Investigating Debates Around Racism in Sport to Facilitate Perspective Transformation in the Secondary English Classroom

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Abstract
The English classroom is a space in which issues of social justice can be explored through texts, using a critical literacy approach. Indigenous Australians have been subject to racist policies throughout postcolonial Australian history, and racist attitudes toward Australia’s original inhabitants prevail. This article suggests that racism in the Australian Football League online discourse community can be addressed in the English classroom, as social media texts in this area provide rich illustration of the prevailing antisocial attitudes thriving both in this community and the broader Australian community. Informed by both critical literacy and transformative learning theory (TLT), this article proposes a learning experience to facilitate perspective transformation in a secondary classroom. This experience draws on TLT to construct an experience incorporating introspection, stimulating awareness, reflection, and action. This experience is proposed in the hope that reticence to directly challenge antisocial views in the classroom may be overcome.

Keywords
transformative education, social transformation, critical reflection

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What occurs in society has relevance for the English-learning area, as the texts explored within the classroom are culturally laden artefacts that serve to both challenge and reproduce sociocultural norms. As such, texts cannot be read without accessing perspectives, drawing on social scripts, and conscious or unconscious theoretical frames to make meaning of texts. Consideration of how texts about sport contribute to the shaping of specific discourse communities and the permitted cultural norms that flourish within them is arguably of interdisciplinary interest, lying at the intersection of a somewhat unusual partnership between physical education and English. This consideration will be central to this article.

Joining a community of sports supporters can have social effects on participants, fostering feelings of belonging (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Wann, 2006), with team identification offering benefits for “social psychological well-being” (Wann, Martin, Grieve, & Gardner, 2008, p. 229). Sports communities can also be a space in which antisocial ideological proclivities such as racism continue to thrive despite efforts towards reform (Reeves, Ponsford, & Gorman, 2015). Carrington and McDonald (2002) suggest that “sport is a particularly useful sociological site” for examining contemporary racism, as “it articulates the complex interplay of ‘race’, nation, culture and identity in very public and direct ways” (p. 2). They contend that the “greatest paradox about sport’s relationship to racism” lies in the fact that “it is an arena where certain forms of racism” have been “effectively challenged,” while at the same time, it provides “a platform for racist sentiments to be most clearly expressed,” revealing prevalent social inequity (p. 2). While these observations were made in the British context, they have great currency for Australia society, as Australia is a British colony that remains part of the Commonwealth, and racism in sport is equally an issue in this context.

Australia’s history since colonisation has been littered with racist policies preventing Indigenous Australians from engaging with the dominant “White” Australian society. Much of this has come about because the colonisers needed to justify their invasion of the land by perpetuating the myth that Australia was terra nullius (empty land; Attwood, 2005; Craven, 2011; Healy, 2008; Parbury, 2011). Banner (2005) contends that terra nullius was an “anomalous” justification “in the broader context of British colonisation”:

> The British treated Australia as *terra nullius*—as unowned land. Under British colonial law, aboriginal Australians had no property rights in the land, and colonization accordingly vested ownership of the entire continent in the British government. The doctrine of *terra nullius* remained the law in Australia throughout the colonial period, and indeed right up to 1992. (p. 95).

From this first declaration of European superiority, many other myths have been exploited to further benefit the colonisers (Milnes, 2005). Although the harshest of these policies are no longer in effect, their impact is still clearly felt in the Indigenous population today. Furthermore, it can be contended, “this belittlement of
Indigenous existence is an essential element in ensuring that the occupancy of ‘settlers’ is seen as morally and ethically legitimate” by mainstream society and external observers (Lowe, Backhaus, Yunkaporta, Brown, & Loynes, 2014, p. 65), enabling the colonisers to maintain their position of power. This ideology has ensured that Indigenous perspectives are largely ignored by the mainstream media, which serves to perpetuate the values of the dominant group by generally choosing to focus on stories about them rather than from them. This only perpetuates the inequalities of society today, such as those found within the sporting environment and specifically the Australian Football League (AFL).

Discourses of Anglo-Australian nationalism have structured popular understanding of the AFL in ways that have for the most part excluded Indigenous people and their cultural identities from participating and/or participating openly in the “national game” (Hallinan & Judd, 2012a, p. 975). The AFL has been a site of gross discrimination through verbal abuse of players on field, yet it has also taken the first liberating steps towards combating this. Hallinan and Judd (2012b) explain that, “the AFL was the first professional sporting body in Australia to address on-field racism by adopting antiracial vilification laws in 1995” (p. 917). The AFL has also been heralded as a leader in reconciliation through the large percentage of Indigenous players incorporated into the game at an elite level. These successes by Indigenous Australians have been particularly celebrated by “whitestream” media outlets, suggesting that enough is being done for Indigenous people in the game (Hallinan & Judd, 2012b, p. 919). This positive discrimination has put the emphasis on Indigenous people as being excellent sports people at the expense of any academic achievement (Sarra, 2011). This is evident in the lack of Indigenous voices in public debate on the game suggesting that the stereotype of the Indigenous person is still one that is physical, uneducated, and mystical (Coyle, 2015, p. 605). Judd (2012) reinforces this notion of the lack of validity of Indigenous perspectives in the status of Australian history by stating that, “Indigenous reconstructions of the past are dismissed derisively as ‘subjective’ resting on folklore and literary romance rather than serious scholarship” (p. 1027).

The media has continued to undermine the Indigenous perspective by portraying images of Indigenous Australians as “mystical trackers, comedic sidekicks or as petrol-sniffing drunks” (Coyle, 2015, p. 605). These stereotypes have been used to contest an Indigenous origin to Australian Football, further undermining Indigenous contributions. Tom Willis, the man purported as the inventor of the game, had been known to have a strong relationship with Indigenous people who regularly engaged in a game which had striking similarities to the codified Australian football game played today (Coyle, 2015; Hallinan & Judd, 2012a). A possible reason for this to have been contested by the AFL historians is the connection to the myth of innocence of Australian colonisation, sustaining the belief that it was a convict from European origins who developed a truly Australian game (Coyle, 2015). Acknowledging its credible Indigenous origins would mean acknowledging a darker and more brutal past. Australia has a history of “whitewashing” its past by “forgetting”
or ignoring its Indigenous history (Healy, 2008). This continuing ideology of Indigenous people being seen as “other,” as separate from the cultural majority and inferior except in unintellectual and physical activities such as sport has perpetuated widespread racism (MacNaughton, 2001).

Negative stereotypes of Indigenous Australians are often viewed as societal norms through their limited portrayal in the mainstream media. This has the effect of exacerbating the problem, as people are more likely to adopt attitudes if they are perceived as societal norms (Watt & Larkin, 2010). Furthermore, those who believe their attitudes align with the majority are also more likely to be more vocal even if this belief is false, which could account for the verbal racism at sporting events. Perhaps this explains why AFL games are a site where people wishing to verbally abuse Indigenous players using racial vilification feel that their racist attacks are socially acceptable. As such, Australian Football has allowed Indigenous people to be visible and celebrated in Australian society; however, this has come at the expense of narrowing the potential of Indigenous Australians in other fields. Therefore, Indigenous players and people may always be limited by what is deemed acceptable visibility within this community. Critically examining the way in which people view Indigenous sporting athletes could positively impact their perception on the wider community.

**Online Community Posts as Texts**

One way of investigating debates around racism in sport is by examining the posts in online communities. Online communities differ from social networks, as social networks are generally comprised of an individual’s known friends, family, and acquaintances. In contrast, online communities consist of people potentially from varied backgrounds and contexts “held together by a common interest or goal” (Johnson, 2014). While these are not traditional text types, using social forum posts from online communities is responsive to an increasing push to use a greater diversity of text types in the English classroom to ensure that texts with high currency and relevance to students’ lives are included in student learning experiences. While the study of visual texts such as films are becoming increasingly acceptable over time, the use of social media texts has not been embraced, perhaps due to general scepticism “of the educational value of social media” and “the risks of social networks and media sharing” (Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010, p. 85). At the same time, use of real-world texts in the English classroom is responsive to the need to optimise student engagement (Lee, 1995).

**Reaching Consensus About Social Issues**

Posts on online communities that generate a high volume of responses are unique texts in that they can ultimately constitute a kind of focus group within that community, by which consensus is reached and approved community norms are exposed,
critiqued, and negotiated. While “the unsavoury aspects of online comment have prompted many to turn a blind eye to the ‘bottom half of the internet’” (Reagle, 2015, p. 16), the activity of participants who comment on social sites such as Facebook and YouTube to express their opinions and support or challenge the views of others, protected by the perceived safety and distance of the Internet, can offer considerable insight into human’s opinions and behaviours.

While online focus groups are increasingly used (e.g., Kenny, 2005), there are obviously several key differences between a traditional, in-person focus group and the conversation that emerges around an online post. The focus group is usually instigated, supported, and invigilated by the researcher in their corporeal form, whereas an administrator externally moderates an online community group. The traditional focus group invites participates to orally ask questions and comment on the experiences and points of view of other participants (Kitzinger, 1995), whereas on an online community post, discussion is undertaken in the written form, requiring reading, writing, and digital literacy skills to participate. While a focus group often follows a semistructured question schedule and is subject to some guidance by the researcher, respondents in online communities often take the subject on a tangent that was probably not anticipated by the author of the original post. Whereas participants in a focus group are conscious of the artificial nature of their interaction, and its ultimate research purposes, participants on online social networks interact without the same constraint of self-consciousness, even though they are publishing their ideas on an international platform, often with an identifying photograph of themselves, along with their names. Those joining discussions online also tend to seek out discussions that reinforce their values and beliefs (Watt & Larkin, 2010). Furthermore, those with opposing views may not wish to join the conversation and may not even be aware of it.

Kitzinger (1994) contends that focus groups enable researchers to examine “how knowledge and, more importantly, ideas both develop, and operate, within a given cultural context” (p. 116). While as outlined, posts on social media are slightly different and have additional constraints on interaction, the conversations that evolve around key posts can be critically analyzed to yield similar benefits, with the advantage of the authentic language of the discourse community being captured in written form. The researcher can analyse “the operation of humour, consensus, and dissent” in order to identify “shared and common knowledge” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 300).

**Discourse Communities**

Critical literacy and “new literacy studies” recognise that “reading, writing and meaning are always situated within specific social practices within specific discourses” (Gee, 2000, p. 189). In order to investigate debates about racism in an AFL online discourse community, students must first understand the context in which they are being undertaken. Knowledge of the origins and nature of the AFL
community, in the past and in the present, would be central to this consideration; while the AFL is the most popular sport in Australia and the fourth most popular sport in the world (The Guardian, 2014), not all students will be familiar with it, and even avid fans may never have critically considered its nature and origins. In addition, students will be required to have conceptual knowledge of what constitutes a discourse community as well as understanding of the role of comments within an online community.

Discourse communities are defined by the following characteristics:

- A discourse community shares a common interest with public goals. Despite this, it can accommodate tension between adversarial subgroups underneath a common purpose.
- The discourse community has a mechanism for interactive communication between its members.
- The community sustains itself through provision of information and feedback.
- The discourse community continuously develops and reinforces discoursal expectations.
- The discourse community progresses towards an increasingly shared and specialized terminology that its uniqueness can contribute to the exclusivity of the group.
- The discourse community has a core of members with discoursal and content expertise that remains consistent despite membership circulation (Swales, 1987, 1988).

Although this definition of a discourse community emerged in the 1980s, before online discourse communities attained their current levels of popularity, its applicability to the online discourse community is striking.

**Thematic Analysis**

Qualitative data that are derived from the focus group data are often subject to thematic analysis. As such, this method of analysis will be appropriated for secondary students to use as a way of reading and analysing a post from an online discourse community. As a relatively accessible and flexible approach to analysing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), thematic analysis can be used in the secondary classroom at a basic level without the requirement that students possess advanced epistemological knowledge or highly developed research skills. Secondary students are high school students in 7–11 years in Australia, generally inclusive of students aged from 11 to 17 or 18. The implementation of a thematic analysis would also give structure to the analysis of such a hectic text with many voices. A framework for a thematic analysis can be developed as a group, allowing the development for more
complex thinking. Simple categories can be developed or more complex, depending on the class and student. The use of a CADAS program such as NVivo may also be appropriate, as it would allow for greater exploration of the data. Not only would it help students organise the data, it could also support students to present findings in varying formats, including those which are visual and multimodal.

**Informing Theory**

This article draws on a sociocultural theory of language and literacy by utilising critical media discourse (Sandlin, 2007), critical literacy (Janks, 2000), and transformational learning lenses (Mezirow, 1978) as the basis of this article and to inform the learning experiences explored within. Critical media discourse acknowledges that media texts have the power both to educate, when people critically reflect on the messages they are getting through the media, and to ‘miseducate,’ when viewers are passive consumers who don’t think much about the images and messages that they are receiving (Tisdell, 2008, p. 49). And as such, it invites active questioning of reader/viewer positioning as well as critical understanding of the impact of shaping elements such as selection of detail and corporate ownership. Readers/viewers are encouraged to question the manner in which media enforces hegemonic values, particularly in relation to minority groups (Tisdell & Thompson, 2007). Online discussion spaces are open to examination through a critical media lens, and can be sites for the examination of the ways in which the space administrators direct their readers to be good consumers, as well as how readers react and negotiate meaning in these spaces (Sandlin, 2007). The pleasure inherent in enjoyment of media as a viewer or membership of a discourse community can act as both “facilitator and deterrent of critical media literacy” (Tisdell, 2008, p. 55), and students need to be awakened from their relatively passive position of enjoyment to the value and affordances of a resistant position.

In the secondary English context, critical media discourse operates within the critical literacy imperative. Luke (2000) describes the four-tiered approach to early reading instruction that is applied in the secondary English contexts to examine texts through a critical literacy lens. This approach invites students to interrogate a text with guiding questions to support their inquiry. When social media posts are positioned as texts, the four-tiered approach offers a useful frame. Using Luke’s (2000) approach, students would identify the patterns and conventions of the social media post. They would consider the possible cultural meanings in the text and consider different possible readings that could be derived from the text. Students would consider the pragmatic purposes of the text, and what it offers for themselves as well as other readers. Finally, they might consider the perspectives of the numerous authors who contribute to the text, trying to determine their values, attitudes, and intentions, and how the authors wish to influence the readers. Absent and disproportionate voices are also important in this context (Luke, 2000). Critical literacy draws attention to how language operates as a “powerful means of maintaining and reproducing relations of domination” (Janks, 2000, p. 176).
Transformative learning theory extends beyond this critical literacy perspective, highlighting the importance of an experience resulting in personal transformation. The theory has been put into practice across a range of diverse contexts and subjects, for example, “mature aged women returning to study, PhDs at a Swedish Engineering University, and domestic and international students studying at an Australian regional university” (Christie, Carey, Robertson, & Grainger, 2015, p. 9). While Mezirow’s (1978) theory of transformational learning is directed at adult learners, it also has relevance for adolescents, who are essentially in an apprenticeship stage, transitioning from childhood to adulthood, and it has been applied across a comparatively limited range of high school learning experiences, such as in an urban high school social justice course (Harrell-Levy, Kerpelman, & Henry, 2016).

During this phase, adolescents are engaged in reorganising their ideological orientations (Vollebergh, Idema, & Raajmakers, 2001) and undergoing identity development informed by influential “identity formation partners,” with teachers potentially situated as active agents in the shaping of identity (Harrell-Levy & Kerpelman, 2010, p. 77). Mezirow’s (1978) theorisation of perspective transformation encourages introspection and active awareness and challenging of the roles we play in “meeting social expectations” (p. 101). It encourages “consciousness raising,” by which we become aware of our cultural conditionings (Mezirow, 1978, p. 102). This awareness can lead to “a structural reorganization in the way a person looks at himself and his relationships,” which can influence subsequent attitudes and value judgments (Mezirow, 1978, p. 108). In the secondary English classroom, Mezirow’s theory can be drawn upon to introduce new possibilities, practices, and identities to adolescent learners through critical visitation of existing views. Contemporary transformative learning experiences often involve the use of “disorienting dilemmas” that have been designed to engage students in a deeper critical analysis, during which students are encouraged to “challenge the current assumptions on which they act and, if they find them wanting, to change them” (Christie et al., 2015). We would contend that issues of racism in the media, which raise dilemmas for members of discourse communities that permit the promotion of racist views, can generate valuable disorientation, as participants who have otherwise felt enfranchised, sharing similar values and beliefs in other areas, may suddenly find themselves questioning their affiliation with such groups. There are, however, notable differences that arise between the adolescent and more traditional adult learning contexts; for example, the power difference between secondary students and their teachers may be potentially more marked than that between adults and their instructors, and this is significant as it can force compliance with teacher expectations and obscure whether a genuine transformation has occurred, or if students are simply being responsive to the risk of not conforming to their teacher’s position (Harrell-Levy et al., 2016). However, we would argue that this same dynamic is present in many adult education contexts, and as such should not discount the potential of transformational learning for adolescent students, rather, this power imbalance should be
considered across both contexts and mitigated where possible by minimising teacher didacticism and optimising student-centered learning.

**Practical Use of a Perspective Transformation Approach**

Not only is critical reflection central to critical literacy, it also acts as a trigger for transformative learning leading to perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1990). This article seeks to apply perspective transformation and critical literacy lenses and approaches in a proposed English-learning experience to be conducted in a mainstream secondary school classroom in Australia. While critical literacy is a feature of the Australian national English curriculum, critical and creative thinking is a specified general capability in this curriculum that must be considered and taught across all subject areas from the outset of schooling (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2013), and as such, this approach should enable adolescent students to build on critical literacy skills fostered from their early years of schooling.

This experience moves through five key stages as per Table 1: preteaching, introspection, stimulating awareness, reflection, and action.

**Preteaching.** This learning experience needs to take place in a safe classroom, where students are comfortable with each other and unafraid to articulate their views. This learning experience is recommended for a mature secondary class as students will encounter strong language and mature themes.

At the outset of this learning experience, some basic conceptual and sociohistorical background should be pretaught. Students need to understand the concepts of racism and an informed opinion, as these two concepts are central to the inquiry. Ideas about White fragility and implicit and explicit racism should be examined. Understanding of Australia’s history of colonial oppression and racism should also be fostered. Students can also be provided more unequivocal frames to consider, such as White supremacy and its history, both locally and globally. Students will need to move toward a capacity to make distinctions between structural inequalities and social phenomenon based upon race and racial prejudice. Students should also consider the difference between an opinion and an informed opinion. Understanding the broader context of the Australian national identity and what attitudes, beliefs, and values contribute to it is also of relevance.

**Introspection.** Students could be guided to critically and privately reflect on their current attitudes toward race in Australia, with a focus on their views about whether or not racism exists in Australian sports culture. They should also explore their constraints, identifying barriers to having a holistic understanding of race in Australia, and racism in sport, with consideration of intergenerational transmission of values. As such, they are positioned to be responsive to a cultural ideology, which “places priority on the information readers bring to discourse” (Cadiero-Kaplan,
This will also draw attention to their own potential bias when reading texts, and once recognised, students can look for a more informed response. Students should be made aware of their individual capacity to make powerful individual choices. As such, they should understand that their values and attitudes have been shaped by various sources, such as cultural, historical, and social influences, and that access to further information and consideration through a deliberative process may be necessary in order to create a fully informed opinion.

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<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Focus Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Preteaching</td>
<td>• General discussion and preliminary research</td>
<td>• What is racism?</td>
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<td>• How has racism continued to proliferate in Australian society?</td>
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<td>• How might racism be passed down through families?</td>
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<td>• What is an informed opinion?</td>
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<td>1. Introspection</td>
<td>• Personal reflection</td>
<td>• Where do your values come from?</td>
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<td>• What sources inform your views?</td>
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<td>• Are they sufficient to constitute an informed opinion?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Stimulating</td>
<td>• Introduction to the research questions</td>
<td>• What are the main themes emerging from the data?</td>
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<td>Awareness</td>
<td>• Teacher explain and demonstrate how to code the data</td>
<td>• What are the values and attitudes of the group?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Students code the data in groups</td>
<td>• How will you demonstrate what you have learned?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Students present their findings to the research questions in an appropriate form</td>
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<td>3. Reflection</td>
<td>• Personal reflection</td>
<td>• How have your attitudes changed from the original introspection?</td>
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<td>• How has your understanding of the issues changed?</td>
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<td>• What more do you need to know about this issue to fully understand it?</td>
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<td>4. Action</td>
<td>• Take action</td>
<td>• What further investigation will you undertake?</td>
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<td>• What educational product will you produce?</td>
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**Stimulating awareness.** Stimulating awareness is central to perspective transformation. This phase preferences group learning as this is “the ideal medium for fostering transformative learning” (Taylor, 2000, p. 10). After students have engaged in private introspection, they can actively engage with a relevant sports online discourse community. Group learning will also encourage students to question various readings of the text to critically understand their own viewpoint.

While this process could be undertaken around any relevant post from any online discourse community in which antisocial values are thriving, for the purposes of this article, the AFL online discourse community has been selected, with the AFL Facebook discourse community the focus of the inquiry. Students will be asked to consider how analysis of the comments on a post about AFL football player and multiple-accolade winning indigenous sportsman Adam Goodes can contribute to an understanding of a discourse communities’ position on racism. For this purpose, students will use thematic analysis to investigate how racism is defined and debated in a social media post.

On May 29, 2015, a video of Adam Goodes celebrating a goal during the AFLs Indigenous Round was shared by the administrators of the AFL Facebook page under the title “Goodes’ unique celebration” (AFL, 2015 May). We have selected this post as an example, as this dance was viewed as highly controversial both within the AFL community and the broader community. Local, national, and international television, print, and online media extensively covered the celebration, and Goodes was both commended and criticised. For the purposes of this analysis, the events that came after are not crucial to understanding the reaction to this event, even though these included Goodes temporarily withdrawing from the AFL as a consequence of a significant escalation in the crowd booing and his resignation from the sport. However, students should be made familiar with the time line of events which act as significant precursors to this celebration; the fact that Goodes had been subject to increasing levels of crowd vilification since he pointed out a young opposition supporter in May 2013 who subjected him to a racist slur needs to be taken into account to understand the response of the discourse community, which seems almost unrelated to the video in many cases. This incident, which led to the ejection of the supporter, was also highly publicised and controversial (Burdsey & Gorman, 2015). Some autobiographical knowledge about Goodes is also essential; students need to understand that this booing occurred despite the fact Goodes is a dual Brownlow medallist (fairest and best player) and former Australian of the Year (2014) for his efforts supporting Indigenous youth.

As per the screenshot in Figure 1, the written component of this post is minimal (Adam Goodes celebrates uniquely in #IndigenousRound) and the neutral adjective “unique” is employed twice, both in the title and in aforementioned brief written contribution. As such, the AFL ostensibly does not position the reader to respond favourably or negatively towards the celebration; however, in the context of the history of “othering” through the exoticization of indigenous people and non-European Australians, the adjective is not truly neutral. Instead, it implies
uniqueness through failure to conform to the acceptable White heteropatriarchy, emphasising difference and noncompliance. Students will have the opportunity to further explore these ideas in the learning journey proposed herein. The video is only 9 s in length and shows Adam Goodes kicking a goal and then only the beginning of Goodes’ celebratory dance. As of September 9, there had been 271,806 views of this page, with 4,110 “likes,” 572 shares, and 2,975 comments.

For the purposes of analysis, the three “top comments” from this post and their replies can be critically examined by students to provide insight into value-laden views aired in the online discourse community. Rather than discussing the celebration, the primary focus in the three “top comments” is the booing of Adam Goodes. The top comment (C1) by Sean Brigden, “Jack watts (sic) gets booed every week. Don’t hear him crying about it. He just drops himself to the Victorian Football League (VFL)” accuses Goodes of comparatively poor sportsmanship for daring to complain about the way he has been treated. This post also implies that the booing of Goodes is not racially motivated, as Jack Watts is not a player of Indigenous

Figure 1. Screen shot from Australian Football League Facebook page, September 9, 2015.
origin, suggesting that booing of players is not based on race. This post had 689 likes and 28 replies.

The second most popular comment (C2) posted by Gary Robert also seeks to establish that derision of Goodes is not racially motivated, rather a product of his ostensibly flawed personality, with Robert stating, “This is why he gets booed, nothing to do with the colour of his skin but more to do with him being a prick of a person.” This post had 1,568 likes and 102 replies.

The third most popular comment (C3) by Daniel Eagle supports the previous contention in C1 and C2, stating, “People don’t boo him because of race. He is the one that makes it about race.” As in the previous posts, this suggests that booing of Goodes is not due to race and that Goodes is personally responsible for making it “about race,” implying that Goodes has something to gain from this and that it is entirely a self-generated concern without any external foundation. This post has 831 likes and 21 replies.

The students can be guided by the following research question:

1. According to this, online discourse community is the booing of Adam Goodes racially motivated? Why/why not?
2. What perspectives and knowledge is missing from this discussion? Why is the absence of these voices significant?

Students can then begin to code the top three comments and their replies by developing themes and subthemes where appropriate. The first few replies to the C1 can be coded as a class as a demonstration. For example, in reply to C1, Christine Kelly wrote:

People don’t boo him because of his race or colour. People boo him because he’s a big girl’s blouse who gets upset and makes a big song and dance when someone looks at him wrong and then gets Australian of the Year for his troubles.

Kelly argues that the booing of Adam Goodes is not racially motivated. To understand what she attributes the issue to, one needs to understand the type of colloquial language being employed to insult him. A “big girl’s blouse” is a colloquial idiom of British origin used to imply that a male is feminine and “ineffectual” (Ayto, 2010). “Song and dance” is a British/Australian idiom suggesting that someone is being overly dramatic.

Therefore, this comment suggests that the issue has arisen due to perceived personal failings of Goodes, perhaps also responsive to a perception that Goodes failed to conform to normative masculine roles, which are culturally constructed and racialized. It also ultimately challenges the legitimacy of Goodes’ Australian of the Year Award. As students progress through this material in their group, they will negotiate themes and theme allocation. They will also notice how colloquial language is used in the community, particularly for the purpose of insult. Language is reflective of culture, therefore the use of colloquialism in the insults is indicative of the masculine ideal the Australian culture celebrates.
Students can present their findings to Questions 1 and 2 in any appropriate form. A poem can accommodate a meaningful expression of these findings as effectively as a persuasive written piece. Visual representations such as models and infographics may also portray an understanding of the complex relationships within the community.

Reflection. The value of reflective practice is that students can introspect about how they think and how their culture, experiences, the media, and many other factors can influence this (Lyons, 2010). Students can compare their beliefs and attitudes from before the critical analysis of the text and afterward. They may also reflect upon the influences not just of the text and comments but also the manner in which their peers have responded and how this has influenced their response. Although a reflection of how their views may have changed or cemented is important at the end of the project, it is also an important process to occur throughout. This would allow their reflections to then inform their reading of the text. This learning experience highlights the importance of undergoing a deliberative process before consolidating opinions based on limited information. True to a critical literacy perspective, it highlights the significance of the missing voices, knowledge, and perspectives that can be excluded from a discourse community (Luke, 2000). Students could also reflect on how these comments align to that of the wider community in Australia or how they differ. This reflection could then explore how Australian society would like to see itself and how these comments may challenge or support that ideal.

Action. Students should decide what action they will take as a consequence of this learning experience. For example, students may wish to:

- Conduct further research to identify the missing perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of the issue. Other online or off-line media outlets will be a valuable starting point.
- Locate this incident within a broader social and/or historical framework and within recent debated incidents and policies.
- Produce an educational product to challenge the perpetuation of racist views in an online discourse community (not necessarily the AFL). For example, students might produce an interactive website, an informative video clip, a suite of paper-based educational resources, or some other item.
- Investigate how this issue raises doubts about the legitimacy of a community’s efforts to reduce racial vilification. For example, the fact that the AFL allows racist comments to prevail on its Facebook community despite its administrative powers and its efforts to implement an antivilification culture can be read as endorsement or acceptance of racism as inevitable.

There is strong potential for cross-curricular work at this stage, as this project could also have relevance for art as well as the humanities and social sciences.
Discussion

Conducting this learning experience in a secondary English classroom would be worthwhile but also challenging for many reasons. The coarse language used in the text may preclude its use in some conservative classrooms. In addition, the currency of the issue, and the fact that many students within the class may, at least initially, share a common value set with the most vociferous racists in the AFL online discourse community, make this a very sensitive matter to deal with. It is not suggested that this learning experience would be appropriate to all secondary classes; it should be attempted after close discernment of suitability. Perhaps most significant would be potential discomfort for Indigenous participants. While some Indigenous students may be keen to complete this exercise, particularly in light of the media’s ambivalence, others may not wish to engage, particularly if they are a minority. Careful consideration should be given to these issues before proceeding.

In addition to issues arising from class members empathetic with the views of the online discourse community, it is likely that there may be some students who are members of the discourse community. Due to the nature of the text, it is possible that their comments may even appear on the post being examined. If, as previously contended, members of a sports community may join for the sense of shared purpose, belonging, and common identity (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Wann, 2006), participants who do not wish to be identified as racist by membership or association with the group may experience discomfort. This ideological dissension can create rifts that cause participants to question their place within the community. While dissent and the adoption of adversarial positions and language is typically part of discourse community membership, the extent to which retaining membership is felt to be endorsement of views that are not palatable may determine whether membership is maintained after this learning experience. This discomfort is ultimately positive as it can lead to the critical location of the self and revision of identity, which may result in self-exclusion, resistance, or simply ignoring the issue in the discourse community to maintain membership.

Completing this activity will also raise student awareness of the level of scrutiny that posts in online communities may receive; students need to be willing to be held to account for their views. It is unlikely that when Christine Kelly labelled Goodes a big girl’s blouse on Facebook that she ever imagined that her views would be explored in an academic paper. Participation in this activity will reinforce the fact that views published in the public domain are open to analysis and interpretation from those who may not subscribe to the permitted values that are approved within the discourse community. Antisocial values that may be accepted in an online discourse community may easily be removed or “shared” beyond its border, making viewpoints subject to interpretation under very different lenses. What may be seen as “normal” in an online discourse community may not—when taken out of its original context—be considered a popular opinion by different groups in the wider community.
Conclusion

As educators, we often avoid directly challenging antisocial views in the classroom, particularly when powerful discourse communities support these views. However, developing a critical understanding of how texts can act to establish, maintain, and reenforce antisocial views can be undertaken as part of a widely accepted critical literacy approach to English. Using current texts with high accessibility and relevance cannot only enhance learner engagement through harnessing textual authenticity, it can also lead to perspective transformation that can have a lasting impact on an individual and broader social level. Indigenous Australians have been subject to racist policies throughout postcolonial Australian history, and although these have been addressed to some extent in recent times, racist attitudes toward Australia’s original inhabitants prevail. Fostering perspective transformation in this area isn’t just an educational project; it is also a social project that can be used to address the issue of intergenerational transmission of racism.

As this area is so controversial, even in current times, the authors are hoping to use acceptance of this article as a basis to seek further funding in order to test the efficacy of the proposed learning experience. The authors have personally felt the recent rise in vociferous articulation of racist views in the Australian media as a failing of education to adequately address this issue, and we are eager to actively seek to address this blight on our national culture. We look to the informing perspective of critical literacy and perspective transformation to strongly ground our approach and hope to further collective understanding of how English educators can play a vital role as effective agents for social change.

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