise, it is easy not to make contact with members of culturally different groups. Obtaining information and experiences through the programme that challenged the dominant discourse, it took conscious effort on the part of the participants who wanted to maintain the same level of disconnection and ignorance. This conscious ignorance was clearly expressed by Mel when he discussed his feelings towards asylum seekers after the programme:

*Impartial . . . impartial . . . they don’t make . . . irrelevant? No, that’s not the word. I don’t get hooked into them . . . I disconnect myself from them. And I do that with other parts of my life, right? If it’s going to cause a problem, ok, so as far as I’m concerned, you don’t exist.*

This reflects what Johnston and Carson (2000) describe as a “passion for ignorance” coming from a resistance to “dangerous knowledge.” Tied to issues of identity, this knowledge is resisted because “it threatens the imagined coherence of the self” (p. 81). They suggest that the failure of social change education to understand that this ignorance is deliberate has resulted in educational approaches that rely on providing more information. Clearly, the affective approaches used in this programme were also no ‘quick fix’ to encourage people who strongly identify with oppressive discourses to embrace alternative discourses.
Challenging and being challenged

Essentialising the Other

A common feature of a racist discourse is that it essentialises all members of the out-group, attributing all with certain negative characteristics. Time and time again during the programme there were occasions when participants (usually from the monoculturalist group) stereotyped different out-groups, in particular asylum seekers and Muslims. These participants perceived very high inter-group diversity between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ coupled with very low intra-group diversity of ‘them.’ Generalising negative qualities to asylum seekers was a common way that some participants maintained emotional distance from them.

An awareness of how groups become the object of an essentialising discourse was raised through the incident with Hal in week 1. Taken from Steve’s journal, the following summarises his response:

_Hal, who is Chinese Malay, told how he feels guilty/responsible for crimes perpetuated by Chinese people in Australia (i.e. drug trafficking, prostitution). I agreed with both Tom and Tony, in that I don’t feel guilt or responsibility for English miscreants . . . Paul asked what steps Hal thought the Asian community could take to control criminal activities amongst Asians. I felt that was divisive. We are all Australians and although communities can maybe influence their members, we must be careful not to scapegoat and marginalise._

Hal’s essentialising discourse on ethnic Chinese people in Australia (his own ethnic group but not generally his own religious group) was rejected by a number of participants who spoke supportively of him as an Australian. This interaction was sympathetic and supportive of Hal as a participant of the programme and also critiqued this stereotyping as unhelpful in creating a unified Australian community. At the same time as some participants rejected the stereotyping, Paul’s response indicated that he agreed with Hal’s stereotyping and saw it as appropriate that Hal felt responsibility for the entire ethnic group. Those in the monoculturalist group were comfortable generalising about others and yet very resistant to any suggestions that certain negative characteristics could be generalised to Anglo-Australians. For example, when criticism was made of the Australian culture, Paul reported that he felt “a little uncomfortable with criticism of Oz” during that week (Feedback sheet).

Stereotyping a marginalised group creates problems when an individual is encountered who does not fit the stereotype. The conflict between the stereotype and
the lived experience occurred when the participants met the guest presenters who had come to Australia as refugees and asylum seekers. One of the responses from participants in the monoculturalist group was to make an exception to the stereotype for these specific individuals. This is seen in Paul’s response:

*It was good to talk to a real bloke who ought to be here, who’s being looked after, who’s a real refugee . . . The government money should go into guys like that, not economic refugees who come here with the money . . . These were real people that had to come here. And I haven’t met one of those. And they’re not what you might call the difficult ones of a different sort.*

To reconcile his sense of connection and empathy for the individual guest presenters, Paul needed to create a category of ‘real’ refugees. ‘Real’ refugees were set up in opposition to ‘other’ refugees who were undeserving and ‘difficult . . . a different sort’. Through this binary of ‘real’ refugees and other refugees, Paul, and many other Australians are able to retain their self-image as compassionate people while at the same time denying support to asylum seekers. The punitive response to asylum seekers can be accepted because those unknown and unmet ‘others’ deserve it.

**Positioning asylum seekers negatively**

Distinct from Paul’s approach above, the other participants from the monoculturalist group, in discussing the refugees’ stories and talking about them as human beings, positioned them negatively. Angus brought up the issue of the courage (or lack of courage) and whether or not refugees who flee were selfish:

*One of the things I found interesting was wondering how I would have reacted. Would I have gone up in the hills? . . . That is what I hope I would have done . . . In East Timor, the Timorese they didn’t accept it and they tried to change the system, not run away from it . . . Were they being selfish? These individuals left their country, left their relatives there. Why did they go and not somebody else? . . . I just wondered about that . . . Whether they were just looking out for themselves.*

Unprompted, four of the five monoculturalist participants cast doubt on the truthfulness of the individuals who came and spoke with us. Angus felt that the

---

58 This was reminiscent of previous work I had done with year-6 school children (11 year olds). The only child who was openly antagonistic towards refugees and learning about refugees, concluded in his final reflections that “they were all cowards, they should have stayed and fought.”
association that the refugees had with people smugglers in order to come to Australia impugned their veracity:

I'm very sceptical, yes . . . How much can you believe them? . . . They paid criminals to get here, large sums of money and in a way, that's promoting crime. How much did they manipulate the situation in saying that they were true refugees?

Derek didn’t provide a reason for his scepticism:

I still have my doubts about those asylum seekers who turned up . . . Were they telling the truth?

Hal linked his scepticism of the refugees and their information and experiences to the possibility that they were terrorists or common criminals:

The answers they gave were reasonable, but whether they were truthful or not, I do not know. There is no way to find out . . . I felt sceptical about certain information they provided . . . I am not saying that they are not refugees. They could be economic refugees. Or they could be at the worst, a terrorist . . . Are all asylum seekers that desperate? Aren’t there, among these asylum seekers dangerous people from other parts of world? They are coming, they are trying to get into this country to escape . . . probably some kind of judicial punishment that they are facing in their own country.

Paul also questioned their truthfulness because of the use of the term ‘God’:

Some of those questions that were asked of them, religious questions, they referred to God. And I thought they were making a peaceful overture. Actually I thought they talked to Allah, the Muslim God. That was the only disturbing part that night. I thought their answers were bordering on untruthful to please us, because we’re hosts.

Through positioning the refugees as cowards, selfish, liars and criminals these participants were effectively able to create distance between themselves and the presenters and discount that part of the experience that conflicted with their worldview.
Chapter 9

**Blame the victim**

A common consequence of hegemonic ideology is to blame the victims of oppressive systems for their circumstances. It is a relatively recent phenomenon that asylum seekers have come to Australia with children. This has been caused in part by the introduction in October 1999 of the Temporary Protection Visa, which excludes a person granted a TPV from the usual family reunion rights. As a result, a parent who arrives without the rest of the family faces the prospect of never being reunited with her or his family. To avoid these consequences, since 1999 more parents have brought their children with them. The situation of children has been particularly contentious, especially in relation to mandatory detention. Paul combined his concern for the children with a judgement against the parents:

*The parents shouldn’t bring their kids across the water. There should be some sort of system in the Muslim world where the kids can be looked after by their own kind until their parents get themselves sorted out.*

Analogous to the idea that asylum seekers are in some way to blame for fleeing persecution with their family, Mel found that his suspicion that the United Nations was in some way to blame for refugees was supported by the information he received:

*My other concern was the United Nations and what they were on about, because they don’t seem to be doing their work. The information that you handed out confirmed that. I think that they have done an appalling job since 1951.*

Laying the blame elsewhere than on the underlying causes of forced migration allows participants to avoid having to examine those causes and how they are beneficiaries in the same global system.

**Discredit dissenters**

We have seen a variety of ways employed by some participants to discredit voices that challenge the hegemonic position. Another way is to question the personal morality of those who ascribe to alternative discourses. By requiring advocates for a compassionate alternative to have impeccable morality before they can speak out, most people would be disqualified. Hal raised this:

*When I first came into this country I was told that . . . more than half of the students in my children’s class came from single parent families . . . So when I listened . . . to people talking about showing compassion to the asylum seekers,*
showing generosity to them, letting them come into the country, things like that, my mind goes back to this argument. If we as a society, I’m referring to those single parents, if they as a parent or a married couple, can’t love their own . . . family, how could they show love and compassion to an asylum seeker . . . If you can’t show love and compassion to your own family, don’t talk about showing compassion to asylum seekers.

**Excusing bad behaviour of own group**

Amongst the justifications implicit, and at times explicit, in the dominant discourse’s rejection of asylum seekers is a belief in the innate superiority of Anglo-Australian culture over other cultures. From time to time, the supposed superiority of a culture is contradicted by unacceptable behaviour exhibited by members of the dominant group. An example of atrocious behaviour by the dominant Australian culture was depicted in the newspaper article about the Riot at Lambing Flat. As mentioned above, Paul tended to generalise about Others but rejected any such essentialising about his own group. He was appalled by the behaviour of the Anglo-Celtic miners. He rationalised this information by finding an acceptable reason for its occurrence, thus maintaining his ideological position:

*I found the Lambing Flat interesting. That Australia could be like that. The other side wasn’t put, the difficulties . . . there was no spokesman for the Australians before or after it. What drove them to that? . . . I was ashamed of Australians like that but also the other side wasn’t put from those miners. The police were a lousy lot and the pressures on them . . . perhaps not finding enough money, not finding enough gold, having to pay out for this and that wasn’t put, not that well.*

In discussing the ways that participants, comfortable with the dominant discourse, managed the new knowledge, understandings and experiences, and resisted alternative visions, I am not suggesting that they maintained the same worldview. As already discussed, there is some indication that some monoculturalists did develop a more expansive and open attitude. This was not done without significant resistance.

**Ideological confirmation/strengthening**

For people uncomfortable with, or challenging the dominant discourse, a transformative pedagogy does not provoke the kind of resistance discussed above. For the participants from the globalist and multiculturalist groups, the predominant experience was one of affirmation. Notwithstanding that many members of these groups held certain beliefs and opinions that were consistent with the dominant
ideology, their overall disagreement with the dominant position meant that they experienced less dislocation. Many of them described how the programme was significant in confirming or supporting their overall positions or the particular beliefs they already held. This comment by Frances was typical of many participants. The experience had:

*strengthened [my beliefs], because I’ve got a bit more information . . . I would say strengthened my position.*

For Harriet, that reinforcing of her position was done by providing time to reflect on the issue and additional information:

*What this programme has done is added meat to the skeleton, broadening out that understanding . . . Just the stopping and thinking things through . . . It is not necessarily an Asian boat person we are talking about but there are a broad range of backgrounds. Little things like that . . . I don’t feel that my beliefs have become more extreme or dwindled. I certainly feel like I’ve got a bit more ammo.*

Likewise, Driandra felt that she was now better positioned in the social justice struggle:

*I am armed up a little bit more, when I do hear reports, because of the process that we went through.*

The primacy of human life over a doctrinaire approach was one of the beliefs that was clarified and strengthened for Ron. He found support for:

* . . . the belief that you have to deal with issues as they affect individual human beings. You cannot deal with things that affect human beings on an ideological basis . . . ignoring the effect that it has on individual human beings.*

Ron was further reinforced in his belief that:

*The treatment when [asylum seekers] get here, while it may deter more people coming, is not worthy of a country that considers itself humanitarian.*

Going against the dominant discourse is not easy, particularly as the discourse marginalises those who hold opposing views. Talia felt that her position was affirmed through her experience in the programme. She felt that she now had a well-argued position instead of her previous ‘gut feeling’:

*I always felt within my heart what was right, even though I didn’t have the evidence to back it up. I’d always felt that refugees and asylum seekers had earned the right to be treated with respect and dignity. And I don’t know where
that belief came from . . . But now, I feel very confident in stating that . . .

because . . . I have the evidence to back it up. Through speaking to the people and

hearing their stories and having the literature to actually back up my beliefs,

that’s the greatest value for me personally . . . My beliefs have been strengthened

and reinforced and positively acknowledged too.

Steve noted in relation to week 4 that the programme “reinforce[d] my belief that

although it is a complex issue, it can in fact be broken down to reveal the mistruths

and manipulation being used by the government.” (Feedback sheet week 4)

These comments show how the programme was useful to these participants in

reinforcing their positions. A number of the participants also described some sort of

change in their overall position on the issue of asylum seekers. Driandra, who had

accepted some of the misinformation about asylum seekers, felt that she had become

more welcoming as a result of her participation. She stated that she was now:

. . . probably a bit more, a little bit more open door.

Talia was in a similar situation to Driandra:

I feel very positively and open towards refugees now . . . Before I started the

programme I was a little bit more confused and nervous because I didn’t

understand, now I have a lot more clarity about it. I am not confused any more. I

feel more confident now.

Harriet, who had not been in the globalist position prior to commencing the

programme, appears to be moving in that direction:

The more I read about it, the more I heard, I thought it is such an unjust process.

For the sake of trying to maintain borders, sovereignty, all the bull-dust that

comes with that. I still think that it is an abhorrent process.

Derek who had said in his interview prior to starting the programme that boats

carrying asylum seekers should be run down by Australian naval vessels thought that

he had become more accepting:

My original conversation with you, and what I said then about what I thought.

Yes, I would change that, I’d let them reach the beach this time, and they don’t

have to swim to get to the beach either . . . A lot of my views have not changed

but it has tempered the others . . . Give them a drink and a slice of watermelon

before we send them home. I don’t hate them. But as I said I’ll feed them and give

them a drink and then send them home. I don’t want them here, I don’t want them

here. I still don’t want them.
This is a significantly more humanised approach from his previous position.

**Agency**

Transformative pedagogy seeks to engage people in social justice issues in ways that go beyond the cerebral. To what extent did participants now see human action as an effective tool for social change? A heightened sense of agency and engagement would go some way to demonstrating the research’s *catalytic validity* (Lather, 1991). Did the research re-orient, refocus and re-energise the participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it? I discussed the ways the research re-oriented participants above. Here I examine whether participants became engaged to take steps to ‘live’ their beliefs, to incorporate their awareness of injustice into action.

There are different degrees to which we, as individuals, comprehend our personal agency. For some, the apparent futility of acting within a system that is so overwhelmingly enormous and seemingly impervious to change demotivates and renders us passive. For others, the belief that change is possible spurs us to action. There was a reasonably high appreciation among the participants of their own agency, not unexpected given the effort involved in participating in the programme. In contrast to the majority of the group, Driandra had a very low estimation of human agency. This had been apparent in the pre-CEP interview. After the programme she seemed to remain similarly demotivated:

> *In terms of getting me off my butt and doing anything about it or . . . what am I going to do with this information? I don’t know. It’s just the sad facts of it.*

This is echoed in the words from another participant’s feedback sheet (week 3): *“This will never be solved. Hundreds of years won’t get it anywhere.”*

**Engagement**

There seem to be many ways whereby an ideological commitment to alternative discourses gets dissipated and never materialises as action. As Driandra’s words show, lack of motivation is one such reason. However, unlike Driandra, most of the participants felt more engaged to act as a result of their participation in the programme. The starting point for many participants in relation to a heightened sense
of agency was the increased motivation they felt. For Lem, his increased motivation resulted in him paying more attention to the issue:

I’ve probably kept a closer eye on what’s happening . . . instead of just being morally disgusted and thinking how terrible it is. It’s stimulated my level of interest.

This increased level of interest encouraged Lem to visit the Immigration Museum on a trip to Melbourne:

I went to the Immigration Museum in Melbourne which had a display about Afghani refugees. That was fascinating. I stood there and took about 3 pages of notes . . . It had profiles of different Afghanis that had come . . . But for the education programme . . . it probably wouldn’t have been of interest.

Like Lem, Harriet’s interest in the issue had been stimulated. Even though she saw herself as more of a thinker than a doer, Harriet discussed her increased motivation to act. During one of the sessions she had gone out of her comfort zone and: “Needed to challenge what another person was suggesting.” (Feedback sheet week 5)

I guess the issue has just been pushed more to the important side of things . . . [due to] the process of listening and participating in the workshops.

[The major thing that I will take from the programme is] probably the whole thing about not sitting on my backside and just letting someone else deal with things. To pick up the phone, write the letter, that sort of thing . . . [This feeling] sort of permeated, trickled through the process . . . not being prepared to sit still and not do anything when asked to assist.

Motivated by her participation in the programme, Frances felt that it was:

. . . leading me to other things. I think, “Well, what can I do next? Can I do something with the refugees?” . . . Maybe run a little writing group for them . . . So I’m thinking along those lines. A bit of political action that I feel that I could do . . . that may be of some value . . . I’m sure that will encourage me to speak out in ways that I haven’t done before.

Because of his participation in the programme, in particular talking with other participants, Steve felt increased motivation to assist refugees in the community:

On a personal level I would like to get more involved in learning more about the individuals . . . Working with them, being some sort of assistance . . . Just on a sort of a practical level. I had a chat with a lady a few weeks ago . . . We found some refugees, I don’t know where they were from . . . wandering about the shopping centre down in Rockingham and . . . we helped them out . . .
programme probably made me think more about it, hearing some of the others . . . I would be . . . quite happy to go and do something like that.

Talia felt an overall surge in motivation to act in ways connected with asylum seekers and refugees:

After a couple of particular evenings, I remember driving home and feeling really, really good and really happy and really . . . inspired and enthused and . . . it was almost like I had this wonderful knowledge or news and I just wanted to tell everyone about it . . . I could do volunteer work or at the school if they needed . . . like an advocate or somebody to help them out or show the parents around or come along to a P & C\textsuperscript{59} and interpret . . . I’ll actively seek out more information . . . particularly regarding religion because I think that it is a really relevant issue . . . It was almost like there was this stereotypical view that all refugees were Muslims and that the Muslims were going to take us over. And in a certain respect that made me want to find out more because I didn’t know a lot about the religion.

Although he hadn’t previously participated in political action, Tom felt that now he would consider taking part in a rally because:

The refugees, seeing the rally on the telly, it might make . . . just that bit of difference to them.

As a person engaged in community and political action on other issues, Tony already had a high sense of personal agency. He now felt motivated to become involved in the area of asylum seekers and refugees:

I intend to be more active in the area and expect some letters to be going from me to politicians and expect to be attending the odd rally and things like that . . . I’ll probably join CARAD\textsuperscript{60} or something like that.

Derek felt that he had learnt a lot of things which were different to his previous understanding of asylum seekers. His increased awareness of the misinformation presented in the mass media had really increased his interest in the topic:

It was really . . . an eye opener . . . I am more looking at this topic now.

It was interesting that Derek, who identified several areas in which he had had to change his understanding of the issue and who now was challenging certain aspects of the dominant discourse, also felt inspired to act:

\textsuperscript{59} Parents and Citizens Committee of a school.

\textsuperscript{60} CARAD is a locally based community organisation that provides assistance to refugees and asylum seekers.
I will be a little bit more mindful of refugees, a little bit more supportive of them. And perhaps even have to straighten a few people out and tell them that they’re wrong.

These responses are heartening for me to read. However, it must be remembered, as noted in Chapter 5, that participants may have been telling me what they thought that I wanted to hear.

**Dissemination of the learning**

Agents of social change can act in a variety of ways. An important way is through challenging dominant discourses and discussing alternatives with others. As an educator, it is usually unknown what happens with the information acquired and knowledge created during an educational process. Hearing some of the participants discuss how they had already acted as agents to further disseminate their learning was very rewarding. This section details how participants disseminated their learning within their social networks, and engaged strangers on the topic of asylum seekers and refugees.

Lem related his increased knowledge to an increase in confidence in speaking out on the topic. We can see him rehearsing his next interaction here:

*In my discussion with people I could say “hmmm, that’s not exactly true. What it is, is X, Y and Z.” Or “if you’re really interested in it you should go and have a look at this” . . . Rather than just going “No, you’re a dickhead, you don’t know what you’re talking about.” . . . I feel a lot more confident speaking about it . . . If I knew that I was going to put myself in a situation . . . where there was going to be certain people there that would be bringing the issue up . . . I know that I’d be able to get the information a lot quicker and then the information that I was looking at, I’d know reasonably well whether it was fact or fiction.*

Driandra, who otherwise did not identify any action she had taken or intended to take, had discussed various sessions from the programme with her husband, colleague and sister:

*When the information was fresh in my mind, I passed it on . . . Sam, I’d say “did you know . . .?” that type of thing. When I was thinking about that session that we had with the psychologist, I spoke to a bloke at work, because it was in my mind . . . It did get me thinking and talking about it . . . I may have mentioned something to my sister.*
In a similar fashion, Harriet discussed the programme with her close contacts after one of the sessions:

*It has been the topic of discussion at my home . . . with my sister. Even suggested to my very one-eyed bloke of a father occasionally – my small central circle.*

As a more extroverted person, Talia had a wide range of people with whom she discussed what she was doing in the programme. What is particularly interesting to see in Talia’s account is a secondary level of dissemination that occurs:

*I’d go home and get all my stuff out and go over it with James [partner] . . . James has a couple of his mates at work [a trucking company] . . . one of the guys in particular, an older guy mid-40s and quite an intelligent guy, they had had discussions from me . . . he’d gone to work and over lunch, smoko or whatever, they’d talk about it. And I felt that was a really good thing. Like the snowball effect. And that it would go to a totally different arena . . . I’ve got another really close friend and she works at Red Cross in the city . . . and she’s got some friends. . . And I’d give her a run down of what was happening and she would actually go to her friends at work . . . because they were really interested as well . . . In my assignments I’ve made mention of it, so that’s two different lecturers that I have discussed it with . . . There has definitely been a bit of a ripple, domino effect that has gone out from it . . . All these people are coming to mind . . . I can remember spending a couple of hours on the phone, talking to my father in Queensland about it.*

His new awareness of the misinformation which was part of the dominant discourse motivated Derek to speak out:

*I am more looking at this now. When somebody speaks about this now, I’ll make a comment. I have been on this course. I have spoken to [refugees]. I’ll get their response.*

Derek had discussed the issue with a security officer down at the Fremantle wharf one evening during the period the programme ran. Derek wanted to counter this person’s views, which he now saw as prejudiced views and not based on fact:

*What he told me raised questions for me and I didn’t know how to counter him. So, I’m now having to think about when I ask these questions, if I was to receive an answer like he gave, how am I going to counteract it.*

Since commencing the programme, Ron also had practised speaking out on the topic with strangers at a dinner party:

*The issue happened to come up and I explained in a neutral way that I’d had an interesting experience of meeting someone who had come to Australia by that route [asylum seeker]. Nobody actually asked me about that experience. One*
woman just exploded and just hurled out epithets. Another guy said “I try and adopt a more even attitude . . . but when it comes down to it, we’re here, we pay the taxes and I don’t want them here.” And the other people listened politely . . . I’ll do it again, yes . . . Introducing the subject was all right, it was dealing with the objections . . . takes a lot of skill.

Tony felt a bit more confident than Derek and Ron as to the positive impact that his conversations had:

I’ve spoken with a few people about it in various ways and it has generally gone pretty well, in that because I can support my arguments with facts that they don’t know, then I can stop them in their tracks initially and possibly make them change their attitudes.

**Action in civic life beyond asylum seeker issues**

In thinking about participants’ sense of agency and engagement to act, I did not ask them whether their participation in the programme had made any impact on their agency in other areas of life. However, an enhanced awareness and belief that the dominant discourse could be changed, transferred to other social issues for at least two participants.

Notwithstanding Angus’s continued allegiance to the dominant discourse around asylum seekers, he was very pleased to have participated in the programme because:

What it has done is I’ve got back to writing now and putting in submissions [on environmental issues]. It was good making the effort to go out at night . . . All I was doing before . . . I was doing crosswords and things like that and watching television.

Harriet described herself as an introvert and someone who doesn’t go in for ‘flying the flag.’ Nonetheless the increased motivation she felt (as noted above) translated into civic action on a local matter and another social justice issue:

They want to build a tramway past my bedroom window which I’m not too pleased about . . . Usually it would be “I can put up with this sort of thing.” But the people decided to have a community consultation and I thought, ” right, consult we will.” I trucked off down to the council chambers on Monday . . . I followed through with yet another letter outlining my particular problems and potential solutions. I actually did something. This was during the education process, trust me . . . [Further,] I was approached by a friend of mine about the closure of one of the Aboriginal community services. I actually got on the phone to McGinnty’s [Attorney-General of Western Australia] office and yakked to somebody there and followed it up with a letter. Little things like that together mean that you’ve pulled your finger out.
Specific action taken related to asylum seekers

Social psychologists have pondered the issue of when motivation translates into action. As noted in Chapter 3, critical pedagogy has been criticised because of its lack of empirical research as to when and how the underlying political and social objectives of the pedagogy are attained. To add to the base of empirical research on these issues, this section contains the accounts that the participants gave of how their behaviour has been influenced by the transformative pedagogy. It has much in common with the section above relating to dissemination of information and engagement in conversation on the issue. However, I have separated it out as it demonstrates another level of engagement to act. None of these actions was specifically suggested as part of the programme.

A number of participants (Harriet, Ron, Lem, Talia and Mel) reported how they had sought out additional information on the topic. Given the difficulty of finding alternative voices within the dominant discourse, this is necessary in order to challenge that discourse. Harriet said that she had been:

... tracking down information outside of the workshops ... tracking down websites on the net and looking at some of the positive stuff.

In addition to finding alternative sources of information, Talia was formally integrating her learning from the programme into her studies at university:

I incorporated some of this into a presentation that I did on Friday regarding refugees and the whole power issue. A lot like what you'd done – to make my colleagues aware of the situation of the asylum seekers having next to no power ... That whole empowerment issue.

Going beyond the intellectual, Tom identified that he was:

... more demonstrative ... to immigrants now. I encourage them to let them know that there are some people here at least who approve of them being here and are willing to be supportive.

At the same time as we commenced the programme, Lem also started a creative writing course. His choice of story, which he was looking to get published, was directly linked to the programme. Through this he seeks to disseminate further an
alternative discourse and engage people with the social justice issues:

I probably came up with the main character [a person who assists refugees who arrive illegally to assimilate into Australia] directly because of the course that we were doing. I don’t think there’s any doubt about that. It probably wouldn’t have been the same story if we weren’t meeting . . . That was probably a pretty big impact. And I probably wouldn’t have been as angry.

Of all the participants, Ron was the person who took the biggest step to engage in social action in relation to asylum seekers and refugees. This seems to be the logical next step for him:

It did get me moving along the path of action again. I wrote off to CARAD offering them my services and they sent back . . . I either have been or will be put forward for membership at the next meeting. And my plan is to volunteer one day a week.

Ron’s actions, as with other participants, are illustrative of moving to the next level of engagement. Whatever the starting point, the vast majority of participants became more active on this social justice issue.

**Reflections**

In analysing the participants’ accounts of how their learning had an impact on their knowledge, beliefs and actions, it was apparent that each participant had a unique response to the pedagogical process. There was a complex variety of responses from the same process. If the question was: “did your participation in the programme impact on your knowledge, beliefs and actions?” there would be answers such as “yes, but . . .” or “yes, and . . .” or “no, but . . .”

Despite the individual responses, the participants’ comments consistently show a greater understanding of the dominant discourse about asylum seekers. All participants discussed how their understanding of the reality of asylum seekers was enhanced. Most participants also reflected on their enhanced appreciation of the way that a dominant discourse is constructed and maintained through the exercise of power and selective use of information. This increase in empirical and theoretical knowledge and ability to understand the social construction of discourse was quite consistent throughout the group. What was not consistent was how the participants responded to that new knowledge. There is a marked disparity of responses between
those whose ideological positioning was consistent with the dominant discourse and the others. For participants already challenging the dominant discourse, the pedagogy worked to support them in their quest to “actively refuse the role of cultural servant and sentinel for the status quo in order to reclaim, reshape, and transform their own historical destiny” (McLaren, 1995, p. 24). Their sense of agency was enhanced. For participants comfortable with the dominant discourse the process was more complex. They experienced conflict between their identification with a monocultural Australian way of life and the knowledge gained. And while they now had a greater appreciation of the constructedness of discourse, they also managed not to allow this to interrupt their worldview significantly.

I have a heightened appreciation of the significant role that self-awareness and reflexivity play in a person’s openness to worldviews. Although aspects of the pedagogy, such as problem-posing and journaling, enhanced these attributes, in future I will place more emphasis on pedagogical processes which explicitly develop reflexivity and self-awareness.
Chapter 10

Reflections on a process of change

Introduction

By dedicating my passion and mind to this research project for over three years, I have developed my thinking about pedagogy, about the role of the facilitator and about social justice. Some of the reflections here expose the messier side of the pedagogical and research process. These reflections are an important aspect of the project’s methodological integrity. I offer these reflections to all educators interested in social change, even though what works for one educator will not necessarily work for another. From some general reflections on social change pedagogy, the chapter moves to a deeper analysis of two major developments in my thinking arising out of the research. The first of these is the tension that arises from the explicit political nature of the pedagogy. The second major theoretical development is to reframe the issue of asylum seekers using an analysis of privilege.

Social change pedagogy

Social change pedagogy, of which my transformative pedagogy is an example, assumes that human agents are able to deliberately bring about positive social change. This section discusses the doubts that occurred to me as to the possibility of human agency within the social systems that create those human agents. Hopeful that human agency is not merely a modernist fantasy, the section moves on to examine how the experience of creating a transformative pedagogy reinforced the importance of the relationship with each person involved in the pedagogical process. I re-examine the contextual elements of the pedagogy created, finishing with a short discussion of one of the limitations of my pedagogy – the avoidance of conflict.

Agency and regimes of truth

There are difficulties that a social change project must face arising from the notions of agency and regimes of truth. These difficulties generally remain unspoken within
social change pedagogy; as to voice them brings into jeopardy the entire project. The first difficulty relates to the limitations on effective human agency within the discourses that construct our subjectivity. The second is interrelated and concerns the role of oppositional action within any system or regime of truth. This project incorporates a belief that a transformative pedagogy can help to construct new discourses. Even sustained by a belief in some form of human agency, I still wonder whether I am merely part of the safety valve that exists within an unjust system to stop it from exploding. Are actions such as my transformative pedagogy permissible within the existing regime of truth because such contained opposition allows for the regimes’ continuation? Such thoughts make me question whether in fact I am working within the system rather than against it.

Foucault (1980) and others have suggested that actions to challenge a dominant discourse are a necessary part of a particular regime of truth. Similarly, Freire argued that the form counter-action takes is determined by the system, although not requested by it (Escobar et al., 1994, p. 31). By taking a historical view and noting the significant ways that oppressive discourses on issues such as slavery and the position of women have been transformed by deliberate human action, I feel that human agency can be effective. However, such changes do not challenge the very core of oppressive social relations but merely cause them to take on a different form. In part it appears to be a question of where we draw the boundaries of a discourse – almost a question of definition. The wider the terrain a dominant discourse envelops the more resistant and enduring it appears to be in the face of challenge.

These musings are obviously a long way from a definitive position. The reason I raise them here is to remind us of the potential paradox of the work of social change educators. Does our work effectively challenge an existing regime or does it work to support it by containing oppositional action in a form which does not ultimately threaten that regime? There is a need to reflect on these issues as we do empirical research into social change education. Being aware of the paradox increases the potential that a transformative pedagogy can avoid merely being a safety valve for oppressive systems and instead play a role in achieving social change.

61 This book takes the form of a dialogue between authors thus allowing attribution of one author.
Person-centred pedagogy

In general, the programme was a good mix of information, experience, reflection and discussion, with participants engaging in different ways – intellectually, affectively and somatically. In particular, the emphasis throughout the programme on the social, on developing relationships with the participants, was I believe a key factor in their engagement with the process and their learning. Such an emphasis could be described as person-centred. I use person-centred rather than the more usual student-centred because I want to acknowledge the importance of learning about, and knowing better the participants as complex human beings. As a result I have deepened my understanding that “the practice of education revolves around the teacher-student relationship, as an interchange, a bringing together of particular subjects” (Gilberto Guevara-Niebla in Escobar et al., 1994, p. 28). My recognition of the multiple subject positions of the participants and the need for a pedagogy of multiple approaches moved from a more technical into a more ethical understanding of the pedagogical relationship.

A productive, person-centred pedagogy was made possible because the participants and I came to know each other and relate in nuanced ways. The informal moments built into the programme as well as the interview process were vital contributing factors. Building these kinds of relationships can be quite difficult in formal educational settings with pressures of numbers and institutional requirements. My experience in Guatemala, with its emphasis on relationship, helped me to create a person-centred pedagogy. Through establishing dialogue I was able to get to know them. Jan Jagodzinski (Jagodzinski, 2002) suggests that “a rapport with each and every student has to be established, and this is primarily an ethical demand that is made on the teacher and student” (p. 86). I agree with jagodzinski that the process of knowing our students creates an ethical relationship:

When we begin to know our students, their strengths, their frailties, their personalities, and their strivings, we come face-to-face with their “visage” . . . that core of their identity which we know nothing about and which we will never completely know about. (p. 86)

Reminding ourselves of the centrality of relationships in human lives is important for any educational encounter. It helps us to refocus on the ethical and moral dimensions
of education and people’s lives. It also is a practice which goes against the predominant economic forces of neo-liberalism.

**Context**

Working with self-selected adults in a community education programme was both a limitation and a benefit. In every pedagogical encounter the educator needs to consider the context and adapt the general principles and instructional strategies to the situation. Time is usually a major limiting factor. The hectic postmodern condition of the 21st century leaves most Westerners with little time or desire to cover an issue in breadth and depth, using participatory processes (Shor, 1992; Kincheloe, 2001). Ideally, I would have preferred that the programme be at least twice the length so that additional topics and processes could have been included. This would have allowed greater participant involvement in the direction of the programme and more power sharing.

Of major significance to the lived form of the transformative pedagogy was the make-up of the group. Many of the positive results described in Chapters 8 and 9 were facilitated by the fact that a majority of the participants were already challenging the dominant discourse about asylum seekers. Having a critical mass tilted in that direction was a significant advantage to achieving my pedagogical objectives. The dominant discourse was never able to establish itself in the pedagogical space.

Social change education carried out in formal institutions (schools and universities), where the students are required to attend, brings with it very different issues. There is an ethical dilemma present in formal educational settings of ensuring that students are not prejudiced in their vocational (or other establishmentarian) goals by the passion of the educator for interrupting those goals (J. Smith, 1997). In formal education the time constraints are generally less fierce and the educator, in effect, has a captive audience. However, the resistance of some students in formal education settings creates obstacles not present in the community setting where only those who want to attend are present. These differences highlight the dangers of transferring one experience into a distinct context.
Conflict

At the conclusion of the programme I had cause to reflect on the place of conflict in social change pedagogy. In their post-CEP conversations, four of the participants expressed regret that there had been no opportunity to engage in a full-blown debate. What they wanted was a ‘no holds barred’ discussion in which everybody would be able to argue her or his case. In wanting to convince others of their point of view through debate, these participants may be expressing what Derek Edyvane (2005) argues is the common human desire to seek unity with others through having them care about the things that we care about. It could also be an expression of a more competitive desire.

I had not included a space in the programme for the kind of debate that these four participants wanted. Reflecting on the decision, which had not been fully considered when preparing the programme, I can see that I was influenced by various factors. A basic reason was that I am not comfortable with ‘no holds barred’ debates and have little experience in facilitating such a situation. Conflict will usually have not only an intellectual component but also an emotional component. Although I enjoy an intellectual debate, I avoid emotional conflict. In addition, there is a strong possibility that with such a controversial topic, a debate could become a personal attack rather than a debate of ideas. Intense debate often becomes an exercise in point-scoring as people retreat from open discussion to polarised positions. There is the possibility that some participants could have been distressed. In addition, such an activity could be counterproductive to my transformative pedagogy. If there were a heated debate, participants could be alienated from the group and the process. The group dynamic could have changed significantly as the group would inevitably become more polarised. Participants could decide not to continue in the programme and if they did, be much less open to ideas that challenge their worldview. The previous willingness to listen would have been severely undermined. This would have contradicted the objectives of the pedagogy.

In favour of having debate in which participants can raise whatever arguments and issues they choose is that it would be a way of engaging more fully with the

62 The result of a middle-class conflict-avoiding upbringing?
emotional aspect of the topic. Greater expression of our emotions would have minimised the unspoken and repressed aspects of our response to asylum seekers. To be handled productively, it would require a facilitator with experience in such processes.

There is obviously a range of behaviour that constitutes conflict. Without discussing in any detail what he means by conflict, Edyvane (2005) argues that conflict is a necessary part of any community and that dialogue with those with whom we disagree is “constitutive of a good life” (original emphasis) (p. 50-1). The existence of disagreement provides us with reason to engage with others and this engagement is important to communities. In his argument supporting the importance of conflict, Edyvane conflates conflict with dialogue. This ignores the destructive potential of conflict, which often results in winners and losers, and assumes that through conflict a neutral space is established. Although I see conflict as much messier and more dangerous than Edyvane, he makes an important contribution in raising the potential productivity of conflict.

Jane Hunter and Simon Jimenez argue that the role of conflict in pedagogy is not a new concept, having been present from the time of the Ancient Greeks (1998). Again, in a way that appears to conflate conflict with rational debate, they note a number of positive benefits from conflict. Of relevance to my transformative pedagogy, the benefits of conflict in a classroom include: permitting students to manage conflict in a democratic society; helping to clarify beliefs held; and providing an experience of participatory citizenship (Conflict section). These skills are vital to social justice processes and objectives. Our lack of familiarity with dealing with conflict is reflective of a more general lack of familiarity with radical democratic processes. One problem is that these writers only consider the positive aspects of conflict. They do not discuss how conflict can be managed to maximise the positive aspects and minimise the negative aspects. In particular, the emotional impact of conflict is not addressed. I anticipate working on this further.
**Some reflections as facilitator**

The facilitator of a social change pedagogy occupies a delicate position. In working towards a social justice vision she or he also seeks to further values such as freedom, democracy and transparency within the pedagogical process. The normative social justice vision can potentially act as an obstacle to practising democracy and furthering individual student freedom. I anticipated that it would not be difficult for participants to identify my particular social justice position from the pedagogical approach. This was borne out in the final interviews. All but one participant (Hal) commented on my political position on the issue of asylum seekers during the final interview or focus group. Nonetheless, during the process I became uncomfortable with the fact that I had not explicitly disclosed to the participants my position on the issue of asylum seekers. Through the interview process, I knew that my political objectives were not shared by all of the participants. This difference in political positioning gave rise to certain questions: Is social change pedagogy necessarily directive, and if so, is it possible to be directive and at the same time seek greater freedom and democracy? Is there an ethical imperative that the educator should declare her or his position? These questions arise whenever social change educators work with participants who materially benefit from the status quo. They are largely irrelevant when working with the popular sectors where it is the shared political goal that brings the educator and group together.

**Freedom – Normativity**

There is a tension between having a clear social justice framework and also a commitment to not imposing my views. Does the social justice framework result in a directive pedagogy that contradicts participant freedom? Working with the collaborative team, the consensus was that the programme would not tell people what was the ‘right way’ to respond to the social issue of asylum seekers. In any event, there was no consensus as to what that ‘right way’ would be. There would be no imposition in the pedagogical outcomes.\(^{63}\) In our discussions we reflected a position commonly taken in critical pedagogies, “to be both non-neutral (always on the side of good) and non-normative (always on the side of freedom)” (Mellor & Patterson,

---

\(^{63}\) Freire argues that non-directiveness is “a deceitful discourse; that is, a discourse from the perspective of the dominant class” as it necessarily supports the existing power structure (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 378).
2001, p. 124). The pedagogical processes set out to be dialogical and democratic with a non-authoritarian mode of facilitation and yet the dialogue was directed, the content more or less pre-determined, and only certain views problematised. Some of these tensions are picked up by Brookfield (2002a) in the context of setting the educational curriculum:

> Here is one of the unresolvable tensions of critical practice: how to respect the agendas adults bring to a democratic negotiation of curriculum while contradictorily challenging these agendas by offering (and sometimes insisting on) radically different, politically contentious options for study. (p. 106)

Having a normative social justice framework has led some to argue that critical pedagogies are unethical and undemocratic (George, 2001, p. 100). Jeff Smith (1997) argues that not to allow students to set their own agenda for their education “is undemocratic at best, if not infantilizing and frankly oppressive” (p. 317). He claims that “we are ethically bound by students’ own aims, even if those aims seem uncomfortably close to elite values” (original emphasis) (p. 317). Although these writers challenge my understanding of social change education, they are relatively simplistic arguments that appear to ignore the constructed nature of our social world and the interests behind maintaining particular power relations. It is a limited view of democracy and freedom that they espouse, one that accepts the limits of the existing discourses.

A necessary component of furthering our contingent freedom comes from the right to understand these discourses as well as the socio-economic forces that shape our lives, minds and desires. It is arguable that only through processes such as ideology critique and conscientisation do we gain an awareness of the social construction of reality, thus increasing the possibility of escaping those limits, even if only momentarily. Moments of freedom can come from action that goes against the grain, inspired by heightened awareness. It is thus those pedagogies that do not identify the interests and forces that shape hegemonic discourses that limit freedom. In bringing a curriculum that students may not share, critical pedagogies and my transformative pedagogy in particular, do not give priority to students’ existing desires. What is given priority instead is to uncover as much as possible the constructedness of a
social system and the possibilities and limitations inherent in the discourses we inhabit.

The work of Mellor and Patterson has been very important in helping me think through the inherent tension between normativity and freedom. I am grateful to Mellor for suggesting that what I needed to do to was to ‘make strange’ my angst about having a normative position and at the same time not wanting to be directive in my pedagogy (personal communication, 2 March 2004). Mellor and Patterson (1994) argue that normativity is unavoidable in educative processes (p. 39). In their domain, the English classroom, they critique the fiction of teachers, through non-directive processes, allowing students to see through the dominant ideology and produce their own resistance readings. What they see as occurring is an equating of freedom with a pre-determined, resistant reading of texts sanctioned by cultural studies or critical literacy. Working from a critical post-structural position, they come to the conclusion that the freedom and autonomy espoused by critical literacy and cultural studies are in effect produced through a particular set of technologies. Acknowledging that certain readings – for example racist or fascist readings – will not be acceptable to teachers brings them to see that the pedagogy of the English classroom is in fact directive and normative despite protestations to the contrary (Mellor and Patterson, 1994).

In the end, I have to accept that my pedagogy is normative and understand that what I am undertaking is work that furthers a particular worldview. As do Mellor and Patterson (2001), I “acknowledge the normativity of my practice . . . admit, indeed, to the use of power, not simply to the resisting of others’ uses of power” (p. 132). All education is about shaping particular moral character. Social change pedagogy is merely more explicit about the kind of moral character than many other forms of pedagogy. Giroux (2004) explains the situation thus:

The concept of the project [of critical pedagogy] in this sense speaks to the directive nature of pedagogy, recognizes that any pedagogical practices presupposes some notion of the future, prioritizes some forms of identification over others, and upholds selective modes of social relations. At the same time, the normative nature of such a pedagogy does not offer guarantees as much as it recognizes that its own position is grounded in modes of authority, values, and ethical considerations that must be constantly
debated in terms of the ways in which it both opens up and closes down
democratic relations, values, and identities. (p. 36)

I was reassured by reflecting on the process of the programme. All participants were
adults who had chosen to participate knowing that the research was looking at how a
community education programme could affect attitudes to asylum seekers. The
pedagogical space that had been created was non-judgemental and facilitated all
views being expressed. Contrary to imposing a particular worldview, everyone’s
views were listened to and everyone was respected irrespective of their position. No
’solution’ to the issue of asylum seekers was ever presented, and in fact I do not have
a blue-print for a ‘solution.’ There was no indication from the participants that they
experienced the programme as coercive, on the contrary, those who expressed most
enjoyment from the process had strongly opposing worldviews.64

Taking the lead from Mellor (personal communication, 6 February 2004), I see the
role that I play as a social change educator as one in which I encourage people to
“reflect on and possibly adjust their attitudes to various moral and ethical issues.” In
doing this work I will continue to respect that others have different worldviews and
allow those views to be expressed, challenging those views which are contrary to
social justice and human rights. I need to accept that the exercise of power in this
way will necessarily limit certain freedoms, something that (all other things being
equal) I would seek to avoid.

To declare or not to declare – an ethical issue?

The possibility of exercising freedom requires, amongst other things, being as fully
informed as possible. Openness and transparency of action and word are
characteristics that promote further freedom. There needs to be a compelling reason
to opt for a position that chooses opaqueness over transparency. As a result of the
critical reflective process I now feel that although there was no deception or
misinformation, I fell short of what was necessary to enable the participants to freely
negotiate the pedagogy. This self-criticism exists notwithstanding passing
Pappworth’s ethical test referred to in Chapter 5, namely that I was prepared to carry

64 Mel and Don, in particular, were very sad when the programme ended.
out the research with those closest to me. The dilemma arises from the desire to enact a pedagogy which can be negotiated by participants in a literate way, at the same time as encouraging them to opt for particular outcomes. I would argue that as an ethical issue, how, when and whether to discuss one’s political position is pertinent for everybody who facilitates a pedagogical process, whether they are supporting or contesting the status quo. If I were to undertake a similar programme again, I would seek to declare my position and incorporate it into the pedagogy. I would seek a way to openly acknowledge my position without cutting off processes for democratic dialogue or closing down minds and hearts to new points of view and experiences.

After the programme concluded, I discussed this issue with various critical friends and the collaborative team. For most people the approach I had taken was appropriate. Some members of the collaborative team understood my concern and seriously questioned whether the approach I had adopted was the most appropriate. A creative suggestion came from Helen who has exceptional honesty and personal integrity. For Helen, it was belittling to suggest that the participants would not have chosen to stay, given a disclosure of my position or that of other facilitators. As she saw it, we needed to accept that participants had their own reasons for coming that were not dependent on what we set out to do. Her proposal was for the facilitators to acknowledge to the participants at an early stage that we were involved in this process because of our historical commitment to social justice and that we were keen to have this challenged as part of our own learning. It could in fact have fostered a more critical and open exploration of the issues, one that could increase the likelihood of engaging participants in a serious reflection of their own prejudices. A skilfully led discussion could have ensued in which the participants were enrolled in the conversation about the importance for us all of trying to understand our own subjectivity and of being open to hearing different ways of viewing the world. Participants could well become more open by hearing a facilitator introduce a statement as to her/his position with:

*I realise that this could put some of you off, but I need to do it because I want you to understand and challenge me as much as I hope to understand and challenge*

65 This made me reconsider the appropriateness of Pappworth’s test. I now believe that although it may be a good starting point, it does not cover all contingencies.
you. Through this process I will be uncovering things about myself as much as I hope you will be uncovering things about yourselves. I am being upfront with you because that is who I am. (Adapted from Helen’s words)

Such an approach would be more consistent with an educational process committed to non-hierarchical structures and the dual roles of educator/learner.

Critical educators working in the West with students not necessarily sympathetic to their worldview rarely disclose their positions (Marks, 1995; Ellsworth, 1989). For example, Marcuse, Gramsci and Baptiste, referred to by Brookfield (2002b), argue for the need to be strategic and in some ways play the game as set by the rules of the hegemonic interests, but to do so in a way that is smarter than those whose world view you oppose. Ian Baptiste argues that where there is no shared political commitment, there is no need for transparency. On the contrary, he argues that social change educators will need “to engage in some form of manipulation – some fencing, posturing, concealment, manoeuvring, misinformation, and even all-out deception as the case demands” (cited in Brookfield, 2002b, p. 273). Similarly strategic are the words of Michael Apple (2002) when looking at how to engage in critical pedagogy and social action, post the attacks on New York and Washington of September 11, 2001. He states that it “required a very strategic sense of how to speak and act, both in my teaching and in my appearances on national media” (p. 1763). Even Freire who usually speaks of transparency indicated that: “There is no liberating education without some measure of manipulation; there is no such thing as angelical purity. The important thing is to know which is the predominant space between liberation and manipulation; that is the issue” (Escobar et al., 1994, p. 36). Although I sympathise with those who argue in effect that the ends justify the means, I prefer to work to an ethical position that does not include Baptiste’s idea of “an ethically grounded pedagogy of coercion” (cited in Brookfield, 2002b, p. 273).

There is the danger that explicit acknowledgement of my political position could have resulted in some participants constructing me in a problematic way. It would have been easy for them to stereotype me and write me off as a ‘bleeding heart,’ out of touch with the realities of today’s world with the increased need for security and protection. A declaration of political position might well have shut off the very processes that I was trying to create. Foregrounding this concern here highlights that
the programme was part of a struggle of positions, with the dominant discourse being challenged by a social justice discourse. Naming my role in the struggle over ideological hegemony was not something I even contemplated prior to holding the programme.

There are a number of factors that guide an ethically strategic decision on whether to disclose one’s position and how: the composition of the group of participants; the subjectivity of the facilitator; the nature of the topic; the level of institutional support for the intervention; the place that the intervention is occurring; the local, national and global contexts. Some of these issues come through in Stephen Marks’s (1995) belief that: “in a course that is a social science elective and not a core women’s studies course, it is a mistake to directly discuss these [feminist] agendas with students at the outset” (p. 143).

Helen’s suggestions seem to be a good place to start in this endeavour. It would be naïve not to acknowledge that there is a serious risk involved in such an approach but it is a risk worth taking to maintain an ethical stance.

**Reflections from a position of privilege**

I started this research uncomfortable in my position as a beneficiary of an unequal world, committed to highlighting inequities, challenging the discourses that support them and looking for alternatives. In part, this was also my motive for working as a volunteer in Guatemala. I believed (and still do) that global injustice is the product of inequitable relations between countries, often based on past exploitative colonial practices and continued through current multilateral organisations such as the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. It is immoral that countries (and individuals) that already have too much, engage in practices that augment their power, wealth and global inequality. Social justice and human rights debates tend to focus on the plight of those without adequate power, wealth or resources. In contrast, I want to focus on those of us who have too much.

The greatest gift for me from this research has been the opportunity to discover the literature on privilege – literature that provides a theoretical framework for my
disquiet. It fits well with my methodology as a case study of critical reflective practice that a major aspect of my theory-building would come towards the end of the process. Through ongoing reflexivity and critique the importance to my work of the analysis of privilege crystallised as I sought to relocate the work back into its social justice framework. Using the notion of privilege I am now reframing how I understand the issue of asylum seekers and how a pedagogy can challenge the related injustices.

The orientation of my transformative pedagogy did reflect in many ways the orientation that an analysis of privilege provides. I would describe my transformative pedagogy as necessarily examining the “social, political and psychological dimensions of membership [of a privileged group]” (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 163). However, the analysis of privilege was not fully explored at the time of the programme although there was some interrogation of the globally privileged positions that Australians citizens have. In developing the notion of globally privileged citizenship, this work may provide a new theoretical tool for social change educators.

**Displacing the privilege of citizenship**

Over the last few decades we have witnessed a significant change in the migratory movements of people. For centuries it was largely the peoples of the powerful colonising nations who moved uninvited into the ‘underdeveloped’ nations. Now it is largely people from economically underdeveloped countries who are moving uninvited towards the centre from the periphery (Castles & Davidson, 2000, p. 55). Populations of asylum seekers and refugees ignore the limitations of their own citizenship and fail to defer to the citizens of the countries they seek to enter. In response, powerful nations have evoked exclusionary discourses of citizenship to protect those on the inside and keep out the uninvited. Harsh responses are seen as necessary to protect the rights of the citizens of the safe, stable, materially comfortable Western countries and to minimise the perceived threat posed by those seeking to enter uninvited and enjoy the same benefits. The policies of governments in relation to asylum seekers have significant social justice and human rights

---

66 Also referred to as *citizenship privilege*. 

260
consequences (Booth, 1997; Benhabib, 1999; Mares, 2002). Alison Brysk and Gershon Shafir (2004b) describe the disparity in the rights enjoyed by citizens and those enjoyed by outsiders as the ‘citizenship gap’. In analysing globally privileged citizenship, I challenge the way people from relatively privileged locations understand the respective rights and limitations of citizenship. In short, I develop an ethical alternative to the dominant discourse of citizenship currently holding sway.

The notion of privilege is one way of shifting the gaze from those who are from underdeveloped countries, excluded or oppressed and onto those who are from overdeveloped countries, exclusionary or oppressive (whether intentionally or not). I am not the first to suggest that citizenship of a safe, stable and materially comfortable country is a privilege. Veit Bader (1997) and others (Benhabib, 1999) express a similar sentiment although they do not develop the concept any further. In arguing that citizenship has always meant the exclusion of non-members, Bader (1997b) states that in present conditions “democratic citizenship in the rich and safe Northern States . . . increasingly is a privilege. The exclusion of billions of desperately poor and uprooted people ‘out there’ becomes morally more scandalous the harder one thinks about it” (p. 2). Rather than locating the problem somewhere else, I suggest that those of us who globally privileged citizenship look at our own unearned benefits.

It is no coincidence that previously colonising nations are using exclusionary discourses of citizenship. Citizenship was not a major part of the discourse of the colonising nations during periods of colonisation. After all, as it operates in 2005, the notion of citizenship would not have been very useful to those colonisers who wanted to enter the lands of other nations uninvited and appropriate the resources, peoples and territory they encountered. Notions of citizenship are now employed to exclude people who could be characterised in those same terms – people who want to enter the countries of others uninvited and share the resources of those countries. Citizenship as an exclusive notion would have contradicted the desires of the powerful colonising nations. It only becomes necessary when the ‘natives’ of those territories want to return the favour.
The dominant discourse in many over-developed Western countries concerning citizenship is one that focuses on the need to protect the rights of citizens. It supports the need to maintain control over who makes up the population through strategies such as the control of grants of citizenship and is based on the right to exclude outsiders (Booth, 1997). A ‘natural’ and immutable division between the citizen and the non-citizen, which largely determines who is allowed into a country, continues from pre-modern times. As Keith Faulks (2000) states, “in pre-modern society, the division between citizen and non-citizen signified inequalities that were taken to be natural and immutable” (p. 163). At other times the division between citizen and non-citizen resulted in women, slaves, non-property owners, and indigenous people being located on the non-citizen side (Ramirez, Soysal, & Shanahan, 1997; Castles & Davidson, 2000). In Australia now, rather than explicitly excluding certain groups, the main way that we exclude people from potential citizenship is by discriminating in favour of people who are rich, well educated, have sought after skills, are English-speaking and have relatives in Australia.67

Australia has successively expanded the criteria for who could be an Australian citizen. From the racist beginnings of Federation in 1901 with the White Australia Policy, more inclusive approaches to Australian society gradually developed culminating in the official recognition of Australia as a multicultural nation in 1973. The consolidation of a multicultural vision of Australian society has been halted since the 1990s when many politicians and much of the population reacted against waves of non-citizens arriving on Australia’s shore from countries, such as Cambodia and China, and later Afghanistan and Iraq without permission (Castles & Davidson, 2000, p. 57).

The legal definition of who is a citizen and the rights of citizens are contained in domestic legislation.68 In general terms, an Australian citizen is anyone born in Australia with a parent who is an Australian citizen or has been an Australian resident for 10 years. In addition, all children of Australian citizens are also Australian citizens. In a tantalising suggestion that the legal notion of citizenship

---

67 See the various migration visa categories published by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs at http://www.dimia.gov.au.
68 Principally the Australian Citizenship Act 1948.
requires rethinking, the Australian Citizenship Council (2000) nonetheless
recommended that the status quo be retained:

Although there are some trends in Australia and internationally which give
cause for reflection [italics added], the Council considers that the
fundamentals of Australian Citizenship law are correct and the emphasis
should be on continuity rather than change in this area. (p. 38)

Until recently, citizenship has not been subject to significant political or sociological
analysis. Political philosophers, writes Benhabib (1999), “have paid little attention to
citizenship as a sociological category, as a social practice that inserts us into a
complex network of privileges and duties, entitlements, and obligations” (p. 719).
This is changing as writers begin to explore how citizenship is intersecting with
justice (Booth, 1997; Carens, 2000; Fraser, 2005). The notion of citizenship, of
belonging to a particular nation state, has been irrelevant to most social justice
debates. Social justice debates traditionally focus on oppression and discrimination
arising from such things as race, gender, religion, disability, sexuality and class –
issues that operate within societies or nations. When citizenship has been addressed
within a social justice framework it has been in order to harness its potential for the
work of furthering active democratic participation within the borders of a society
(Down, 2004). Citizenship discourse has also been a rallying point for social justice
struggles, as women, the poor, and indigenous peoples have sought enfranchisement
(Castles & Davidson, 2000; Ramirez et al., 1997). Where the social justice debate
broadens to take into view the global picture, issues such as colonialism, economic
globalisation and neo-liberalism are generally the focus.

**Social justice and citizenship**

One may wonder what the notion of privilege adds to the social justice debate
concerning asylum seekers and the approaches taken to them by the citizens of the
safe, stable countries to which they flee. This section looks at alternative social
justice discourses and argues that the notion of privilege brings with it an important
change of focus.

It is possible to see the shifting discourse around social justice issues as characterised
by two distinct approaches during the last centuries: charity and justice (usually in
Chapter 10

the form of human rights). At different times, specific social justice initiatives are framed in terms of charity. They were ‘sold’ to the powerful by convincing them of the ‘good’ that a more socially just approach would achieve. By appealing to a person’s sense of charity, many injustices were and continue to be abolished. In general terms however, charity alleviates short-term suffering without looking to remedy the underlying cause. Those who become the objects of charity are expected to respond with gratitude, and a dependency on charity may result. The negative social consequences that can result include loss of dignity and powerlessness. The charitable discourse is consistent with a modernist worldview in which social ‘problems’ are seen as being located with those who are different from the normalised Western male. It sees injustice from the position of the powerful and does not challenge their position or power in any way. Through a charitable discourse those with power take the benevolent and paternalistic role of protector and the Other is positioned as needing protection, and in some way lacking in full adult capacity. Depending on the social issue, the problem will be seen to be with the Other – those who are non-male, non-White, non-able bodied, non-heterosexual, or non-affluent. In relation to asylum seekers, the problem is with the non-citizen.

The charity based discourse has been augmented and in some cases replaced by a rights based discourse. The development of human rights and their predominance within social justice discourse has been a significant change during the 20th century. The discourse of human rights stops social justice being seen as the choice and benevolence of the powerful. Rather than being an optional ‘good’ that the powerful can bestow, social justice becomes something required due to the equality of rights shared by all human beings. Although a rights based discourse presents the social injustice from the position of the powerless, the position of the powerful remains largely unexamined. The problem remains with the Other, the marginalised or oppressed group who wishes to have full benefits of personhood. It is still against a normalised Western position that the injustice of those Others is being measured. No power analysis is required within a human rights framework as indicated by Shafir: “human rights were to provide basic protections against arbitrariness – not to equalize access to power” (2004, p. 14).
Although there are important advantages from the discourse of human rights, there is a major limitation when it is applied to asylum seekers. Human rights purport to apply to all human beings irrespective of circumstances. However, to enforce these rights, a person needs to have citizen status. Citizenship is necessary for a person to establish entitlement to all other goods available in society (Booth, 1997, p. 263). McMaster (2003) comments on the relationship between human rights and citizenship:

All persons have rights as humans, but human rights are, for the most part, citizen’s rights – rights found in, and lived in, nation-states where legal and political identity is bound to citizenship. Underlying the early notion of citizenship are the concepts of equality, freedom, exclusion, discrimination and the ‘other.’ (¶ 6)

It is interesting to note that until the mid-twentieth century our relationship with outsiders was understood not in terms of rights but rather in terms of “mutual aid, good samaritanism and, in general, charity [italics added]” (Booth, 1997, p. 270). It was drawn from “notions of charity or affinity with particular national or religious groups” (Boswell, 2002). This of course brings with it all of the limitations of the charity discourse. As William Booth (1997) describes it:

The norms governing . . . the ethics that direct our comportment toward outsiders are not those of justice. Nor is this a particularly surprising result given the argument that justice consists of associative obligations whose precondition is membership in an historic community. This is a fundamental rejection of the view associated with liberal modernity (if only as an ideal) of justice as a property of relations between human beings qua human. It is a return to the ancient view, aptly characterized by Alasdair MacIntyre, that outside the political community theology, not justice, governs: divinely ordained xenia or caritas, hospitality or charity toward foreigners. (p. 270)

Neither the charity discourse nor the human rights discourse contains within it an analysis of power from which the position of the citizen can be scrutinised. In contrast, I believe that an analysis of privilege can provide this. The discourse of privilege places under the spotlight those who occupy positions of power in a society and interrogates the systems and structures that operate to maintain those privileged positions (Underiner, 2000, p. 1294). In Foucaultian terms, the direction of the ‘gaze’ shifts (1979). It shifts to those who have privilege. They are not in a neutral position but are faced with allowing injustice to continue.
**Existing theory on privilege**

An analysis of privilege interrogates the usually invisible role of those who occupy the position at the centre (O'Sullivan, 1999, p. 130). It is important to recognise here that there are many aspects to privilege. Given our multiple subjectivities, we may well move in and out of positions of privilege on a daily basis and over our lifetime. In general terms, the characteristics that attract privilege are those that describe the normalised modern subject: male, White, Western, affluent, educated, heterosexual, able-bodied – a citizen of a safe, stable and materially comfortable country. Having those characteristics, or some of those characteristics, provides an individual with a unique set of ‘credentials’ which they bring to any situation. Powerful social, economic, political and global institutions, such as the World Trade Organisation, governments of Western countries and the boards of major corporations, are disproportionately run by people having those characteristics.

Through the women’s movements and anti-racism movements, there has been significant theoretical development of male privilege (Marks, 1995) and White privilege (McIntosh, 2002; Frankenberg, 1995). This has been both a cause, and a result, of a de-centring of view. The move away from the universalising gaze of the White, Western male has allowed for an interrogation of privilege at the same time as it has been the vehicle through which that interrogation can take place. An understanding of the socially constructed nature of gender and Whiteness has allowed us to see that the privileged position occupied by men and Whites is the result of deliberate and systemic beliefs and behaviours. The structural nature of privilege works to validate the experiences of White men at the same time as invalidating other experiences and ways of being (Applebaum, 2003, p. 7).

The major characteristic of privilege is that it is ‘unearned,’ an accident of birth, the luck of the draw (McIntosh, 2002, p. 77). A second characteristic of privilege is that those who have the privilege can be ignorant of it, disclaim it, disavow it and yet be unable to avoid benefiting from it, whether they consciously exercise it or not. Privilege confers dominance (McIntosh, 2002, p. 79) and with it the ability to have one’s views seen as correct and immutable, as well as the ability to disregard the rights of others. It is the invisible shadow of oppression and its existence implicates...
Reflections on a process of change

all those who occupy privileged positions in the oppressive dynamic (Applebaum, 2003, pp. 7-8).

A problem arising from the existence of privileged positions is that structures and systems based around a particular existence (usually that of the wealthy, White male) have developed invisibly and are seen as beyond challenge. Many of these systems and structures are destructive not only for people who are not part of the dominant group but also for the environment (O'Sullivan, 1999). In addition, many social change theorists are clear that systems of oppression or privilege are also destructive for those who occupy the privileged position (Freire, 1987; McIntosh, 2002; Tannoch-Bland, 1998). Through theorising privilege, the previous immutability of the lifestyle, behaviours and life choices of those who occupy the privileged position can be examined and challenged. The challenge is not only in relation to who has the privileged life choices but whether anyone should have such a lifestyle, behaviours and life choices.

This raises the important issue that the attributes that attach to the privileged position may be attributes that no-one should have, or, they may be such that everyone should enjoy them (McIntosh, 2002, p. 79; Tannoch-Bland, 1998, pp. 36-37). The attributes that ought to be shared by all human beings fit within the category of human rights, many of which are recognised by international treaty. In this category are the following examples:

- The expectation that neighbours will treat you with respect (McIntosh, 2002, p. 79);
- The expectation “that your race will not count against you in court” (McIntosh, 2002, p. 79);
- The ability to live in society without fear, anxiety, insult or injury (Tannoch-Bland, 1998, p. 36); and

Those attributes ‘enjoyed’ by the privileged group that no-one ought to have relate to the ability to use the power which is part of the privilege in a way which oppresses others. They include the power to violate the basic human rights of people who are

69 Treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)
not within the privileged group. The following examples would fall into this category:

- The power to name the world (O'Sullivan, 1999, p. 130);
- The ability to ignore less powerful people with no consequences (McIntosh, 2002, p. 79); and
- The ability to organise everything “into one’s own frame of reference to the exclusion of any other” (O'Sullivan, 1999, p. 133).

Power is exercised both deliberately and unconsciously to maintain the structures and systems that uphold privilege. Those who occupy the centre, accepting the benefits rather than working to undo privilege, are complicit in its maintenance – a situation incompatible with social justice. When it is named and challenged, the unearned advantage that characterises privilege has the effect of engendering fear and anger in those who have the privilege. As Robert Jensen says: “I think much of both the fear and anger that comes up around discussions of affirmative action has its roots in [the] secret” of the ‘unearned’ nature of the privilege” (1998, html document).

There is emotional resistance to an analysis of privilege. It is not an easy task for people to become aware of their unearned advantages and the dominance that certain groups enjoy because privilege is maintained through its invisibility (Underiner, 2000, p. 1296).

**Globally privileged citizenship**

Inclusive notions of citizenship, which don’t discriminate on the basis of sex, race or religion, can be supportive of social justice intra-nationally but can become problematic at the global level. Unlike the more developed theories of male, White and northern hemispheric privilege, globally privileged citizenship that attaches to those of us born in safe, stable and materially comfortable countries has not been well explored. Using the existing work on privilege can be problematic as, similar to comparing male privilege and White privilege, there are “difficulties and dangers surrounding the task of finding parallels” (McIntosh, 2002, p. 79). In unpacking the privilege of citizenship of a safe country, it will be useful to see in what ways those better developed theories of privilege can assist or hinder.

Like other forms of privilege, citizenship privilege attaches to people through the accident of birth. It is also possible however, to acquire citizenship privilege through
Reflections on a process of change

naturalisation. For those who acquire citizenship through migration, they have met the specified criteria of that country’s migration law, often as the result of inhabiting privileged positions in other countries (e.g. high educational qualifications or wealth). As Booth (1997) puts it:

As a consequence of a contingent fact about ourselves, the place of our birth or the citizenship status of our parents, we are assigned a location in the world, a place more or less wealthy, more or less free, more or less at peace and in which henceforth, being anointed a member, we or our agents will exercise closure against foreigners. It is, as Joseph Carens writes, an almost feudal-like privilege. The veil of ignorance, and other thought devices used to wash contingencies out of relations of justice should therefore have the effect of filtering out as well the contingencies of birth/membership status. (p. 284)

Unlike White privilege and male privilege that operate within our society to advantage certain groups on a daily basis, the privilege that we have from citizenship of a safe country operates quite differently. Rather than being principally an intra-social dynamic, it operates beyond any one society and looks to the interrelationship between nations of people. Its role is to maintain the outer edges of society, to exclude certain people from membership and to protect a country’s globally privileged position, notwithstanding internal diversity and even division. Citizenship is the core characteristic that unites individuals in the one society; individuals who may otherwise have diverging interests. Uniquely in relation to theories of privilege, the privileged status bestowed by citizenship is recognised by international treaties and domestic laws. These political and legal systems provide strong structural support for the privilege that is attached to citizenship. The fact that this privilege is domestically legislated for and internationally recognised does not mean that it escapes the categorisation of unearned advantage. After all, White privilege has been legislated for in various countries at various times – Australia’s White Australia Policy and South Africa’s apartheid laws. Male privilege has also had legislative backing in a variety of ways, including male only suffrage. Those laws are now seen as unconscionable. It is quite likely that laws protecting the privileged position of citizens of safe, stable countries will be seen in the same way in the future.

A point of disjuncture with other privileges comes from the nature of the characteristic to which the privilege attaches. Maleness, Whiteness, able-bodiedness, and other characteristics that attract privilege are physical characteristics innate to a
person. Although their import and the power able to be exercised through them are largely the result of social construction, the possessor is generally unable to divest her/himself of these characteristics. In contrast, citizenship is a characteristic that can be vested and divested. There are legal processes whereby new members can be admitted to the privileged group. That citizenship can be bestowed and new members admitted to the privileged group further highlights its nature as a construct which could be undone very simply, given political will.

The standard legal and administrative processes by which admission to the privileged position of citizenship is determined are jealously guarded and strictly administered. The existence of an ‘admission gate’ at the boundary between the privileged and the others provides support for those who wish to maintain the privilege. “They should apply through the proper channels” is a common response to people who arrive in Australia without permission seeking asylum. The existence of formal migration channels allows us to minimise the real obstacles that exist for most people to acquire our privileged position. For example, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs has profiles of people (age, nationality, sex) who are seen to be seeking entry to Australia for the purposes of staying. These groups are assumed to be likely to abuse their visa status (and challenge the citizenship privilege of those on the inside), are not granted even a visitor’s visa let alone given permission to migrate permanently.  

The consequences of a person having citizenship privilege are that they have what Peggy McIntosh (2002) calls “an invisible package of unearned assets” (p. 77). As Faulks (2000) sees it, the benefits of citizenship of safe, stable countries have global consequences: “privileged citizens of the West may well have rights that extend beyond their immediate locality, but these will come at the expense of the poor regions of the world” (p. 161). For the possessor of citizenship privilege, the contents of that invisible package of unearned assets include:

1. The ability to travel the globe, entering countries freely.

---

70 This information was given to me personally by a staff member of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.
2. The ability to feel secure in our country because:
   • The existence of the ‘rule of law’ means that there is equality of protection of person and property;
   • The government does not ‘disappear’ people for political or other reasons; and
   • We have our basic needs met.
3. The power to determine who can be admitted to the privileged group.
4. The power to sanction the violation of the basic human rights of people who are not within the privileged group.
5. The power to prohibit the entry of people who are not citizens.

In line with the work of McIntosh (2002) and Tannoch-Bland (1998), the consequences of citizenship privilege are of two distinct types – those that are human rights to be enjoyed by all, and those that should be enjoyed by no one. Of the consequences that can be characterised as basic human rights are those linked to living in a country where the rule of law is largely respected. In the other category – attributes that no human being should have – are the exercises of power that violate the human rights of others such as the mandatory detention of all asylum seekers.

Whereas most Whites would feel embarrassed to argue for the deliberate and structural maintenance of unearned White privilege, and most men would feel embarrassed to argue for the deliberate and structural maintenance of unearned male privilege, it is the norm to find Australians (and citizens from other safe, stable countries) arguing for the maintenance of exclusive citizenship. There is widespread support for maintaining citizenship privilege via strong border control. This would be similar to legislation restricting the right to vote to males only. The strong support for explicitly maintaining the privileged position of citizens is alluded to by Christina Boswell (2002): “In the context of refugee and migration policy, this gave rise to what I term ‘welfare nationalism’, the claim of nationals to a privileged standard of socio-economic welfare” (Nationalist Justifications for Restriction section).

The Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, defended the privileges Australian citizens enjoy in the world and showed a lack of awareness at the contradiction between what he expects for Australian citizens and what he offers the citizens of other countries. His statement in response to the attacks in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, shows clearly his desire to retain the exclusive ‘unearned assets’ that belong to Australians and the citizens of other rich Western
countries. He stated that the attacks were: “an attack on the capacity of the world to maintain that human mobility, that easy movement of people, particularly amongst the young, which has become a constant characteristic of the experience of nations such as ours” (cited in Mares, 2002, p. 231).

Various writers have challenged exclusive notions of citizenship (Faulks, 2000; Soysal, 1994; Booth, 1997; Benhabib, 1999; Castles & Davidson, 2000; Spiro, 2003). The notion of globally privileged citizenship supports those writers who suggest that existing notions of exclusive citizenship are not compatible with justice. Both the discourse and practical consequences of citizenship impede global social justice and human rights.

In 2005, citizenship privilege is arguably the most entrenched of the unearned privileges. It is entrenched legally, politically and socially. The dominant discourse about asylum seekers makes it explicit that our position as citizens needs protection. In part, citizenship privilege is maintained and kept invisible through the evolving dominant discourse about asylum seekers. In that discourse, those with citizenship privilege are cast in the role of victim and those fleeing persecution become the aggressors – an interesting role reversal. Citizenship privilege is strongly entrenched because of the feared negative consequences that would flow to its possessors should it be abolished. And the strength of the entrenchment flows in part from its precariousness, from the fact that it is more obviously a construct designed to protect the dominant group. As such, its immutability needs to be maintained. After all, unlike White and male privilege, it could be abolished overnight should the citizens agree.

**An obligation to act?**

Given its strength and benefits, why should those who enjoy globally privileged citizenship consider giving it up? For many people in a privileged position, their *individual* responsibility for the existence and maintenance of structures of privilege is, at most, marginal. They do not act with the *intention* of maintaining systems of injustice. However, in the same way that citizens may justly be held liable for the wrongs perpetrated by the state, those in the privileged position may justly be held *collectively* liable for the wrongs perpetrated against those not in the privileged
position. Relying on the work of Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, Andrew Schaap (2000) argues that:

All citizens may justly be held liable for wrongs perpetrated by their state. Civic responsibility entails a collective liability for making reparation to those wronged. However, this liability in no way implies moral blame, since such responsibility is based on association rather [than] individual action . . . Whereas the idea of collective guilt is unjust because it attributes blame without regard to individual intentions and actions, the idea of collective responsibility is just since it refers only to the liability or duty of citizens, without attributing blame. Political liability is an unavoidable condition of membership in a political community. (original emphasis) (p. 3)

In the same way as collective responsibility obliges “citizens to accept both the burdens and benefits of membership in a polity” (Schaap, 2000, p. 8), that same responsibility can be logically applied to the burdens and benefits of membership of a privileged group. This applies even though being a member of a privileged group is not within the control of the individual. The privilege is attached to arbitrary characteristics not chosen by the person. Schaap sees that this collective responsibility arises from the fact that we live in a shared world. In words that apply easily to the collective responsibility attached to unsolicited membership of a privileged group, he says:

Like Jaspers, Arendt draws a clear distinction between collective responsibility (which is always political), and personal responsibility (which is legal or moral). Whereas personal responsibility means that one will be judged according to one’s acts, political responsibility entails only liability based on association. What distinguishes political responsibility from personal responsibility is that it is vicarious and involuntary. It is vicarious because a citizen may be held liable for things he did not do and it is involuntary because it results from his (typically unchosen) membership in a political community. (p. 5)

Booth (1997) expresses the liberal humanist argument as to why we should not exclude those different to ourselves. He asks:

Why should we think ourselves bound to attend to their [strangers’] needs? Perhaps the reason we answer their call is to be found . . . in a rejection (for some purposes) of ties, in an impartiality . . . We share with these strangers, not because they are close to us – they are not – but because we break free of the grip of proximity, and recognize something that obligates us in virtue of
its universality. Abstraction from our specific attachments is the cost of justice, perhaps under all, but certainly under modern conditions. (p. 283)

Contributing to the social justice debate, the notion of privilege changes the criteria by which we view those who occupy privileged positions. In the same way that Schaap understands an individual’s political responsibility, an individual has a responsibility for systems of privilege. Few of us are personally responsible for the global economic structures that privilege those who live in the West. However, according to Arendt, we have a political responsibility to right the injustices that come from that privilege. The philosopher Peter Singer discusses the obligation of the rich to give money to the poor. In arguing that such an obligation exists, Singer (2001) states, “we ought to be preventing as much suffering as we can without sacrificing something else of comparable moral importance” (p. 113). Because he sees this as a moral obligation, Singer criticises the current classification of monetary donations by the wealthy to the poor as ‘charity’. He states that “the traditional distinction between duty and charity cannot be drawn, or at least cannot be drawn in the place we normally draw it. . . we ought to give the money away, and it is wrong not to do so” (p. 110). Similarly Nelson Mandela has stated that “overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity, it is an act of justice” (Treneman, 4 February 2005). On a more global scale, Thomas Pogge (2002) challenges how we can consider it just, in “a world heavily dominated by us and our values [to give] such very deficient and inferior starting positions and opportunities to so many people” (p. 3). The discourse of privilege operates in the same way. It has similar radical implications for our understanding as to whether it is possible for those in privileged positions not to act to change the status quo and still consider ourselves just.

What should be done?

The ethical imperative to act brings us to McIntosh’s (2002) question: “Having described [privilege], what will I do to lessen or end it?” (p. 77). Those of us who may have previously been concerned for the welfare of others but chosen not to examine our own positions are now required to do so. Unless this examination of our own position occurs, there is little point in yet more theorising. Thus the first step is

71 Booth makes this argument not in relation to non-citizens but rather to support the extension of the welfare state to persons who do not come from the same community as the dominant social group of a country. I anticipate that he would not object to its use in this different context.
to acknowledge that privilege exists and demystify it. Then, it is necessary to determine what action is needed to change the situation.

According to the arguments set out here, the concept of ‘privilege’ ultimately requires us to seriously consider renouncing the politico-legal construct of citizenship. Up until now, I have been challenging, relatively unproblematically, the privilege that I hold as citizen of a safe country and suggesting that in a socially just world I would need to consider relinquishing this privilege by abolishing immigration controls at, in my case, Australian borders. A limit to totally abolishing this privilege comes from the fact that it is a human right to live in a safe country. Issues of personal and national safety are I believe legitimate concerns that limit in practical terms how the privilege ought to be challenged. To maintain Australia as a safe country, certain minimal border controls could be retained and people who are shown to be a serious threat excluded. This clearly could play into the hands of those who would exclude anybody different to the dominant cultural group and therefore requires further consideration. The challenge is to find border control that is consistent with social justice and human rights of all the world’s people.

Maybe it would be necessary to create international bodies with jurisdiction to adjudicate the right to enter a country based on universal human rights and global social justice standards, not narrow national interests. There may be some merit in requiring any entrant to Australia to agree to the seven civic values set out by the Australian Citizenship Council (2000) or some other formal acknowledgement that they will not cause disharmony. These values are:

- A commitment to the land.
- A commitment to the rule of law and to equality under the law.
- A commitment to the basics of a representative liberal democracy including freedom of opinion.
- A commitment to principles of tolerance and fairness.
- A commitment to acceptance of cultural diversity.
- A commitment to the wellbeing of all Australians.
- A commitment to recognising the unique status of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. (p. 11)

Significant resources would be needed to inform all who enter of the import of these civic values. Other writers concerned with the human rights violations and social
justice problems caused by closed borders have suggested similar solutions
(Benhabib, 1999; Brysk & Shafir, 2004a). Bader (1997a), for example, suggests that
until global poverty is significantly reduced “rich Northern states have to
acknowledge that they are immigration countries and should, therefore, accept
binding obligations to let much higher numbers of migrants in” (p. 50).

Having more open borders is not anarchical and does not get rid of the need for
states. Local and even national forms of democratic government are needed now
more than ever given that many significant decisions are being made by
multinational corporations and multilateral institutions who have interests different
from the more general human good. We need organisations and decision-makers who
represent our interests.

It may appear straightforward to establish a clear three-stage process of
acknowledging privilege, demystifying privilege, and working consensually to undo
privilege. Unfortunately, it is not as easy to achieve. The dominant discourses that
support the various privileges ensure that oppression is made commonsense and
privilege is made invisible. Using White privilege to work with students in an anti-
racist way, Tamara Underiner (2000) says that “it is hard for them to see their
Whiteness and even more difficult to recognize all of the symbolic capital that goes
with it” (p. 1294). In addition, Underiner states:

I chafe at a pervasive reluctance in my classes, even when privilege comes to
be recognizable, to see it as both contingent and relational: manifest through
an accident of birth and maintained by the blood, sweat, and creativity of
others the world over, who are the true labor of the “American” way. Beyond
a general pigmentocratic privilege, there are also privileges hard won by
work of earlier generations (feminists and civil-rights workers, e.g.), whose
results have similarly come to be naturalized in a “post-” conscious
“America.” I see this as a dangerously unhealthy ingratitude. (p. 1296)

These concerns are repeated by other educators who recognise the difficulties of
engaging the privileged to confront and work to change privilege. Significant in the
resistance which many people in privileged positions experience is denial. As
Kincheloe (1999) says, “one of the great paradoxes of the end-of-the-century
Western societies is their ability to deny what is the most obvious: the privileged
position of Whiteness?” (p. 176). It is through denial, and assertions of a fair world
that those with privilege are able to maintain the “charade of . . . White victimization” (p. 176).

Ignoring the distaste at needing to present social justice in a way that is attractive and palatable to the privileged, we must appreciate that a strident and aggressive approach is more likely to provoke a defensive response. A discourse of privilege that is productive of social justice must not incorporate blame for the collective benefits that come from privilege. Blame is a sure way to disengage many people.

These obstacles which operate to make a pedagogy to challenge privilege more difficult are similar obstacles to those I encountered through my transformative pedagogy. However, I would be interested to see how a pedagogy to challenge privilege built around the topic of asylum seekers could perhaps provide new possibilities for engaging people in social change.
Conclusion

Through writing this dissertation, my private desire to gain greater understanding about social change pedagogy has spilled into the public space. It has been a work of love, through which my personal experience as a student and educator now takes on an academic face. The respectful engagement that I have sought with other theorists, practitioners and the participants of the research has provided ongoing challenges as well as affirmation. This attempt at a transformative pedagogy did not produce a definitive blueprint. Rather, it presents ideas about how a transformative pedagogy worked in a particular context. Grounded in lived experience, I have attempted to build useful theory. The context of the research was always a key feature. I was interested in working with people like me – people who were materially comfortable and who in general terms belonged to the dominant social group. I was curious to understand how such people may develop critical sensibility consistent with an inclusive social justice framework through a pedagogical process.

In Chapter 2, the research revealed the power of the dominant discourse and the ways that it has worked to support an oppressive regime for asylum seekers in Australia. The misinformation and separation of the dominant group (Australian citizens) from the Other (asylum seekers) were key issues of the dominant discourse that I needed to address in my transformative pedagogy. Starting to develop the theory underpinning my transformative pedagogy, Chapter 3 dedicated itself to searching for useful theory from a wide variety of sources including critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogies, cultural studies and my own experience in popular education in Latin America. The broad theoretical underpinnings were refined in Chapter 4 as I worked with the Collaborative Team to fashion a programme for Australian residents that would explore the issue of asylum seekers. The methodological issues for this case study of a critical reflective practice were teased out in Chapter 5.

Having laid the groundwork, Chapter 6 introduced the participants and located them socially, economically and culturally. They were categorised according to their
position on asylum seekers into three groups: monoculturalists, multiculturalists and globalists. The lived experience of the pedagogy from the perspective of the participants, facilitators and other presenters was introduced in Chapter 7. This included a description and analysis of the instructional activities with reflections from all parties. The pedagogical spaces that were created through the transformative pedagogy were the subject of analysis and theorising in Chapter 8. This was a vehicle for looking at the feelings generated through the processes of the pedagogy. The notion of pedagogical space was theorised under the categories of safe, social, dialogical, democratic and empathetic spaces. The importance of listening in all of these spaces was highlighted. Moving from the heart to the head, Chapter 9 looked at how the participants responded to the new knowledge that was generated through broad processes of ideology critique. Arising from this theorising was the importance of self-awareness and reflexivity. The relationship between the pedagogy and the participants’ engagement to interrupt the dominant discourse was analysed. I explored how participants comfortable with the dominant discourse resist such processes. Finally, in Chapter 10 I developed some of my major reflections in relation to social change pedagogy. In particular, the tension between the normativity of the pedagogy and freedom was discussed, along with the related issue of whether a social change educator should declare her or his position. The chapter ended with the development of a new way of framing the issue of asylum seekers, using the analysis of privilege.

Throughout this research I have attempted to turn the gaze away from its usual position outward from the centre of power and refocus it back onto that centre. I regularly examined my position as co-creator and facilitator and I made visible my part in the complex relations and processes of the research. This objective fits with Lather’s (1991) suggestion that people who engage in this kind of social change pedagogy question their position at the centre:

To abandon crusading rhetoric and begin to think outside of a framework which sees the “Other” as the problem for which they are the solution is to shift the role of critical intellectuals from universalizing spokespersons to cultural workers who do what they can to lift the barriers which prevent people from speaking for themselves. (p. 47)
The marrying of the modernist notions of agency, freedom and justice with postmodernist understandings of social difference was foundational to my transformative pedagogy. Wanting to create coherence in my work I agree with the approach of John Dirkx, whose “perspective on transformative learning directs us to both the process and the outcomes of learning, [as it] insists that we think of transformative learning as a kind of stance toward one’s being in the world” (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006, p. 128). This approach comes through in the way that the transformative pedagogy sought to embody the ideas of collaboration, reflection and the participation of excluded subject positions. The detail of the pedagogy enacted shows attention to learners as complex, relational beings who will interact with the pedagogical process in contradictory ways at the same time as showing some degree of predictability.

How I understand my motives for engaging in social justice work of any kind has changed through this period. Whereas I previously focused on the abstract, moral principles of justice and equality, I now am more comfortable to explicitly include an emotional component. Love and anger also propel me to act for social change. My anger at the atrocities committed by some, and experienced by others, now provides me with greater confidence in the social justice work that I do. My commitment to continue similar work comes from the small differences that I believe this project has made – to the participants, to the collaborative team, to me and I hope in an indirect way, to the asylum seekers who come to Australia.

Perhaps the major source of joy for me came from the final interviews and hearing the ways that the participants were reflecting on their previous beliefs and attitudes, and understanding better the constructed nature of the dominant discourse. Hearing Derek say he would now give asylum seekers a slice of watermelon and a glass of water (before requiring them to leave), rather than running over their boats, was wonderful. I am happy to take pleasure in the small steps that occurred, even with the doubt as to whether they will be sustained. They highlight that more compassionate ways of understanding and acting in the world are possible.

---

This article is a dialogue between the authors, thus allowing attribution of one author.
Original contribution

There are a number of areas where I believe this work has opened up interesting theoretical and practical issues. This has been possible because the work unusually sought to develop a nexus between theory and practice based on an empirical pedagogical experience. The attention to process and relationship came together to create the original notion of productive pedagogical spaces. The notion of pedagogical space provides a structure to assist social change educators in creating pedagogies that are effective in challenging dominant discourses and working to create alternative discourses. The potential dangers within the pedagogical spaces were explored. The notion of pedagogical spaces highlights that pedagogies are forever under construction and needing to respond to the particular context in which they are created.

The development of the original notion of globally privileged citizenship is a contribution to social justice discourse. Theorising on privilege is an important strategy to engage people to act for social change. No longer can we believe that the problem is located with the Other, using the idea of deficit found there. The limitations of modernist understandings of injustice, such as those found in the charity discourse and even in the human rights discourse, do not lead to radical notions of social justice. By using a more postmodern approach such as the discourse of privilege, the gaze reverts to those in the centre and suggests that what we think and do is implicitly bound up in maintaining systems of injustice. The discourse of privilege highlights that we need to scrutinise our own assumptions, beliefs and behaviours and question the normalised position from which those beliefs grow. Unless we do that and engage in action to undo privilege, those of us in privileged positions are implicated in the injustice created.

The process of conceptualising the situation of asylum seekers through an analysis of privilege has provided support for my globalist position. Now, however, rather than focusing on the injustice of the elites creating a system of globalisation which only suits their particular interests, I am looking at the ‘unearned asset’ of citizenship. Citizens of safe, stable, materially comfortable countries share this privileged position. Citizenship is one of the few characteristics to which privilege attaches that
Conclusion

can be abolished, in contrast to Whiteness or maleness. Arguments I presented support the abolition of globally privileged citizenship.

The challenge for activists and educators is to develop approaches that minimise the resistance of the privileged and work to change the discourses that support privilege. It is probably impossible to break free fully from the impact that privilege has on our subjectivity but that should not stop us from working towards a freer state, more inclusive of the Other.

How has this research informed critical pedagogies?

If my dissertation provokes reflection on past pedagogical practices and future possibilities for the reader, then the research is validated in an external sense. Independently of any reader, as a process of development of my pedagogical self it has been a gift. The dialectical theory building I have engaged in will be useful for my future work.

A contribution my research has made is to highlight the importance of context in social change pedagogy. Context has an impact on theory, instructional practices and the resulting pedagogical spaces. Having had experiences teaching in a wide range of contexts prior to coming to this research, especially starting my social change pedagogy apprenticeship in Guatemala, I was very wary of grand universalising pronouncements and sought to challenge them. The research brings out the possibilities and limitations that are caused by the make up of the student group (part of the context), in this case people largely from the dominant social group, without a shared political commitment. The specific group had a critical mass of voices that was already challenging the dominant discourse about asylum seekers. This was a significant advantage as the dominant discourse was never able to establish itself during the sessions – something that can occur when social change educators work in formal educational settings. I believe that this was a key issue to promoting the kinds of pedagogical spaces conducive of critical sensibility – an openness to new experiences, feelings and understandings grounded in an awareness of the relationship between power and knowledge.
By exploring the ways in which the participants experienced the transformative pedagogy, this research provides a link between the conception of critical pedagogies and what can happen when we try to enact them. It was instructive to observe the diverse responses of the participants to the process of ideology critique. The pedagogical process of making strange the familiar and familiar the strange, was shown to have helped in developing a complex and multifocused, rather than a simplistic and unifocused, view of the world. The development of the consciousness and conscience of many of the participants through their engagement in the transformative pedagogy is shown to have coupled with an engagement to transform oppressive discourses. From those who resisted the challenge to the dominant discourse, I learnt more about the process and nature of such resistance, relevant for all social change educators working with people from the dominant social group.

A further contribution made by the research has been to document the ways the participants acted as agents of change – taking their new knowledge into their lives. The distance that a pedagogical process travels is usually unknown, as is the effectiveness of its multiplication. The work shows the many ways in which the effects of the pedagogy rippled through the participants’ lives and further into the lives of those who they touched. Knowing this, greater attention can be paid in other educational processes to facilitating the participants in their informal role as change agents.

My battle with the tension between the normativity of my transformative pedagogy and freedom has resulted in a discussion that may be useful to other educators. The attempt to answer the seldom asked question of whether, what and how to disclose my political project provides a significant contribution to critical pedagogy. My initial musings here are the beginning rather than an end to thinking on the subject. It would be useful for example, to explore further the disclosure of other factors which are relevant to the educator’s subjectivity; such as class, sexuality and the place of birth of her or his parents. In certain situations these factors may be relevant to enable the participants to be better able to negotiate the pedagogy.
Conclusion

Limitations of the work

The forces and interests that work to maintain the status quo and reduce spaces for greater social justice provide an external limitation to social change pedagogy. Contradictorily, because of their success in establishing a harsh response to asylum seekers, a small but vocal voice of outrage has been ignited. Social change action like my community education programme at this stage necessarily remains local, small scale, under-funded and lacking in support from key cultural institutions. However, rather than be put off by this, I see the tightness of the spaces available for teaching against the grain as minimising the potential vanguardism that Lather (1991) warns against.

It would have been interesting to have explored in more depth how the participants’ positionality (class, gender, citizenship, race, age and other factors) influenced their engagement with the pedagogy and with each other. In particular, the ways in which participants as agents, negotiated with the structure of society, would have been useful to investigate further.

Noting the multiplicity of subject positions of the participants highlights that the pedagogical process will have been experienced in different ways. It also reminds us that it is not possible to satisfy the diversity of human needs and desires through one process. The vast range of experiences and responses of the participants reinforces the inherent impossibility of such an outcome. A further external limitation to this research was the wide disparity of positions held by the participants in relation to the issue of asylum seekers. Devising a learning process that satisfies and allows all to learn was made more difficult because some of the participants entered the process already having attained some of the pedagogical aims. They had sought out alternative sources of information on the issue and were already challenging the dominant discourse. Other participants had not started the process of understanding the hidden assumptions that they bring to all situations. The difficulties caused by this, however, were offset by the advantage of having participants present who were already questioning the dominant discourse. It is worth repeating that all participants learned more and gained from the experience. It remains unknown as to the durability of the new knowledge and changed attitudes. It would be fascinating to
follow-up the participants in twelve and twenty-four months from the time of the programme to see how they understood the issue of asylum seekers and what action, if any, they had taken.

**Further work**

The areas that have been opened up for me by this research are both theoretical and practice based. Arising from the desire of some participants to have a greater level of open conflict within the pedagogical process, I am interested in looking at how this could be developed in a productive way. A productive pedagogy of conflict would be a risky undertaking but deserves further thought and engagement. Similarly risky is the need to experiment by discussing with students my political position when engaged in pedagogy that goes against the grain. Two questions about the interaction between democratic principles and facilitated pedagogical processes also deserve further attention:

- What does it mean for a so-called democratic process that the space was the result of deliberate and controlling facilitation by someone in power?
- Can a facilitated process ever be radically democratic or does radical democracy require the messier and more organic processes of people coming together in grassroots-type movements?

My commitment now is to develop social change pedagogy to challenge privilege. I intend to explore the possibilities that exist for a broad based pedagogy that deals with social, economic, political and environmental injustice through reversing the gaze. It is my present challenge to develop a pedagogy that will explore, with those who occupy privileged positions, the benefits of having less (power, prestige and resources) rather than more.

From the perspective of a person, whose global location, level of education and race generally locates her in a position of privilege, I suspect that these attempts to challenge and transform systems of privilege are in effect attempts to live a more whole and meaningful life. Arbitrarily acquired privilege in its many guises seems to me to present significant obstacles to a meaningful life. I look forward to the ongoing development of notions of privilege and the pedagogies that will support them. This work will recognise that while those of us in the dominant group may be materially privileged and able to violate the human rights of others with impunity, this
‘privilege’ significantly hinders our ability to achieve coherent and fulfilling lives. As Thomas Pogge argues, in giving up positions of privilege, “we might recognize ourselves [our humanity] for the very first time” (Pogge, 2002, p. 8).


Barker, L. (n.d.) *Featured quotations from the month of August - Effective listening*.


291


292


Conclusion


Appendix 4.1 – Article in the Southern Gazette

22-28 July 2003, p. 6

Refugees for study

MURDOCH University PhD student Kathryn Choules is undertaking research into asylum seekers and how Australians see them.

Her work is particularly relevant to the Victoria Park and Bentley areas, which have become home to numbers of refugees from places such as Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Iraq. Some arrived by boat without a valid visa and passed through one of Australia’s detention centres. Others came via United Nations-sanctioned programme.

Kathryn is keen to know what local people think on this complex issue.

She plans to examine the important issues with a select group from various backgrounds through a community education program and interviews. These will take place over about eight weeks, starting next month.

If you want to know more, call Kathryn on 9360 7401 (uni) or 9487 0771 (hm) or by email to kchoules@murdoch.edu.au.

An information session will be held at Gurney VC RSL & Community Centre, 1 Fred Bell Pde, East Victoria Park on Wednesday, August 6 at 7 pm.

Community Comment section of the Southern Gazette Community newspaper, 22-28 July 2003, p. 9 (Edited by the newspaper)

Opinions sought of refugees

HOW do you see the broader issue of refugees and asylum seekers? As a PhD student, I want to know.

I am undertaking research into the issue of asylum seekers and how Australians see them.

I hope to examine these important issues with a select group of community members.

The program will take place over about eight weeks starting at the beginning of August.

If you are interested in participating in this research or would like any more information please contact me on 9487 0071 or by email to kchoules@murdoch.edu.au.

An information session will be held at Gurney VC RSL & Community Centre, 1 Fred Bell Parade, East Victoria Park on Wednesday, August 6 at 7 pm.

Kathryn Choules
PhD Candidate
Murdoch University
Appendix 4.2 – Flyer publicising the community education programme

Who are Asylum Seekers?

Why do they come to Australia?

What should we do about them?

How do you feel about these issues?

Are you interested in the issue of Asylum Seekers?

Kathryn Choules a PhD candidate at Murdoch University is looking for 40 people to participate in a community education programme to be held in East Victoria Park.

Come to an information session about the programme on 6 August 2004 at 7 pm at the Fred Gurney RSL and Community Centre and see if you are interested in participating.

For further information contact Kathryn Choules –
- Telephone: 9360 7401
- Email: kchoules@central.murdoch.edu.au
- Fax: 9399 4545
Appendix 4.3 – Notice publicising community education programme for public display

Are you interested in the issues around ASYLUM SEEKERS?

Who are Asylum Seekers?
Why do they come to Australia?
What should we do about them?

Kathryn Choules, a PhD candidate at Murdoch University is looking for up to 40 people to participate in a community education programme on these issues to be held in East Victoria Park. Your views are important.

Come to an information session about the programme and see if you are interested.

For further information contact KATHRYN CHOULES:
Telephone: 9360 7401 (uni) 9487 0771 (hm)
Fax: 9399 4545
Email: kechoules@murdoch.edu.au

LOCATION: Gurney VC RSL & Community Centre
1 Fred Bell Pde
East Victoria Park WA 6101
(on the Circle Bus Route)

DATE: WEDNESDAY 6 August 2003

TIME: 7.00 PM
Appendix 4.4 – Letter to local organisations re community education programme

3 July 2003

Coordinator
Learning Centre Link, Western Australia.
GPO Box 8252
Perth Business Centre WA 6849

Dear Coordinator

COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMME - RESEARCH

I am a PhD student at Murdoch University and am researching community attitudes to asylum seekers. As part of my research I am working with a team of people to evaluate a community education process which will look at the issue of asylum seekers and related topics. This research / education programme is going to take place in the local area in which your organisation is situated and is something that people who use your services may be interested in.

It would be appreciated if you could place the enclosed flyer on a notice board for community members to see. If you have a newsletter coming out in the next week or two it may be something that you would consider enclosing in your newsletter.

If you would like to discuss this further please do not hesitate to contact me by email at kchoules@murdoch.edu.au or on 9360 7401 (uni) or 9487 0171 (hm).

Kind regards

Kathryn Choules
PhD Candidate

enc.
Appendix 5.1 – Pre-CEP interview schedule

Where did you find out about the community education and research programme?

We used the terms *asylum seeker* and *refugee* at the information session. Prior to that how had you used the terms? (Did they have a distinct meaning for you? What?)

We have people who came to Australia as asylum seekers living in our local community. What do you think the impact on the Australian community is of having refugees present in the community? (Prompt for both negative and positive impacts. Prompt for impact on Australia’s security.)

Thinking about yourself and the average asylum seeker that we’ve seen coming in, in boats in the last few years; what are some of the similarities and some of the differences that you see between yourself and that person?

There is a wide variety of community views towards asylum seekers. At one end, some people believe that the government should take whatever steps are necessary to stop asylum seekers arriving without authority, at the other end some people believe that whoever gets here should be welcome and allowed in no questions asked. Where would you place yourself in the range of community views to asylum seekers?

Given your attitude to asylum seekers is there anything that you do – what actions do you take, what behaviour can you identify – that reflects your attitude? (For people with a positive attitude towards asylum seekers prompt: deliberately be friendly to strangers in the community who could be refugees; state your views in conversation; write letters; ring talkback radio; donate money to refugee organisations; go on rallies . . . For people with a negative attitude towards asylum seekers prompt: try and avoid contact with people who could be refugees; state your views in conversation; write letters; ring talkback radio . . .)

What does the term human rights mean to you? (Do we need human rights in Australia? Are human rights a good thing?)

Who do you feel a sense of connection with? (Prompt: friends, family, people in the wider community, globally)

[For people who identify with marginalised groups. Why do you think you identify with marginalised groups?]
Appendix 5.2 – Post-CEP conversation areas

Participating in the programme has been an effort. Was it worth it?
(Why? Why not? Tell me more . . . )

How important is the issue of asylum seekers to you?
(place a mark on the line below)

Not at all       Extremely

Area: understanding / information / knowledge

How has the programme increased your knowledge about asylum seekers and refugees?
(Prompt: From a global perspective did you learn anything about asylum seekers that you didn’t
know?)

Did you learn anything about yourself from the programme? What did you learn about
others in the community through the programme?

Has how you look at the world changed as a result of your participation? Has the way
that you evaluate information changed as a result?

What are your views on learning more about asylum seekers?

Area: attitudes

Where would you place yourself in the range of the general community’s attitude to
asylum seekers?

What impact has the programme had on your beliefs about asylum seekers?
(Prompt: strengthened, changed? Which beliefs? What caused the belief to be strengthened?)

Area: affective reaction

How do you feel towards asylum seekers?

Do you think that this has been impacted on by the programme?

Area: behaviour

Have you done anything differently or acted or behaved differently in relation to asylum
seekers or refugees since starting the programme?

Do you think that you will do anything differently or act or behave differently in the
future in relation to asylum seekers or refugees or issues around this?

If there is one thing that you’ll take away from your participation in the programme,
what is it?
Appendix 5.3 – Focus group discussion schedule

Tell me what you thought about the community education programme . . . its strengths and weaknesses.
   (Prompt: group, materials, activities, facilitation . . . )

Did you feel part of the group? Would it have been better without certain people in the group?

Did you feel free to express your opinions? Could you call the sessions “democratic”?
   In what way were they democratic? Do you think that everyone was given the opportunity to express themselves? Were people willing to listen and different points of view accepted? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this?

[I suspect that you experienced this educational programme in various ways – with your mind/brain, emotionally and even bodily. Keep that in the back of your mind as you think about the next questions. Use copy of programme to remind you.]

Which session(s) did you like the most?
   (Why? What was it about the session that worked? Were there others that you really liked?)
   [about each of the sessions that worked]
   What new ideas / understandings did you have?
   How did you feel during the session?
   And what was your body doing? (eg sweaty palms, looking at the facilitator/other participants, physically withdrew)

Which session(s) didn’t work for you?
   (Why not / How could it have been improved? Were there others that didn’t work?)
   [about each of the sessions that didn’t work]
   What new ideas / understandings did you have?
   How did you feel during the session?
   And what was your body doing? (eg sweaty palms, looking at the facilitator/other participants, physically withdrew)

What do you think was the importance of being able to hear the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees?
Appendix 5.4 – Weekly feedback sheets

Community Education and Research Programme: Attitudes to Asylum Seekers

Evaluation sheet – SESSION 2     20 August 2003

Did you learn anything new this session?
If yes, what . . .

Did you do something new this session?
If yes, what . . .

What impact did this session have on you?

Did you enjoy the session?

How did you feel during the session?

Since last week have you thought about what we did during the last session? What were your thoughts?
## FINAL REFLECTIONS ABOUT OUR LEARNING

Please take this home and complete it shortly before your second interview.

### 1. Thinking about each of the sessions…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>Was the session stimulating?</th>
<th>Did you learn anything?</th>
<th>How did you feel?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting started (ground rules, etc)</td>
<td>not at all = very much</td>
<td>not much = very much</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who am I / You? Our identities and those of asylum seekers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(drew self and discussed identity)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The power of listening (Rod facilitated)</td>
<td>not at all = very much</td>
<td>not much = very much</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge / Beliefs / Power (rated individual people e.g. BHP’s CEO, according to power they have)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australians – who are we? Our cultural / national identity. (time line / Giannopoulos clip)</td>
<td>not at all = very much</td>
<td>not much = very much</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories and myths about Asylum Seekers (brainstorm - severely shortened session)</td>
<td>not at all = very much</td>
<td>not much = very much</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asylum Seekers in Australia – The global picture (prepared group presentations)</td>
<td>not at all = very much</td>
<td>not much = very much</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal situation (presentation by Matthew Howard, barrister)</td>
<td>not at all = very much</td>
<td>not much = very much</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Community Education and Research Programme – Asylum Seekers

### Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>Was the session stimulating? (eg. Were you involved? Was the session enjoyable?)</th>
<th>Did you learn anything? (eg nervous, excited, happy, sad, frustrated, angry, sympathetic, lethargic, energetic …)</th>
<th>How did you feel? (eg nervous, excited, happy, sad, frustrated, angry, sympathetic, lethargic, energetic …)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talking with Asylum Seekers / Refugees (discussion with 4 refugees)</td>
<td>not at all very much</td>
<td>not much very much</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and seduction (changed session – group presentations)</td>
<td>not at all very much</td>
<td>not much very much</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice (facilitated by Helen E)</td>
<td>not at all very much</td>
<td>not much very much</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does it all mean? (changed to include various activities we hadn’t completed)</td>
<td>not at all very much</td>
<td>not much very much</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Various people have presented at / or facilitated sessions. Please comment on those people in relation to the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>LEVEL OF EXPERTISE (Do you think that the presenter knew what they were talking about? Why/Why not?)</th>
<th>IMPARTIALITY (Do you think that the presenter was biased or did the presenter provide a balanced view? Explain.)</th>
<th>CREDIBILITY (Did you find the presenter convincing? Why/Why not?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rod Mitchell (facilitated the Power of Listening)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna Lea (co-facilitated Knowledge / Beliefs / Power)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Howard (Legal situation)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilenea (from El Salvador – refugee panel)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>LEVEL OF EXPERTISE</td>
<td>IMPARTIALITY</td>
<td>CREDIBILITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammad (from Iraq – refugee panel)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina (from East Timor – refugee panel)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rahmatullah (from Afghanistan – refugee panel)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen Errington (facilitated Prejudice)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn Choules (principal facilitator)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Handouts**
   A lot of written material was handed out and looked at during the 6 sessions. Taking into consideration all of the materials handed out, did you think that overall they provided balanced information?
   
   Yes
   
   No

   Why / Why not?
4. Please comment on the specific handouts in relation to the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MATERIAL</th>
<th>CONTENT</th>
<th>IMPARTIALITY</th>
<th>CREDIBILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIMIA (Dept of Immigration) documents</td>
<td>(Was the information interesting, informative and useful?)</td>
<td>(Do you think that the handout was biased or was it neutral?)</td>
<td>(Did you find the material convincing? Why / why not?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR (UN High Commissioner of Refugees) documents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper reports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eg Riot at Lambing Hat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story of Akbar (A Life Worth Living)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Luther King quote</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmund Rice Centre (Debunking the Myths about Asylum Seekers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism – Asylum Seeker Link (statements from ASIO)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Muntaham Outrage Inquest (Don's newspaper article)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. If you were facilitating the 6 week programme what would you have done differently?
Appendix 5.6 – Observation sheet

[Note: The original sheet used had spaces after each question for the observer to note down his observations.]

OBSERVATION SHEET - SESSION 1

DATE: 13 August 2003
NAME OF OBSERVER: Murray Masters
[The role of the observer is to record the level and type of engagement – bodily, mental and emotional of the participants.]

Before the session began

Introduction to course

Activity: Birthday wish list – match the person to the present
How did the participants engage with the activity? (eg did everyone participate? What body language was observed?)

What was the emotional response of the participants? (eg pleasure, frustration, anger)

Activity: Discussing ground rules
How did the participants engage with the activity? (eg did everyone participate? What body language was observed?)

What was the emotional response of the participants? (eg pleasure, frustration, anger)

What were the points of view expressed?

Activity: Talk about expectations
How did the participants engage with the activity? (eg did everyone participate? What body language was observed?)

What was the emotional response of the participants? (eg pleasure, frustration, anger)

What were the points of view expressed?

Activity: Picture of self – draw identity
How did the participants engage with the activity? (eg did everyone participate? What body language was observed?)

What was the emotional response of the participants? (eg pleasure, frustration, anger)
Activity: Picture of self – discuss with partner
How did the participants engage with the activity? (eg did everyone participate? What body language was observed?)

What was the emotional response of the participants? (eg pleasure, frustration, anger)

Activity: Discuss with partner individual cultural / national identity and report back to group
How did the group engage with the activity?

What was the emotional response of the participants?

What were the points of view expressed?

Activity: Listening to story of Akbar – depict identity
How did the group engage with the activity? (eg did everyone participate? What body language was observed?)

What was the emotional response of the participants? (eg pleasure, frustration, anger)

What were the points of view expressed?
Appendix 5.7 – Coding system generated in QSR N6

First level categories
1. Base Data
2. Data Type
3. Interview questions
4. Feedback sheet questions
5. Attitudes to asylum seekers and refugees
6. Understand – How did participants understand the pedagogy?
7. Experience – How did participants experience the pedagogy?
8. Respond – How did participants respond to the pedagogy?
9. Participant researcher
10. Community Education Programme
11. Gender

Base data was categorised and coded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base data</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under 40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data type was categorised and coded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data type</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback sheets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video observation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview questions were categorised and coded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview questions</th>
<th>Pre-CEP interview</th>
<th>Post-CEP conversation</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>Q1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>Q2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>etc</td>
<td>etc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feedback sheets were categorised and coded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback sheets</th>
<th>Q.1 - learn</th>
<th>Q.2 - do</th>
<th>Q.3 - impact</th>
<th>Q.4 - enjoy</th>
<th>Q.5 - feel</th>
<th>Q.6 - thoughts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attitudes were categorised and coded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Refugee/Economic migrant</th>
<th>Shared humanity/not</th>
<th>Australian way of life</th>
<th>Australian identity</th>
<th>Multiculturalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Economic system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Understand was categorised and coded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understand</th>
<th>Participant identifies learning</th>
<th>Reflections on pedagogy</th>
<th>Dialogical method</th>
<th>Pace</th>
<th>Political position</th>
<th>Ideology critique</th>
<th>Counter stereotypes/myths</th>
<th>Benefit?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Experience was categorised and coded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Rational</th>
<th>Global statistics</th>
<th>Knowledge - change in</th>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Humanised/shared humanity</th>
<th>Empathy</th>
<th>Connection/lack of</th>
<th>Shame</th>
<th>Privileged/honoured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

316
**Appendices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somatic Participation</th>
<th>Beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflict/Tension/Debate</td>
<td>Desire to learn more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncomfortable Pleasure Doubt</td>
<td>Impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resistance/No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subject formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Power</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Respond** was further categorised and coded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post CEP</th>
<th>Attitudes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feelings towards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant researcher** was further categorised and coded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaborative Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Community education programme** was further categorised and coded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Myths about AS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Riot at Lambing Flats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Matthew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Week 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>Dialogical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tolerant/judgmental/respect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plurality of voices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rational</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Safe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitation</td>
<td>Power/authority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role of facilitator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generating questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modelling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Presence of refugees/AS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gender** was not further categorised.
Appendix 5.8 – Letter and consent form for participants

6 August 2003

School of Education
Division of Social Sciences, Humanities and Education

Project Title: *Exploring attitudes on asylum seekers*.

I am a PhD student at Murdoch University investigating attitudes to asylum seekers in Australia under the Supervision of Dr James Bell and Assoc. Professor Jan Currie. The purpose of this study is to find out how attitudes are formed and how an educational intervention can affect attitudes.

**Commitment involved**
You can help in this study by consenting to participate in the community education programme and associated research. It is expected that participation will involve attendance at six community education sessions, completion of a survey, and participation in focus groups. Given that the process is to be directed in part by the participants it is possible that you will be asked to participate in other similar activities. I recognise that this is a significant commitment that I am asking of you. In total, it is possible that your participation could amount to up to 16 hours spread over 3 months. The community education programme will contain information and activities relating to asylum seekers and how attitudes are formed about asylum seekers and related issues.

**Voluntary Participation**
While it is hoped that all participants will be able to complete all aspects of the community education programme and the associated research, YOU ARE FREE AT ANY TIME TO WITHDRAW CONSENT TO FURTHER PARTICIPATION WITHOUT PREJUDICE IN ANY WAY. If you chose to withdraw all information relating to you will be destroyed unless you permit the information to be used.

**Confidentiality**
All information given at any stage of the education and research process is confidential and no names or other information that might identify you will be used in any publication arising from the research. Feedback on the study will be provided to participants who have not requested anonymity. A report will be produced within 12 months of completion of the programme for participants, describing the research results. All participants will be notified when the final thesis is published should they wish to access it.

If you are willing to participate in this study, could you please complete the details below. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Kathryn Choules on 9360 7401 (uni) or 9487 0771 (hm) or my supervisors, Dr James Bell, on 9360 6460 or Assoc. Professor Jan Currie on 9360 2377.

My supervisors and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study is to be conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

Regards

Kathryn Choules
PhD Candidate
Social Consent Form

I have read the information above in the letter dated 6 August 2003.

Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to take part in this activity, however, I know that I may change my mind and stop at any time.

I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to do so by law.

I agree for my participation in the community education process and associated research to be taped/videotaped.

I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or other information which might identify me is not used.

Participant:

Date:

Chief Investigator:   Dr James Bell

Date:

Investigator’s Name:

Date:
Appendix 5.9 – Letter and consent form for collaborative team

3 April 2003

School of Education
Division of Social Sciences, Humanities and Education

Project Title: Ethical Education: Exploring attitudes on asylum seekers.

I am a PhD student at Murdoch University investigating attitudes to asylum seekers in Australia under the Supervision of Dr James Bell and Assoc. Professor Jan Currie. The purpose of this study is to find out how attitudes are formed and how an educational intervention can affect attitudes.

Commitment involved
You can help in this study by consenting to participate in the collaborative team involved in the creation of a community education programme. It is expected that participation will involve attendance at several meetings, completion of a survey, and participation in a focus group or individual interview. I recognise that this is a significant commitment that I am asking of you. In total, it is possible that your participation could amount to up to 20 hours spread over 5 months. The community education programme will contain information and activities relating to asylum seekers and how attitudes are formed about asylum seekers and related issues.

Voluntary Participation
While it is hoped that all members of the collaborative team will be able to participate throughout the process, YOU ARE FREE AT ANY TIME TO WITHDRAW CONSENT TO FURTHER PARTICIPATION WITHOUT PREJUDICE IN ANY WAY. If you chose to withdraw all information relating to you will be destroyed unless you permit the information to be used.

Confidentiality
All information given at any stage of the education and research process is confidential and no names or other information that might identify you will be used in any publication arising from the research. Feedback on the study will be provided to the members of the collaborative who request it. A report will be produced which describes the results of research within 12 months of completion of the programme. All participants will be notified when the final thesis and a copy will be provided to those interested.

If you are willing to participate in this study, could you please complete the details below. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Kathryn Choules on 9360 7401 (uni) or 9355 5770 (hm) or my supervisors, Dr James Bell, on 9360 6460 or Assoc. Professor Jan Currie on 9360 2377.

My supervisors and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study is to be conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Choules
PhD Candidate
Social Consent Form

I have read the letter dated 3 April 2003 about the research.

Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to take part in this activity, however, I know that I may change my mind and stop at any time.

I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to do so by law.

I agree for my participation in the development of the community education process and associated research to be taped/videotaped.

I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or other information which might identify me is not used.

Participant’s Name:

Signature:

Date:

Investigator:

Date:
Appendix 5.10 – Letter to participants enclosing draft chapters

18 March 2005

ADDRESS
ADDRESS

Dear NAME

Community education programme on asylum seekers – Draft chapters

I hope that this letter finds you well.

As you can see from this letter, I have been hard at work writing up the research that you were involved with in August and September of 2003. It is amazing that it was so long ago.

I am sending you copies of the draft chapters in which I discuss the fieldwork part of my research. These chapters set out the educational programme (Chapter 7), introduce the participants (Chapter 6) and detail my analysis of the pedagogical process (Chapters 8 and 9). All of these chapters include quotes from the transcript of the interviews, focus groups and feedback sheets. In addition, I am sending you Chapter 2, which sets out the context of the research. You will see that these chapters are not yet complete. Because I am using your words to explain various theoretical aspects of my research I would like to give you the opportunity to consider how I have used your comments and make any further comment that you would like. I would be grateful if you could provide me with any comments by 4 April 2005.

To protect your confidentiality I have given you a pseudonym in the dissertation. The pseudonym I used for you is Tom. Please don’t hesitate to get in contact with me, 9360 7401 or email me on kchoules@murdoch.edu.au, if you would like to discuss any aspect of this letter or the enclosed chapters.

Best wishes

Kathryn Choules
PhD Candidate
Appendix 7.1 – Community education programme outline

**ASYLUM SEEKERS – COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND RESEARCH PROGRAMME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>TOPICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13/8/03</td>
<td>7 – 7:50 pm</td>
<td>A. Getting started (process, objectives, general information)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:10 – 9 pm</td>
<td>B. Who am I / You? Our identities and those of asylum seekers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/8/03</td>
<td>7 – 7:50 pm</td>
<td>C. The power of listening: Your thoughts about asylum seekers and refugees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:10 – 9 pm</td>
<td>D. Knowledge / Beliefs / Power (exploring their use in refugee issues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/8/03</td>
<td>7 – 7:50 pm</td>
<td>E. Australians - who are we? Our cultural / national identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:10 – 9 pm</td>
<td>F. Stories and myths about Asylum Seekers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/9/03</td>
<td>7 – 7:50 pm</td>
<td>G. Asylum Seekers in Australia – The global picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:10 – 9 pm</td>
<td>H. Human Rights and legal framework in Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/9/03</td>
<td>7 – 7:50 pm</td>
<td>I. Talking with Asylum Seekers / Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:10 – 9 pm</td>
<td>J. Presentations (from previous week)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 week break – Individual reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/9/03</td>
<td>7 – 7:50 pm</td>
<td>K. Prejudice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:10 – 9 pm</td>
<td>L. What does it all mean?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 7.2 – Birthday wish list - scrambled

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Wish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Aerobatic hour in Tiger Moth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lem</td>
<td>An all-expenses paid trip to the next gay games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>A donation to a medical charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driandra</td>
<td>Zero mortgage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talia</td>
<td>Weekend away with partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray (from collaborative team)</td>
<td>Coffee machine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Dinner with close family and friends OR a new computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances</td>
<td>6 month stay in rural France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn (me)</td>
<td>A new car, a holiday, a new computer, a kiss, a book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron</td>
<td>A photographic portrait of Kate Blanchett (recently in newspaper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Around the world trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mel</td>
<td>A fabulous birthday party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angus</td>
<td>Video “Can’t you hear the wind howl”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hal</td>
<td>Off load baggage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen E (from collaborative team)</td>
<td>A refugee for homeless/abused kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna (from collaborative team)</td>
<td>A digital camera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet</td>
<td>To be alive at the next birthday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rod (from collaborative team)</td>
<td>A new car</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 7.3 – Ground rules agreed by participants

1. Tolerance of other view points
2. Respect
3. Don’t interrupt
4. Start and finish on time
5. Don’t divulge secrets given in confidence
6. Equal time for people who wish to speak
7. Active listening
8. No personal putdowns
9. Enjoy / have fun

NOTE: The facilitator asked participants to be vigilant in respect of point 6 and it was seen as important that no voice or voices dominated the process.
Appendix 7.4 – Group expectations from participation in programme

The participants hoped to get out the following out of their participation in the community education programme:

1. access to more and better information / more truthful information
2. learn about others’ views and share own views
3. overcome community views / inform others (even government)
4. ideas move further out
5. look at the environmental impact of migration
6. clarify social justice issues / discuss hot issues in a good place
7. broaden viewpoint
8. converting feeling to logic or adding logic to feelings
9. find out why I don’t like refugees
10. push beyond the comfort zone
11. clarification of issues
12. see how access to information changes viewpoints
13. overcome frustration at what’s happening to refugees
14. identify what worked within an educational process (from one of the collaborative team members)
Appendix 7.5 – Social capital quotient

(Author: Dr James Bell)

What is your Social Capital Quotient?

For each of the following categories, decide whether your character ranks:

+ 1
0
- 1

depending on the power that our society assigns that character.

1. Race
2. Gender
3. Socio-economic class
4. Occupation
5. Where you live
6. 1st language spoken in childhood home
7. Education level
Appendix 7.6 – Generating questions for week 3, Session 5

For Australian born participants (one question each):
1. How would you describe Australian culture?
2. What is multiculturalism?
3. How is language related to culture?
4. What was the original culture in Australia?
5. What are some cultural issues in Australia today?
6. How would a non-Anglo Australian describe Australian culture?
7. How would an Aborigine describe Australian culture?
8. How would an Indonesian describe Australian culture?

For all non-Australian born participants:
9. What was your image of Australia on arriving here?
Appendix 7.7 – Transcript of video clip of Nick Giannopoulos

Who Participates? – Identifying diversity

Nick Giannopoulos
Writer, performer and comedian

“Look, you only have to turn on your TV set at 6.30 or 7.00 o’clock, and have a look at the most popular soap operas overseas, Australian soap operas overseas: Home and Away and Neighbours. Look at the representative view of Australia we are giving to people in England and Europe, and other associated countries. It’s one of a predominantly blonde, surfy, blue-eyed, Anglo-Saxon background community. And that is wrong.

“Because the people I believe who have the power in this country in terms of television – the owners of the television stations, the owners of the media – are predominantly Anglo-Saxon. And I don’t believe we’ll see a change until more people from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds begin to find themselves in those professional positions; positions of management, people who are in control of the media. Because they are the only people who can understand the discrimination that has been faced by millions of people in this country. Because they have lived through it. And unfortunately that process in Australia has been very slow.

“I think there are a lot of people in the media – journalists, owners – who want to establish a kind of Australian ethos, which they’re not really sure about either. You know those things of mateship, the larrikinism, the ockerism – you know, people say those things have disappeared. Really? Watch Water Rats, Watch Water Rats. Sure, the female detective in Water Rats has come up a notch from female characters, say in Cop Shop twenty years ago. But have a look at how she survives in a man’s world – by being one of the boys, OK?

“It’s great that they’re now casting actors of non-Anglo-Saxon background and giving them ethnic names, but they’re never alluding to their ethnic background, you know? You never really see anything about them that’s really ethnic. To me they come across as everybody else. So, it’s like – OK, look, I understand what you’re trying to do, you’re trying to make us all look like Australians. But we haven’t worked out what Australian means yet. We’re still a very confused community. We really don’t. You go and talk to ten different kids in a high school, and they won’t know how to answer that question. And the sad thing is, they’ll probably answer on the grounds of, you know, the ockerism and the things that the media pump into their heads. And then you say to them, “Have you been subjected to racism?”’” and they go, “Um, yes”.

“The Australian ethos as projected by the Australian media is the wrong one. It’s wrong. Australia is a very diverse country and television has yet to show that diversity. It’s scared to show that diversity.

Interview for Making Multicultural Australia, 1996 (Racism No Way, 2005)
## Appendix 7.8 – Beliefs held by community about asylum seekers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BELIEF</th>
<th>FACTUAL BASIS OF BELIEF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Queue jumpers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t trust them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will not integrate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desperate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay criminals to get here</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huge numbers – swamped</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will take over our jobs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t respect women and children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t stop the flow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good income for lawyers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lots of money / rich / privileged</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not genuinely persecuted – economic migrants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to take over our culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All are Muslims</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims of false promises</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live on welfare – are given priority re housing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinister religion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will not integrate (play footy/cricket)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulative (self-harm)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 7.9 – Quotes on the global economic situation

Quote 1
The combined wealth of the world’s three richest families is greater than the annual income of 600 million people in the least industrially developed countries.
(UN report, 2002)

Quote 2
Now the fact is that everyone as consumers are participants in the global market . . . do we connect with others in the narrow terms of a profit making mechanism . . . or do we connect in a richer set of ethical ways?
(Martha Nussbaum interviewed by Phillip Adams on Late Night Live 11 November 2002 ABC Radio National)

Quote 3
Economic rationalism is not the be-all and end-all of our existence as a community . . . I have already referred to the intangible values adherence to which will determine the quality of our life together – of unity in diversity, of a caring community, of universal respect for the inherent dignity of every member of society – these providing the essential setting for such economic prosperity as we can muster.
Sir Ronald Wilson (previous High Court Judge of Australia, Author of the Bringing them Home Report of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission)

Quote 4
We seem to be hell bent toward a world without borders. Someone has decided to eradicate the nation state as an effective political entity and to rob it of much of its power by moving back to the corporatism of the medieval society; this is not forward-looking but a wish to move back to the pre-democratic era. Decisions that have been the prerogative of National Governments are being transferred to outsiders including the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank, the Bank for International Settlements and transnational corporations.

Apart from the dubious merit of such a massive transfer of power is the undeniable fact that this is being done without the advice or consent of the people whose lives are being affected. They, whoever they may be, are re-engineering the world without asking for our opinions and without giving us the opportunity to express them in any tangible way through the ballot box.
(Paul Hellyer, 1997)
Appendix 7.10 – Reference list of handouts from community education programme

Week 1

Week 2

Week 3

Week 4
The Muntham Outrage [unreferenced 19th Century Australian newspaper article]

Group 1 (excerpts from):

332


Group 2 (excerpts from):


Group 3 (excerpts from):


Week 6
Appendix 7.11 – Questions for group work Session 7

Group 1
Global patterns of forced migration

• Where do the majority of refugees come from – what is happening in those countries?
• Where are most refugees living?
• How does the flow of refugees to Australia compare with the flow of refugees to other countries?
• How have other global refugee crises been managed?

Group 2
International obligations / Human rights

• What are the benefits / detriments of Australia being a signatory to international conventions?
• How does Australia’s policy to asylum seekers meet our international obligations?
• What has the UNHCR and Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission said about Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers in relation to human rights and the Convention Relating to Refugees?
• How should Australia treat asylum seekers?

Group 3
What if . . . ?
You are citizens of a prosperous island in the east Pacific. Your government is now dominated by a party that wishes to expand its influence in the Pacific and take over neighbouring island nations. You are all young men and members of a Christian religion that disagrees with armed conflict and have always been pacifists. The government has started locking up in solitary confinement conscientious objectors to deter other young men from following suit. Passports are only issued to men after they have undertaken military service. The majority of the population agrees with the expansionist intentions of the government. Your parents (who are too old for conscription) want you to leave the country and arrange for you to leave by boat at night heading for the US.

• You can only take a backpack. What do you take?
• How do you feel about leaving?
• What are your hopes and fears?