Chineseness at the crossroads: Curricula and pedagogical considerations for the educational context

Agnes May Lin Meerwald
School of Education, Murdoch University

Chineseness at the crossroads examines how diasporic Chinese women negotiate Chineseness in Australia. I deploy Homi Bhabha's theory of liminality, the concept of being neither here nor there, to question essentialist notions of Chineseness in the women's ambiguous experiences. It disrupts the binarisms that divide the old from the new, and recognises instead the past and present in new but familiar versions of Chineseness.

I argue that essentialist Chinese norms are communicated through cultural semantics or fictions of Chineseness. I assert that liminality disrupts normalised Chineseness to expose the power structures that inform the cultural semantics. Awareness of these interdependent processes politicises the women.

In mirroring my theoretical framework, I use an auto-ethnographic technique to collapse the divide between the researcher and the researched, creating a liminal space between them. This subverts the norms of the researcher, as the archaeologist of knowledge, and the researched as passive artefacts. This methodological frame is a prism to examine the intersections of gender, sexuality, family, relationships, language, education, class, age, and religion with Chineseness in the lives of the 39 women interviewed.

Introduction

Chineseness is often viewed in essentialist terms and according to biological marks. Thus, one who looks Chinese is often expected to perform certain cultural practices or speak in a particular manner, for example. The doctoral research, upon which this paper is based, investigated the everyday practices and views of migrant Chinese women living in Australia to explore an alternative framework for thinking about Chineseness. Data was drawn from the researcher's own life, as well as from interviews conducted nationally. In this paper, I outline this research, and consider the educational implications of its results by critiquing current curriculum and pedagogical practices in English classrooms towards a more inclusive Australia.

Framing the fictions: Theoretical framework

Chineseness at the crossroads interrogates the idea of Chineseness. Here, an anecdote is useful to illustrate the tensions within one's negotiations of Chineseness. It is a conversation between my friend and I:

My friend said to me, "You're Australian."
Having been quite comfortable with being an in-between person in the past, I was suddenly confronted with a new pigeonhole. I felt unusually unsettled by his statement and found myself asking, "Why am I Australian?"
"You are, aren't you? I mean, you're not typically Chinese, are you?"
"I'm not?" I thought to myself. "But why? How not?" I asked.
He couldn't quite explain how I was Australian but the point of the exchange is that it made me feel uncomfortable. (Agnes, auto-ethnographic narrative)

The above exposes the choices so often forced upon my participants and I in our negotiations of Chineseness. Often
these choices are based on a binaric notion of ethnicity - you are either Australian or Chinese/Asian, western or eastern, black or white. I sought a theoretical framework that gave me the space to be an other that was outside these binaries because I argued that Chineseness is much more complex and various than the fixed categories assumed by the essentialist discourses. Homi Bhabha's (Bhabha, 1994) notion of the third space - the concept of being neither here nor there - enabled me to investigate our ideas of who we are with more fluidity.

I further argued that this context is complicated by the cultural semantics that are subscribed to or imposed on us. These cultural semantics are the fictions of Chineseness, and others, or "essentialising master narratives" (Meerwald, 2001, p. 388) that impact on our negotiations of Chineseness in practical terms. I borrow from Weedon's (1997) idea of common sense to elaborate on my notion of cultural semantics. Like common sense, cultural semantics consist of various social meanings and ways of reading the world that reinforce these meanings. These meanings, which serve the interests of particular groups, become fixed and accepted as truth, disguising their contradictions and changeability according to contexts. The power of cultural semantics, like common sense, comes from "its claim to be natural, obvious and therefore true" (Weedon, 1997, p. 74). In short, cultural semantics are similar to Foucault's discourse in that they are "ways of constituting knowledge" (Weedon, 1997, p. 105). Thus, these cultural semantics, I argue, impact on who we think we are as Chinese women.

**Researcher -- researched: Methodological framework**

Methodologically, I wanted a tool that enabled me to journey with the participants I interviewed. For this reason, I used auto-ethnographic narratives alongside my participants' narratives. I wanted a methodological framework that had three functions:

- I wanted it to upset the traditional notions of the thesis genre. The use of autobiographical voices, though still controversial in more positivist circles, reminds the reader of the constructedness of the text, and quoting Gilmore here, as its mark "indicates a disruption in genre, an eruption or interruption of self-representation in genres in which it has not been previously legitimated" (Gilmore, 1994, p. 7). This controversy has a dual function. First, I argue, it unsettles the notion of the genre as an over-arching framework governing the ordering of details in the text, and then it leads the reader to the corresponding idea of the constructedness of culture.

- I wanted it to upset the traditional notions of the researcher and the researched to then reflect my theoretical framework of liminality. The auto-ethnography enabled me to interrogate positivist notions of the omnipotent researcher who mines the participants for data. I argued that both the researcher and researched stand on par to create knowledge together. My narratives served as a prism to understand theirs and vice versa. The researcher and researched then enter a liminal space. Who is the researched, one asks?

- I wanted to politicise my participants' voices. By placing my narratives alongside my participants', I erased their marginalised positions. I borrow from Carolyn Ellis (1997) who states that academics who tell their stories may encourage the disempowered to speak their silences, and lead to a discovery of the researcher's own silenced parts. Ien Ang (1994b) also argues "the narrating of life as lived [rescues] notions of 'experience' and 'emotion' for cultural theorizing" (p. 4).

**Results revisited**

My research indicated that liminality in Chineseness is at the crossroads. Many still resisted accepting Chineseness as a fluid form of cultural production, preferring to fix it to essentialist notions, within binaric frames of Chinese versus not Chinese, in their negotiations of gender, sexuality, family obligations, partner preferences, language use, and educational choices. The data also showed that liminality is only deployed to a minimal extent, according to the different cultural semantics impacting on ethnic negotiations. I look at these cultural semantics in terms of the geographical, cultural and biological fictions.
The data showed that the women's identities were still very much bound by the politics of space. First, there was a clear fixed "here" and "there" notion in how the women referred to their initial home and Australia. They hence either rejected their past or remained very much influenced by their past in their practices, as if oblivious to the fact that they now live in a different geopolitical space.

Secondly, some spoke of the different geographical spaces in seamless ways. I argue that the geographical boundaries used to refer to home artificially segment their lives. If we can acknowledge that we fluctuate in the interstitial spaces of liminality, even if it is initially just between two cultural locations, then we will begin to imagine that our present is complexly interrelated to our past. It is then that we will be able to interrogate past and present politics that construct the cultural semantics that we ascribe to rationally and/or non-rationally.

The constant reference to place as the women narrated their lives indicated that the politics of space continues to impact on them because identification is a process that:

Occurs in situ, in relation to a symbolically and physically constructed "home", "place". ... Identity is thus place bound both conceptually and geographically to specific localised contexts of domination and resistance, and has "no being outside the asymmetrical contact with dominant categories." (Luke & Luke, 1998, pp. 732-33)

I argue that the politics of liminality enables us to be unfixed from the geographical notion of identity.

**Ritual**

The women rejected or accepted tradition as an indication of their rejection or acceptance of Chineseness. Gender and sexuality, for example, were negotiated according to the dichotomous cultural semantics of what constitutes a good or bad woman, with the good woman associated with being Chinese and the bad as unChinese or westernised. The women's understanding of the forces that constructed what is good or bad was eclipsed by their preoccupation with what was prescribed as good or bad.

The data also showed that those who had access to liminal theories were still bound by the strength of the cultural semantics governing Chineseness. I found that Confucianism is so absorbed into the Chinese psyche that many of the Chinese women often did not know why they practised or held certain customs and values. I theorised that perhaps essentialist thinking simplifies life as one looks to existing cultural semantics to inform and explain one's ethnic performances. However, the reality is that "Chinese culture is indeed not different from other cultures [in that] culture is either negotiated or assumed, challenged or revered, rejected or carefully guarded against alien contamination" (Pieke 1997). Ang (1998a) says we can say no to Chineseness for:

Not only does the moment of pure Chineseness never strike; there are also moments-occurring regularly ... in which the attribution of Chineseness does not make sense in the first place. The liberating productivity of the diasporic perspective lies "[in unlearning] that submission to ... 'Chineseness' as the ultimate signified" [citing Chow]. ... to break out of the prison house of Chineseness ... to construct open-ended and plural "post-Chinese" identities. (p. 241)

I counter argue that one can also say yes to Chineseness for the fixed traditions, even if modified, will not suddenly disappear with our present theorisation on liminality. More importantly, so that traditions are not regurgitated unthinkingly, we need to be aware that traditions are fixed according to a specific time and place for a particular political or economic purpose. Our focus should be on the factors that construct the cultural semantics that govern our practices. Where the subject is able to adopt a trans-cultural notion of liminality for self-reflexivity and political critique, much insight can be gained about the cultural semantics that oppress or control them. For it is in the interstitial gaps of these evident parts that the ethnic subject gains insight into who they are and gain political power to do something about the inequities exposed.

**Race**
Many of the Chinese women's lives are still very much influenced by the biological fiction that marks them as different in Australia, no matter how alien her practices may become. Luke and Luke (1998), in citing Omi and Winant, argue that "race' continues to be a core and defining cultural category that structures and shapes everyday motivation and common sense, social practices and perceptions" (1998p. 732), so that they can never abandon identifying themselves or being identified by others as Chinese. Thus, despite practices that contravene acceptable expectations within the Chinese community, colour remains a marker of the diasporic woman's identity among white Australians although she may perceive herself as unChinese.

Similarly, the women's partner choice is very much influenced by the cultural semantics that suggest that non-Chinese men are more attractive. Chinese men were seen by many participants as chauvinistic misogynists with tendencies towards infidelity. Chinese men who did not conform to this stereotypical image were seen as westernised exceptions, instead of Chinese men who practised alternative forms of Chineseness.

To cross the race divide, some women adapted their speech styles or accents to enable membership into different groups. They would thus speak with an Australian accent to gain employment or you-know-lah, speak like a Malaysian or Singaporean so I get better service in a Chinese restaurant, you know.[1]

The problematics raised by the biological fiction, and our inability to activate a politicised liminality, are perhaps because our modern mind metes mutually exclusive ideals. It precludes the possibility that some seemingly mutually exclusive facts are in fact not mutually exclusive, but that they dwell in that indeterminate space of being both and not both. There is still the prevailing hegemonic assumption that Australian and Asian cultural identities are, and I quote Ang here, "mutually exclusive, antagonistic categories: the two cancel each other out; they are a contradiction in terms. One cannot ... be Asian and Australian at the same time" (Ang, 2000, p. 126). The Chinese and Australian remain distinct in the Australian psyche according to the differences in skin colour.

However, Ang (1994a) argues that it is impossible to be anti-essentialist either. Although Australia's current idea of multiculturalism particularises Chineseness and other ethnicities in essentialist terms, and in so doing marginalises them, a position of liminality enables this multiculturalism to be a site of struggle to affirm and undo all ethnic subjectivities.

Thus, my results indicate that the various cultural semantics of geography, culture, and biology continue to impact deeply on the psyche of both the diasporic and mainstream communities. However, I posit that our ethnic identity, which is based on the biological markings on our bodies, can be untied from our cultural and geographical identities through the politics of liminality.

**Ramifications: Educational implications**

I address these findings by considering how the y can deconstruct our present thinking about ethnic subjectification in the educational context. The school, and particularly the subject English, are productive sites for undertaking this kind of work. Given the focus on challenging the dominant culture's representation of self in the Year 12 English syllabus in Western Australia, I argue that it is necessary and critical to interrogate representations of ethnicities that gravitate towards notions of essentialism.

I also posit that a single event or educational session will not invoke a change that is lasting or transforming, and suggest that our educational institutions appropriate the liminal framework into their curriculum and pedagogy, so that we are infused with this alternative concept to inform thinking. I present the educational implications by proposing certain curricula changes and a re-examination of present pedagogical practices.

**Curricula changes**

Essentialist readings of ethnicity in the English classroom can be disrupted by using texts to encourage students to embrace liminality as an alternative reading. The implications of the changing Chineseness within texts should be investigated for two reasons, and I draw from Lionnet (1995) to support this proposal. First, Lionnet argues that literary texts may represent "the subjective experience of muted groups" (pp. 187-88). People of Chinese descent are
certainly a marginalised group in our current English syllabus. This is problematic since one of the general aims of the syllabus is to "learn about, share in, and develop a critical awareness of the language and cultures of Australia" (Curriculum Council, 1998, p. 51). Further to this, the rationale for the syllabus in developing the student's sense of self must surely be compromised if texts silence particular ethnic group's experiences.

Recently there was much debate about the inclusion of film texts such as Star Wars and Natasha Stott Despoja's first parliamentary speech into the NSW HSC English syllabus. The debate focused on the political agenda underpinning such inclusions. Bond (2002) sums up the argument as such:

> It seems to assume that teaching the Western canon is not political, has no political or other agenda, and is a purely objective intellectual exercise. ... They are [in fact] filled to the brim with cultural norms and expectations and social propaganda. Much as I love the "Great Books" I can see that to impose them on students and to expect those students also to uphold them as "great" is in itself arrogant. A great number of English students do not share our love of the canon, no matter how much time you spend studying them and their merits as great works of literature. (Bond, 2002)

I have included this discussion to question the political agenda in the current English syllabus. Are we holding on to the canon to prolong the White Australia attitude of the Australian forefathers? Although the English module of the Graduate Certificate for Western Australian teachers now incorporates Asian writers in a variety of genres, the inclusion of other texts in the English curriculum is still so limited that they are perceived as marginal texts by marginal groups. This is significant in the working out of our future as a multicultural Australia, for texts from marginalised groups need to be given equal value to the Western canon so that multicultural education can be promoted as mainstream education for all at a national level, rather than education for the minority or marginalised, or education that is an elective unit amongst all the core units one undertakes. A multicultural perspective needs to be inserted into the curriculum at every level and in every subject so that it is not just an "add-on." It should be based on the rationale of "productive diversity" (Jupp, 1996, p. 15), which assumes that migrants have a significant contribution to make to the country, as opposed to the deficit model, which assumes that migrants are a threat to the stability of this country.

Lionnet also argues that "the ambiguities and indeterminacies inherent in the literary texts prevent the articulation of rigid or universalizing theoretical conclusions" (p. 186). Thus, I explore the possibilities opened up by using texts that challenge normalised portrayals, paying particular attention to how subjects engage with texts that disrupt the essentialist readings of ethnic subjectivities, and how this may then challenge their own negotiations of who they are. We see how educational moves to do so validated Vanessa's experiences:

> The pivotal event I experienced in Year 12 was studying the three-unit English option, New Voices, for the HSC. Dealing with post-colonial writing, the texts we studied made me aware that I was not alone in the alienation I had so often felt, and that the feeling of being somewhere between two very different worlds was not a condition unique to my small being.

> More significantly, perhaps, was the fact that it was text, literature. To find that writers beyond the "canon" could be studied for writing with literary merit about things I had experienced first hand made my personal experiences, in a way, legitimate, real. Issues that had always been pushed away into the background and/or ignored were actually being discussed and analysed as a part of somewhat esoteric literature. (Vanessa: 106-118; 124-131)

Taken further, such reading practices also inform students about alternative ethnic subjectivities. As one of the process objectives of the Year 12 English syllabus is to understand how the construction of the text encourages particular responses in its readers to confirm or change their attitudes as they read, it is critical that reading practices are interrogated for the power relations that produce them. In so doing, stereotypical portrayals of Chineseness and other ethnic peoples are challenged. Moreover, it is also essential to highlight that one who is not typically Chinese is not necessarily unChinese. Instead the politics of liminality should be taught to encourage a reading that accepts Chineseness outside the normalised frames of Chineseness.

Educational awareness will give birth to the beginning of a hybrid discourse that encourages a reading of ethnicity.
from the interstitial spaces that recognises the inequitable socioeconomic layers, and other geopolitical and historical factors, that create difference. Such readers will develop critical capacities to realise that texts, including non-fiction and non-print texts, are constructed with a political agenda in mind, and that information and language are selectively appropriated to foster the prevalent attitudes within a particular historical and geographical setting. Such an invasive reading of texts helps us to dare to imagine a new Australia.

The politics of liminality, as applied to the use of texts, also influences the students' composition. If all we read is from the Western canon, then all we reproduce will be copies of the Western canon. Just as students produce gendered readings by drawing on what they already know about gender (Martino & Cook, 1998), they likewise produce readings of ethnicity based on existing knowledge about gendered ethnic stereotypes. An awareness of the cultural semantics governing how their experiences are formed will enable the students to further interrogate the powered forces that shape how they perceive themselves, and to develop their own political positions.

Pedagogical practices

The implications of ethnicity as complex and complicated are also critical considerations for pedagogical practices within the educational context. As teachers, we should be educated to reflect on our assumptions of culture and how these have impacted us in different educational contexts. It is worth noting that discrimination in the classroom is often subtle and engaged by those who are ignorant of such practices (Hatton, 1998b). Garcia (1984) states that discrimination is not a deliberate or conscious practice nor is it "blatant racism or sexism, nor is it based on malice" (p. 104). For example, in selecting texts that come only from the Western canon in their teaching program, teachers often unconsciously discriminate against their students by not including the narratives of other ethnic groups. The students' awareness of the experiences of other groups whom they encounter in their day-to-day activities is then hampered.

Discrimination by teachers also manifests itself in practices such as lowered academic expectations, differential discipline measures, sex-role, and ethnic group stereotyping (Garcia, 1984). In 1998, while I was supervising students on their teaching practical at a local high school, I was appalled by the assumptions held by the staff members towards students of different ethnic backgrounds. The staff members naturalised certain behaviours to certain ethnic backgrounds.

"You have your Asian gang in there, you know, kids who have been breaking and entering - activities outside the school. There is one Aboriginal boy and a bully in there as well," the teacher said.

"I live in this area," I thought to myself, "but I haven't seen these Asian gangs terrorising the neighbourhood. Do they come out after hours? Are they members of triads? Who runs these triads? Their parents? Why haven't they approached me for support since I am Asian too?" (Agnes, auto-ethnographic narrative)

Middle-class Asian students are often assumed to be diligent and capable students while working-class Asians are ascribed gangster qualities. A deficit view is adopted towards such gangsters[3]. The liminal space challenges these notions by highlighting the need to acknowledge that some students do not fit either of these categories. Some students can be said to exist in an ethnic liminal limbo. For example, a middle-class Asian student, assumed by the teacher to have the capacity to gain any dux award, may have learning difficulties which are ignored or unidentified due to the stereotype s/he is forced to fit into. On the flip side, the working-class Asian with academic potential may not be given that opportunity through lowered expectations from the teachers[4].

Lortie (1975) argues that student-teachers learn through an "apprenticeship-of-observation" (p. 65), embracing influences intuitively or imitatively, often without reflection. Hatton (1998b) adds these adoptive attitudes may not change with teacher education. She argues that "teachers often engage in mimicry of existing practices rather than involving themselves in reflective consideration of what might be more appropriate" (p. 7) [5].

Hatton (1998a) states that "teachers ... need to critically examine cultures and cultural responses, including their own, to assess which of their cultural practices and responses are flawed, even oppressive" (p. 6), to monitor the intended and unintended effects of these (1998). Attention to the specific nature of their individual students should be given so
that diversity and social inequalities can be factored into their classroom.

Dent and Hatton (1998) suggest that to better understand cultural diversity, student-teachers should engage in ethnographic activities to immerse themselves in different cultural sites. This would be ideal if it could be carried out. In practice, I feel, few would have the opportunity to be so immersed in a variety of cultures as to move from merely knowing about a culture to the position of knowing a culture experientially. Teacher-training time would need to be significantly extended for this immersion to be effective. Further, this strategy does not address the prevailing attitudes of existing teachers. The liminal space is a paradigm shift that enables understanding without necessarily going through this ethnographic process[6].

Reverie

I started off by asking "What is Chineseness?" and thought that it is something that I can choose to assert or not assert as a Chinese woman in Australia. However, I have found that Chineseness is an inescapable identity that is marked by the biological signs on my body although I do not necessarily practise the rituals that so many ascribe to in affirming their Chineseness. Thus, often in writing this thesis, I found myself turning Chinese. Being born Chinese did not automatically make me Chinese. I have had to learn how to become Chinese. I don't think I have arrived, nor will I ever arrive. It will be an on-going process of negotiation as I weave in new knowledges of Chineseness with other knowledges of Australianness or Europeanness or whatever-elseness, into my practices. For what is Chineseness after all?

I borrow from Ang to sum up the tensions within Chineseness: "If I am inescapably Chinese by descent, I am only sometimes Chinese by consent" (Ang, 1993, p. 14). I find this statement problematic as consensual power is determined by the specific context that one is in. Although Ang later adds: "When I say I am Chinese it is a choice, but it is not a completely free choice" (Ang, 1998c, p. 155), that freedom to give consent to Chineseness may not be present at all in certain contexts. I quote Ang here to elaborate:

Traffic through a crossroads is never free flowing and uncontrolled: there are traffic lights, road signs and rules that all road users must obey, for example, those approaching the crossroads from a minor road are supposed to give way to those passing through from the main road. Consequently, borderlands (which are spaces where the condition of crossroads traffic is normalised) are generally heavily policed and patrolled, and it depends on your identity card, your credentials, what you own, or simply the way you look [italics added]. ... These interstitial spaces are pervaded by power structures of their own. ... It matters who you are in borderland encounters, just as it matters which borders ... are being crossed. (Ang, 1998b, p. 16, Ang's italics)

Although certain factors, such as economic class, academic and employment credentials, gender, and so on, may enable us to go against the traffic in certain contexts, or to reinvent the cultural semantics that govern Chineseness, sometimes these factors are powerless as one is reduced to the biological markings that render one unmistakably Chinese. It is likely that Chineseness is attributed to one who looks Chinese, regardless of the identification choice made.

Where consent can be given, it is in terms of how we may choose to practise our versions of Chineseness. This is where we find ourselves at the crossroads, and I stress crossroads that are junctions of multiple trajectories. Here, we decide which versions of cultural practices and values we want to subscribe to as we adapt our practices to our current changing contexts.

I question if such differences will cause confusion since nobody knows how the other may act or respond to situations any more. I borrow again from Ang (1998b) who questions how we can communicate meaningfully in the context of the differences met at the crossroads, which should not be ignored to keep the trajectories visible and the heterogeneity alive, when meaningful dialogue paradoxically comes with shared commonalities that we understand. To effect understanding, the appropriate rhetorical strategies need to be employed, according to Ang. I thus return to my application of liminality as the cultural semantics framing ethnic subjectification as the discourse in the English classroom, to teach us how to rethink sameness and difference. Thus, in our reappropriation of present cultural...
semantics, we need to realise that the existing cultural semantics are not naturally fixed fictions. We can thus critically construct new narratives from these cultural semantics to reduce the inequities experienced at the crossroads without further paralysing Chineseness, and other ethnicities, to impotent and subjugated sites.

Ang (1998b) calls for an increase in the discursive crossroads traffic. I transfer this to the crossroads encounters at the micro level of everyday experiences, to avoid producing bourgeois theory that is decontextualised and with little regard for the pragmatics in the particular and concrete contexts. Students who begin to exercise their political positions within the school setting may one day enact governmental policies necessary to provide the infrastructure for this traffic, which we cannot escape, for meaningful meetings can only be experienced in this spatial tension, through the gaps of recognition.

Although this research has enabled me to appropriate the road rules according to the contexts faced within the politics of liminality, to arrive at a point where I am comfortable with my versions of Chineseness, it does not assume the absence of tensions that continue to make this journey complicated, complex, and sometimes even confusing. However, it matters that tensions are no longer perceived as a deficit. Instead the tensions arising from the gaps exposed are positive signs of an awareness of the power relations that impact on the cultural semantics that govern the diasporic Chinese woman's subjectivity.

While this research is not conclusive, it opens up the road for further exploration on how ethnic subjectification is perceived. It is no longer just black or white but both, and "we need to substitute an 'and' for the 'either/or' logic [which can only breed] polarised destructive conflict" (Bretherton, 1998, p. 9). May we then learn to further appropriate these road rules for ethnic subjectification in contemporary Australia.

And there in front of us is the crossroads and choice. (Trinh, 1991, p. 21)

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my doctorate supervisors, Professor Jan Currie, Professor Simone Volet, and Dr Wayne Martino, for their support throughout my candidature, and continued guidance and help in my professional development. I also wish to thank the School of Education for nominating my work for the WAIER and AARE awards.

Endnotes

1. This section of the research can be found in a forthcoming book by The Office of Multicultural Interests, WA. See (Ryan & Meerwald, Forthcoming).
2. This is part of the Access Asia Schools project.
3. Biggs (1996) outlines the paradox of the Chinese learner who is presumed to use superficial learning strategies such as rote-learning, yet outperform Western students who supposedly use deeper level strategies. The clear binaric delineation of learning strategies according to ethnic background is problematic.
4. Dent and Hatton (1998) illustrate the significance of thinking beyond the beyond through the liminal space by noting that Vietnamese students in an Australian primary school were given positive treatment despite belonging to the lower socioeconomic strata. Though now economically poor, their parents were once middle class professionals in Vietnam who retained middle-class attitudes and values towards education when they came to Australia. The teachers considered these students’ historical background and recognised them as having the potential for academic success. While class and gender intersect with ethnicity to impact on our subjectivity, we must caution against essentialising attitudes and behaviours according to these factors as well.
5. Tertiary institutions that produce these teachers also perpetuate these practices in the orientation programs that cater to the needs of students according to ethnic stereotypes.
6. While it must be acknowledged that, in certain cases, knowing about a cultural group would arm one with a set of strategies for dealing with students who behave in non-conformist ways, it must still be argued that the strategies employed need to be specifically tailored to the needs of the specific student for that specific context. For sometimes a student may fit one pigeon hole, at other times another, and at other times neither, none or both simultaneously.
References


**Author:** Dr Agnes Meerwald has taught at the secondary and tertiary levels for over 15 years. Her research interests lie in cultural studies, postcolonial theories, diaspora studies and educational sociology. She has experience in qualitative and quantitative research methods, with a particular interest in postmodern methodologies. Dr Meerwald has been nominated for the Australian Association for Research in Education Doctoral Thesis Award (2003), and she received a [Post Graduate Award](http://www.waier.org.au/forums/2004/meerwald.html) from WAIER in 2004. Email: AgnesMeerwald@graduate.uwa.edu.au