

**TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE:
CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICE**

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This thesis is presented for the Master of Education (Research)

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

.....

(Emma Stachowicz)

ABSTRACT

TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICE

Emma Stachowicz

In this action research study, I worked with a class of twenty-five students as a teacher-researcher to describe and document how the students' thoughts and learning changed over the course of an eleven-week Society and Environment program I developed entitled "Australian Immigration". Specifically, this study draws on student work samples and my own reflective journal writings to document if and how changes took place in their understanding of prejudice and stereotypes. This study was situated in a mono-cultural community and took place at a small independent College in Australia. The program was specifically designed to challenge the current held stereotypes and prejudices' that many students carry with them towards minority groups in Australian society.

The results of this study demonstrate that when students are challenged to question their own values and beliefs in context to the community in which they live, that changes can take place in their learning. It was a challenge as a teacher-researcher to engage students in a meaningful curriculum that asks them to use their lived experiences as the basis for

learning. As such, this study also documents the 'struggles' I faced as a practitioner in the twenty first century engaging students in a democratic curriculum that asked them to pose problems, collaborate and use critical thinking to connect with 'big picture' ideas related to social justice.

The data that was collected suggests, that as both teacher and researcher trying to implement and engage students in a democratic curriculum is hard. The students carried with them misconceptions about Australia's past and as a result had formed prejudice and stereotypes towards minority groups. The data also revealed that the community in which the students lived contributed towards the historical understanding they had. This understanding was one sided and biased. Although I struggled to connect with some students, who opted to take a more independent route to completing their work, I did have six students who successfully followed through with their group work and documentary tasks. Of the six that finished the assessment, they all made 'big picture' connections. Of the nineteen that opted to 'go it alone' there were only a few who were able to 'connect' with the ideas. The six students who worked in groups and the three independent students were my 'glimmers of hope'. The work they produced demonstrated how students' thoughts and learning changed over the duration of the eleven-week Society and Environment Program.

This study concludes that teacher designed curriculum based on the values of social justice, critical inquiry and social action is far more desirable and effective than teaching to the test to bring about social change.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AISWA	Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia
ACARA	Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority
COW	Computer on Wheels
DETTWA	Department of Education and Training Western Australia
EDWA	Education Department Western Australia
HTAA	History Teachers Association of Australia
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MSE	Moderated Standards in Education
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy
S&E LA	Society and Environment Learning Area
WALNA	Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment