Ceding to the 'Other':
A Search for Relational Teaching Praxis

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy – 0079

Faculty of Education

Monash University

February 2018

Abstract

This autoethnographic thesis focuses on a beginning teacher's first four years of practice in an Indigenous community in Australia. Classrooms in 'remote Indigenous communities' continue to be sites of dilemma and ethical complexity for educators due to the 'cultural interface' (Nakata, 2007) and 'border crossings' (Giroux, 2005) experienced by all members of the space. Research through self-study was conducted to explore the liminal space of beginning praxis in such a context, focusing on my evolving dispositions toward 'social justice' and seeking to 'do good' through a teaching role. Coming from a perspective of praxis and reflexivity, I began by using autoethnographic journaling to examine what it means for a non-Indigenous teacher to construct an ethical teaching praxis in a politically complex setting, in a community of cultural and linguistic diversity. Through the frameworks of postcolonial theory, in particular Third Space theory and the work of Indigenous Australian theorists around Indigenous Knowledge Systems, I problematised my own positioning and privilege and the assumptions that underpinned my beginning practice. The research question asked how a non-Indigenous teacher could ethically interact with notions of 'difference' and 'otherness' in the classroom. This lead to further questions about how the institution affected my standpoint and approach to finding an ethical practice, the relationship between the othering experienced by Indigenous students, Indigenous teachers and non-Indigenous teachers. I also raised questions about how relationships might reduce othering in the school environment, and what role critical theory might have to play in these relationships.

To investigate these questions further, I utilised yarning circle interviews with three Indigenous teacher colleagues in order to receive feedback on my practice and learn from Indigenous pedagogies and ways of knowing, being and doing. These interviews provided a collaborative reflexivity, weaving Indigenous knowledge from local Indigenous teachers into the reflections

on practice. The initial findings were grouped under the themes of examining the teacher Self, examining constructs of Social Justice, examining the workings of the Institution and my relationship to it, and reflections on Othering. Through the work of Karen Martin's seminal work 'Please Knock Before You Enter' and the notion of Third Space, four aspects of relational praxis were constructed from the analysis. I propose these aspects as beginning points for non-Indigenous teachers seeking to decolonise their own practice and reduce the othering of classroom participants. These aspects are Knocking (after Karen Martin), Unsettling, Ceding and Collaborating.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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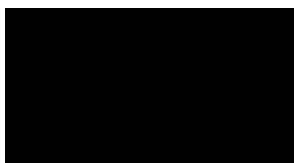
Date: 5th February 2018

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Betty, Jan and Brenda for their roles in my beginning teacher career. Many of the classroom relationships I have enjoyed have been possible because of your example of patient and kind teaching. You have taught me much about relationships and I look forward to future opportunities to learn more from you. Thank you for teaching me how to position myself as a learner, and for constantly reminding me of how much there is that I do not know. Thank you for your patience with my questions and misunderstandings, and for working with me to search for better ways to do things in our shared classrooms. Thank you for helping me to start to learn how to work in a team. Thank you for patiently building those bridges with me from one way of knowing into another knowledge. Thank you for your generous openness not just with me but with any newcomer into your place. Thank you for giving me courage to speak about the difficult terrain of teaching respectfully, and letting me enter into your space as an Other.

As this project drew to a close, the community lost a key figure who had been an inspiration and an image of third space to me in the duration of my study and work in the community. The loss of such a key figure and friend consolidated the sense that there is still much work to do to ensure that voices like hers are heard. I wish to acknowledge Daiguma and her legacy, and to continue the work that she began and inspired in all of us. I hope that any gains made in this research alleviate the future work of Indigenous teachers like her as more of us become able to be allies. Thank you for your role in our lives, Daiguma.

I wish to acknowledge the colleagues that I worked alongside in the community. Olga, Mason and Tim provided endless support and the sense of a sounding board from which to process my experiences.

Thank you to all of my longsuffering family and friends for your support throughout this entire journey.

Thank you to Matthew Sidebottham for his assistance in proofreading, and his close attention to detail.

Thank you to Nicola and Glenn for your painstaking work guiding me, reminding me and encouraging me to continue. Nicola thank you for your patient feedback and for knowing how

to keep motivation high. Glenn, thank you for your kind and constant mentorship, not only in research but also in teaching and learning. Thank you for the many hours you have spent reading and providing critical feedback. Thank you for apprenticing me into research and helping me to find the key stories in my hundreds of pages of reflections.

To the students that learned with me, thank you for the way you have impacted my life. I hope that 'my mob' can continue to improve the way we interact with you at the interface, and that the journey of walking in different worlds is increasingly something we can partner with you in.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Beginnings

This thesis is the result of the autoethnographic reflections I undertook as a young teacher in my first four years of teaching in an Indigenous community that I will call Clear River. Recognising that being a non-Indigenous teacher in an Indigenous community creates unique challenges in terms of sense-making, ethics, and pedagogy, I began a research project in order to probe what it meant to develop ethical praxis in such an environment. By ethical praxis, I mean that I wanted to conduct my teaching practice in a way that was informed by a political awareness of the social justice implications of my teaching and its effect on my students' lives, and a desire that every aspect of my teaching practice be ethical and informed by the moral context of teaching (Kemmis & Smith, 2008, p. 4). I knew that, in order to do the kind of pedagogical work I wished to do, I needed an awareness of the colonised context in which I was working. I wished to harness my awareness of this context to ensure that my pedagogy did not continue the legacy of harm toward Indigenous people that forms the backdrop to Australia's history.

Early in my teaching studies, I became interested in the 'othering' (Spivak, 1988, p. 289, Staszak, 2009) of Indigenous people that occurs within a western education model. By othering, I refer to the ways in which dominant groups locate marginalised peoples as being on the 'outside'. Such positioning and constructs, in this setting, were a taken-for-granted norm, and served to entrench the silencing of Indigenous voices. In growing awareness of this, I asked what it was that non-Indigenous teachers could develop in their own practice that might reduce these effects. Such questioning involved a reflexivity toward my own standpoint (Cockburn, 2015, p. 12), my thinking, and what shifts ought to occur within my own mind in order to create the conditions under which I might fully respect Indigenous intellectual traditions, and arrange my teaching praxis accordingly. The following pages detail the learning that unfolded – clumsily and messily – as I sought answers to these questions.

1.2 The Research Question

As the focus of the study was my developing ethical praxis, I did not begin with a decisive thematic question and a clear idea of the type of answer I was seeking. I did not know from the outset which themes would emerge as the strongest. I began by reflecting on all the dilemmas and struggles I was facing in seeking to 'do good' in my teaching role.

I began trying to write about my own liminal experiences, but I was increasingly preoccupied by the spaces that my students inhabited. I understood that the sense of the unknown, of transitioning between 'known' and 'unknown' worlds that the students performed every day in entering a western classroom, mirrored my own experiences of liminality. I recognised that a strong sense of the 'in-between' aspect of liminality came from othering and a sense of otherness within the classroom. When I began to see the potential for students to experience othering in the classroom, I recognised that Indigenous teachers would experience this othering as well. These unfolding 'awarenesses' informed the way I reflected on my practice, causing me to be sensitive to the othering and liminality each of us were experiencing in the classroom. This seemed an important consideration – how ought I consider these discomforts and tensions that each member of the classroom were experiencing, given that they could be interrupting or overshadowing the very learning that was taking place?

Liminality became a key concept that I used to describe the dynamics in the classroom. I had been examining the concept of liminality (Rollock, 2012) to understand what was going on within myself – the feeling of being precariously perched between two worlds (both ideologically and physically), the sense of uncertainty about what would happen when I lifted my foot to take a step and had no idea what would happen or where my foot would land after that step was taken. The early use of liminality referred to a phase of entering into an initiation and shedding a past identity in preparation of taking up a new one. Charteris, citing Somerville, describes liminality as an in-between space, one of anticipation, 'a space of becoming in between one state of being and another, where one is working at the limit or the edge of self' (Somerville, 2007, cited in Charteris, 2014, p. 107). We form ourselves and our identities in the relationship and interaction between self and the society, interacting with others and with society. Therefore, when the interactions with society are complex and uncertain, identity becomes complex and uncertain. This was the liminal space I had entered into.

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I conceive of identity here as my subjective view of my ideal self (Rogers, 1980), performed through 'reiteration of norms', (Butler, 1993, p. 94; McNay, p. 177), a 'production that is never complete' (Hall, 1990, p. 222). It has been acknowledged that identity is negotiated whenever one is faced with a new identity (Young, Natrajan-Tyagi & Platt, 2014, p. 177), acknowledging that identity is therefore "multiple, contradictory, positional, contextual, partial, intersecting, continual [and] hybridized" (Jewett, 2010, p. 636). Moving to Clear River meant scratching at the surface of my identity, acknowledging how it had been shaped and where its bearings were orientated to. The scratching of my own skin, tearing at it and probing it and seeking to understand it and its confines and limitations, is at the crux of being able to respect and rub up against the skin of others. Originally used by anthropologists theorising on rites of passage (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969), liminality refers to a place of uncertainty, a space in which one has departed from the known and familiar and awaits the new and as-yet-unformed, a threshold of sorts. This is a site of reflexive potential, but also of great risk.

This captured my sense of the space a pedagogue inhabits when only aware of the pedagogies to be rejected. This is how I felt, with only old models of knowing and understanding, with only shadows and glimpses of the new to be created. As I sketched out earlier, I perceived my students to also be in a liminal space, transitioning through border crossings as a daily event just to access an education. Recognising the similarities between the discomfort of the spaces we inhabit allows me to bring myself together with others in a reflexive practice. The understanding and empathy that the concept of liminality lent me, was key to beginning to craft new ways of facing the Other (Levinas, trans. 2006).

Empathy becomes a key component of the relationships formed in classroom interactions, creating the foundation for a dynamic that seeks to understand diverse ways of knowing, being and doing. I speak of empathy as Bloom defines it, as 'the act of coming to experience the world as you think someone else does' (Bloom, 2017, p. 16), making a distinction between the type of empathy that oscilates around the emotion of regarding someone else's pain, and the kind of 'cognitive empathy' (an intellectual act, as distinct from the more emotional response inferred by empathy) that connotes intentionally seeking to understand another's experience of the world (2017, p. 36). Empathy is also at the core of relationships that seek to understand the different positionings individuals take up, or are assigned, and how these positionings shape the understandings we create about the world. Yet with this position also comes the caution of the 'limitations of cognitive access to other individuals' (Lather, 2009, p. 19), and the

imperative to hold in tension the impulse to presume mutuality (p. 20) by affording respectful distance (p. 20).

Connected to empathy, the role of imagination is also key, especially when seeking to enter the world view of an Other. The type of reflexivity that I engage with as a teacher and researcher, in a space where I am seeking to understand knowledge systems of which I am not part, requires the use of imagination. As Charteris has described, such imagination plays a role not only in empathising but also in exercising our agency to imagine alternatives to the current state of being:

> The agentic learner stands back from thought to see what it assumes and what it might accomplish and to imagine how it might differ. He/she critically examines thought and generates new thinking, using not just intellect but also imagination and the senses. (2014, p. 109-110)

At the beginning of my teaching practice I was fixated on 'difference', as I was confronted by it as never before in my life. However, I soon became aware that, even in trying to make sense of this for myself, I was participating in othering. Never was this more evident than when I described my research as 'looking at how I teach students that are other to me', and an Indigenous academic at the table at which I was speaking quickly pointed out to me that my very sentence demonstrated that I was situating myself as the centre, from which my students were Other (Kearney, McIntosh, Perry, Dockett, & Clayton, 2014). It is here that I began to see how my white privilege converged with an awareness of othering. Thus, while I began with the flawed notion of 'students as other to me', an increasingly de-centring project became one of rethinking my view of myself as centre.

As mentioned earlier, studies on the more subtle othering of students, especially as it pertains to teachers' dispositions, are rare compared to studies on the effect of racism on student achievement. Rose has called this aspect of teaching the 'practitioners' blindspot' (M. Rose, 2012). What interested me was observing in great depth the way in which my dispositions unfolded, in order to see my own attitudes as more fluid and less fixed, and to develop skills to overcome these blindspots. In that sense, the story I begin to tell here may be useful in policy development regarding the skills teachers need to effectively interact in settings where otherness is a significant factor, in order to reduce the harmful effects on students. This study is, therefore, an exploration of how the notion of otherness permeates the fabric of daily life in

intricate and subtle ways, and how I as a teacher may alter my own beliefs and dispositions to become more ethical and empathetic. I hope it will provoke thought among other professionals interacting with alterity in the same way. Research has emerged that indicates that, 'For Indigenous children the importance of positive relationships with teachers is vital' (Kearney et al., 2014, p. 5). My gut feeling was that the role of othering in the classroom affected these relationships. It was in this aspect of my practice that I wished to reflect and improve.

1.3 The questions shaping my inquiry

The following questions informed the focus of my research:

1. How might the function of the institution affect a teacher's ethical standpoint?
2. What might the connection be between students' othering, Indigenous teachers' othering, and non-Indigenous teachers' othering within the institution?
3. How might an awareness of white privilege increase a teacher's reflexivity and ethical practice?
4. How might relationships reduce othering within the school environment?
5. How might critical theory be involved in creating strong relationships?

As will become clear in the subsequent section on 'Difference', the question began to focus on the role of 'difference' and 'otherness' in how the members of the classroom were interacting, and what adjustments I ought to make to my thinking and subsequent praxis in order to ensure that I was not othering the members of the classroom. Over time this would grow into an awareness of how relationships were integral to this aim. Thus, the project developed further to incorporate an examination of ethical relationships. Beginning my research thrust me into the position of learning to research and learning to teach simultaneously. It is only at the end of the project that I can see how interknit the learnings in both would be.

1.4 Thesis Structure

As there is no pre-determined question, this thesis reads more like an exploration than the traditional question–research–answer model. As such, the traditional thesis mode was not the most relevant model, necessitating that I find new ways to present the journey of my thinking while also acknowledging the requirements that make a piece of doctoral work recognisable to

the academy. Autoethnography bucks this trend. Ellis and Adams describe a successful autoethnography as:

> an engaging text… it is a structurally complex and tentative text… a text riddled with passion, danger, politics, and uncertainty… a text that… tries to recognise the ways in which others are implicated in the work. (2014, p. 28)

As much of the research necessitated thinking deeply about my ontology, epistemology and ways of thinking, the need to perform an exegesis on my 'research paradigm', as such, seems artificial. Instead I wish to spell out the multiple modes of thinking that shape my ways of knowing, and how these are pertinent to how I interact with the ways of knowing of Others.

A thesis of this nature also makes it near impossible to restrict 'findings' to their own section. Arguably, knowledge is not always generated in a linear way. As my thinking and reflections unfolded, themes emerged in my journals that helped me pinpoint what was most challenging to my developing praxis. These are described in 'Mapping the Thematic Terrain'. It was when I focused on these themes, and began to extrapolate what I was gleaning from reflecting on these dilemmas, that the knowledge that I constituted as my 'findings' emerged, described in 'Aspects of Relational Praxis'.

To write about the literature surrounding a particular field, when the method of inquiry is autoethnographic, is not a straightforward process. It does not follow the standard mode of asking a research question, surveying the field for what has already been said, conducting the research and then answering the question. Rather, autoethnography takes the shape of a deep exploration of a field, and focused attention on what is found during this exploration. As such, rather than plotting research on a map like a cartographer, as an autoethnographer my literature review takes rather more likeness to a meandering walk that is mapped after the fact, re-tracing my steps and pointing out the proverbial landmarks along the way. Consider this the invitation to revisit where I have been, and what I found along the way.

While it would have been easier to – at the outset – select one or two authors from whom to draw my analysis, and while this had originally been my intention, literature emerged as I hungrily read anything that could help me understand my students and my developing praxis. I did not know at the outset which theorists would have the biggest impact on my developing praxis. It is, therefore, logical that different authors emerge at different points of my theoretical

engagement and my chronological narrative. As such, there is no distinct 'literature review', aside from that which shaped my view at the outset of my beginning praxis.

1.5 On Specific Words

Throughout the thesis, I will refer to my privilege. I wish to outline here, once, that my identity involves the intersection of the markers of being a white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied cis woman. When I refer to my privilege throughout the narrative, I am referring to all of these intersections, which provide me with a level of structural privilege relative to the experiences of other individuals with whom I was working and interacting. Tilley-Lubbs explains why such understanding of ourselves is critical at the outset of a critical autoethnographic project:

> I can recognise myself as a member of the dominant and powerful culture only by first analysing how social norms position power and privilege, and then by understanding my own cultural heritage within the dominant culture. Through intense reflection and introspection, I can understand the insidious nature of power and privilege, and the way they 'reach into the very fibre' of my being, and that 'are inserted in [my] actions and attitudes'. (2016, p. 6, citing Foucault, 1980, p. 39)

I wish also to address my dilemmas in referring to Indigenous peoples in this document. 'Indigenous' is the term I have chosen as, to the best of my knowledge at this point in time, it is the most respectful term to use while also protecting the identity of the specific community in which I worked. My preference is to refer to people by the names that they themselves choose and identify with, and I would usually refer to the distinct language and tribal groups that my colleagues have identified with and belong to. However, in the context of this writing, where anonymity is to be protected, to refer to these distinct language and cultural groups would be to erase some of this anonymity. Thus I use 'Indigenous' as shorthand for Indigenous Australian peoples (while acknowledging that some would prefer not to be called 'Australian', and some would prefer to be called Aboriginal people). I recognise that 'Indigenous' is not ideal, as it implies a homogeneity that does not exist within the diverse First Nations people of Australia. I acknowledge the complexities and issues around such nomenclature and note this from the beginning. I use this term acknowledging its limitations, but having understood it to be the best term to stand in where I am not able to use more specific and meaningful terms.

Some local language words utilised in Clear River will appear where appropriate throughout the thesis, particularly in interview transcriptions. These appear in italics and a glossary is included at the end of the text.

I wish also to preface my use of the word 'other' throughout the thesis. To begin with, I used this word, with some problematic implications, to refer to difference and to locate the Indigenous community as 'different to myself', thus rendering them the exoticised 'Other' that Said (1978) spoke of in colonial discourse. Toward the end of the thesis, however, I began to use the 'other' in the sense Levinas (Drichel, 2012) speaks of, as a human interaction between the self and the other. I have used capitalisation for the first usage but not the second to denote the difference.

2 Context

2.1 Situating my Standpoint

In line with my belief that knowledge is constructed from distinct standpoints and locations, it seems logical to situate this research within the backdrop of my life to date, and the varying locations that have informed my views. In many autoethnographic accounts, this might be where the author situates their subjugation and the challenges they face. I do not wish this introduction to be read as situating my subjugation. This introduction ought to be read as a rich description of how my life experiences shaped an openness to thinking about privilege and disadvantage, and to empathising with the experiences of the students I would come to teach and learn alongside. Throughout the thesis, a theme will emerge of balancing both my awareness of my privilege and the ways that I too am subjugated.

I was born in the Yarra Valley of Victoria. Raised in a family where I was one of a growing tribe of six, stretching the limits of a working class income, relative financial disadvantage was a tenet of life I grew familiar with. I grew up in the quiet safety of the semi-rural eastern suburbs of Melbourne, where the small collection of different schools that I attended all had in common the lush greenery that fringed their perimeters and the simplicity of country kids with nothing to prove.

Race was a topic I came to think about early in life. As my mother's family had arrived from Sri Lanka at the height of the White Australia Policy, and her olive skin had invited cruel taunting from her schoolmates that she still spoke about well into her adult life, we were raised to be anti-racist. I knew that she had been encouraged to stay in from the sun as a child so she wouldn't 'get too dark', such was the internalised prejudice that shaped her early life. When Pauline Hanson (a right-wing politician known for her anti-immigration and anti-multicultural views) appeared on our television screens when I was in primary school, mum made sure to provoke us to think about what her ideology meant to the people we loved, thus putting a face on the people most harmed by her rhetoric.

In Year 7, I had my first experience of being on the receiving end of othering, although at the time I would have summed it up in words far less elegant. My parents had shifted us to my

third school, a parent-controlled Christian school in the rural town of Monbulk. It had never occurred to me that people actually paid attention to one another's financial status until this point. A friend of mine, Hannah, had recently been over to my house, and I had noticed her take in our small weatherboard house, our second hand furniture and our tiny television, but did not know to feel any shame about this. The following week she was wearing a new outfit at school. I thought she looked great. 'Awesome outfit! Where'd you get it?' My friend smirked. 'Ah, don't worry. You couldn't afford it.'

I'm not sure that it immediately even struck me as worth being offended over. When I try to recall that moment in time, all I remember is thinking that it was a silly thing to be hung up over. Yet I also remember the awkward, squirming, crawling feeling of being relegated to a category that I had not chosen, and I wanted to fight my way out of that discursively created box. I felt a need to prove her wrong.

My opportunity came a few weeks later. A friend of ours had a mother who bought her magazines, which made her the holder of glossy, gaudy social capital at lunchtime. We would rest the magazine on a table in our classroom, and clamber over each other to all look at the pages simultaneously. We came across an advert for those Fabergé collector eggs, ovoid porcelain status symbols resplendent in gem-infused décor. Hannah scoffed at the price.

'Who would pay that much for something that ugly?'

I saw my chance to reposition my financial status and pounced.

'I don't know, I don't think that price is THAT expensive! I'd buy it.'

My attempt backfired. Hannah turned her contempt onto me.

'Pfft. You're not very clever with money then.'

I smarted for the second time in a fortnight. No matter how much I tried, it seemed Hannah's mind was made up and there was not going to be much I could do to wrangle free from her imposed identity markers on me. I foreground this vignette to highlight that there have been moments in my life that have given me enough of a taste of othering, albeit in very manageable doses, that I can transport myself back to these moments to garner empathy when I observe others subjected to more dehumanising treatment.

I cannot remember a single event in my life that would have created any association between virtue and wealth, in my mind. Financial status seemed as arbitrary as hair colour to young Jess. I saw my parents working just as hard as my peers' parents did. I was never subjected to any of the discourses that construct low-income families as lazy or simply not motivated enough. The first time I did hear this, I responded with stupor and amazement that this could possibly be offered as an excuse or explanation, especially as it applied to poverty. Thus, when I began to see people like Hannah behaving as though such status was something to be ashamed of, I made sense of it as a flaw in her thinking. For me, this had nothing to do with a person's virtue or lack, work ethic or motivation, or lack thereof. I don't think I gave it enough thought to explain disadvantage through structural means way back in my first year of high school. This would come later, probably during Year 11 Health and Human Development and studying the poverty cycle.

My parent's desire to 'serve' in some capacity that contributed to the proverbial 'greater good' was a shaping factor in my young life. By fourteen, my family was relocating to the green rolling hills of Gippsland, to establish and staff a youth rehabilitation centre on a beef farm. By the age of 16 I was beginning my own intellectual turn. I was reading books about overturning fascist governments and questioning the validity of the church environment in which I had grown up. Between the pages of books and the scattered question marks across the pages of my journals, I found myself challenging the very ontology that had shaped my early years.

Health and Human Development was my favourite subject in my senior secondary (Victorian Certificate of Education) studies. I remember ranting to mum about how important free trade was, and that next time there was a demonstration for that cause, I would go and join in rather than watch from the sidelines. Mum patiently explained to me that I probably meant 'fair trade', and that free trade could not be further from what I meant.

Such a personal revolution lead to a desire to put my money where my mouth was concerning my new personal ethics. That included joining a soup van, trundling with five older ladies through the back streets of the Latrobe Valley, delivering small serves of soup in polystyrene cups to a range of people in need. These moments were at the same time the most eye-opening and transformative moments for an 18-year-old revolutionary.

One of our deliveries was to an old Indigenous man whose name I cannot recall, but who I remember being nicknamed 'Billy' by the passengers in our van. I was serving soup into cups

in his kitchen one day when he began to serenade us on a tiny electric-blue ukulele. I looked up and was taken by the poetry of the scene: behind him, the walls were plastered with photos of his family, covering every available inch. Even the large chest freezer in the corner was a literal work of art, with sharpie illustrations by his nieces and nephews transforming the sterile white canvas. And there he was, flannel shirt and track pants, blue uke with wiry strings spiralling up toward his chin, and a shock of greying hair framing his smiling face. At 18 years old, he was the first Indigenous person with whom I had interacted.

My university studies took me further into my thinking crusade. I opted out of the visual arts course that I had begun in favour of pursuing sociology and Indigenous studies in an arts degree. It was here, this late in my education, that the magnitude of the injustices done to Indigenous people fully established itself in my growing mind. This coincided with the ground breaking release of the *First Australians* (Perkins, Nowra, Cole & Dale, 2008) series on television, and I was in awe that I had made it this far through my education without recognising the full gravity of all that had happened in the lives of First Nations people. Mine had been, up to this point, an education in which I learned about Captain Cook and the white fellas who had 'discovered' Australia. My mother and I watched this series together that year, the final year of her life. We would sit in silence, occasionally shaking our heads at one another in disbelief, sometimes pausing to pass the tissues. As the loss of her father early in her life had caused her profound pain, my mother empathised deeply with the stories of families torn apart. Both of us had been studying that year, me with my double degree and her with a supplementary year of study to update her twenty-year-old diploma of education. We compared notes during units on Indigenous education. I think I probably expressed some desire to teach Indigenous students one day, a logical progression from being moved by something to wanting to translate it into helpful action. Perhaps this very sentiment is representative of where Kowal's 'white anti-racists' (2015) began life in the green leafy suburbs in the south.

Halfway through my teaching degree, we lost my mother to an abrupt takeover by cancer. My education degree became a blur, except for the two classes that had captured my imagination and, somehow, stirred enough passion to keep me both attending and engaging with ideas. One was delivered by an anarchist from the United States, who gave us time to dwell and deliberate on the neoliberal political contexts of education, and encouraged us to see the political in seemingly 'neutral' schooling practices. Here, where every week we faithfully arranged the chairs into a circle in line with our lecturer's espoused values, questioning was the expected

mode of interaction. It was a room of connection-making – finding the invisible yet causal relationships between the decisions that are made 'out there' in policy and economics, and connecting them like so many stood-up dominoes all the way back to the decisions and pressures placed on little old me, fledgling teacher.

The other class was a Research Unit. This was the first time I had heard of Action Research, and I remember – as I read and highlighted the column of photocopied prose that justified the logic of teachers' thinking and reflecting and returning to the everyday of their practice with big questions in mind – resolving that this would define the way I approached my teaching. Given free reign for the assessment for this subject, I opted to conduct a literature review of Teaching for Social Justice. Against the backdrop of constant ache and dull throb of a family in bereavement, having some sense of purpose (at least way off in the horizon of my eventual teaching practice) that connected to my core values and ethics, was some kind of metaphysical lifeline pulling me through this time. My literature review sent me further into the literary arms of Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux, and by association, Joe Kincheloe and Rethinking Schools, and the North American wing of critical pedagogy and emancipatory education. It was in the process of completing this literature review that it occurred to me for the first time that 'teaching for social justice' did not just equate to teaching middle-class white kids about poverty and fair trade; but could be traced like a trail of dominoes back to the very core of a teacher's personal ethics, disposition and projected beliefs about the world. It was here that the notion of praxis became more than just an annoying alternative pronunciation of 'practice'.

I was, however, stirred by awareness of issues such as the cessation of bilingual education through the 'Compulsory English Teaching for the First Four Hours' policy, as mediated through my viewing of media such as the current affairs program *Four Corners* (Whitmont, 2009). With a 'first four hours' (Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2009) policy – in which English had to be the 'language of learning' for the first four hours of the school day, relegating local Indigenous languages to the last few moments of the school day – the bilingual programs that had taken decades to develop, and that ensured a linguistic two-way learning in many schools around the Northern Territory, were effectively brought to an end. This had quite an impact on me in my teacher education journey. While my distance from the physical location and lack of proximity to the issue prevented me fully understanding the complexities of bilingual education, and the inner workings of policy at this level, I was able to gather (especially from elders' voices throughout interviews presented in a Four Corners

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documentary) that within Indigenous education, in addition to the statistical 'gap' of which I was cognisant, a significant issue was the space given or refused to Indigenous knowledges. This was manifested through epistemology that was not being given space within the western schooling environment. I had grasped 'the idea that knowledge is also colonised and, therefore, it needs to be de-colonised' (Mignolo, 2007, p. 3) and armed with a growing awareness of the ways that Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin, 2008) were not being given place in Indigenous education settings, let alone wider Australia, I desired to decolonise the learning spaces I was to work in. I believed that Indigenous knowledges were being marginalised within the educational institution, perhaps under the guise of failed programs and restricted funding. It was a desire to contribute to remedying this perceived inequality that I brought to my teaching position in Clear River.

The pedagogies that I was drawn to in these early years of my pre-career were those of a dialogic, critical nature, seeking to awaken students' critical faculties. I dreamt of the kind of pedagogy that would embody my 'social justice' aims in their vague and as-yet untested theoretical state in my mind.

Responsibility for my younger siblings became a large component of my life over the years of my university education, due in part to the tyranny of distance between Gippsland and the locations where my extended family lived. I believe my studies in these areas of social justice and critical pedagogy buoyed me through some otherwise extremely difficult times. This made studying and reading critical theorists an enjoyable part of my life, albeit one undertaken between loads of washing, preparing dinners and driving siblings to family counselling appointments.

Two of my lecturers became like aunties to me in this period of time. They responded positively to the questions I posed in classes, they engaged with my mind and recommended readings that I would enjoy, they checked in when they could see that I was not coping. This very human strength of these two critical pedagogues was not only crucial for that period of my life but also for opening my mind to research and academia being something in which I wanted to engage. It was a sense of belonging and 'family' that drew me in to participate more than I would otherwise have done.

The way in which the division of 'caring' labour had fallen to me as the remaining woman in the family led me to a new openness toward feminism and gender constructs, which had

previously been ridiculed ideologies in my childhood. I even remember a ten-year-old Jess parodying Helen Reddy's 'I am Woman' to my dad, changing the lyrics to insinuate the bad breath and obesity on the part of the female protagonist ('I've lost weight before, but look how much I've gained!'). I knew it would get a laugh and it did. Now, however, freed from toeing the line of a religious dislike for female empowerment, and from a standpoint that allowed me to see what Helen Reddy had been on about all those years earlier, I began to recognise that feminist thought was entirely commensurate with the social justice ethics with which I was beginning to identify. I had begun to feel the pressure through the way that 'emotional intelligence' and 'maternal instinct' were cited as a reason that responsibility often fell to me. I began to become aware of gendered emotional labour and how it was creating my situation. In addition, I began to see how these roles were constructed and justified in people's minds, thus opening my thinking to a more constructivist way of seeing the world. The famously non-capitalised bell hooks became my favourite reading companion, her calm words a soothing balm in the absence of a mother's advice and a panacea for no longer being able to metaphorically sit at her feet.

Although I would never have opted out of playing this role in my siblings' lives, I would later tell my students in Clear River that I yearned for the way that their kinship system worked. I respected the way that multiple aunties shared responsibility for children, and the fact that multiple people had their eyes on any one child and were able to step in when someone else could not. When a student tragically lost her mother, I observed both the familiar raw vulnerability and grief, but then also an army of women enclosing her and picking up the mantle. The family networks I encountered later in Clear River would ring both familiar and foreign: familiar because I witnessed people stepping up to roles that were not their burden to take on (at least, not according to a western nuclear family model); foreign because I could not imagine what it would be like to live in a network that, at its strongest and most functional, wove together hundreds of arms ready to catch a child when they fell. The western model had failed me and my siblings in many ways, and I could not even imagine what it might feel like to experience such a strong and unquestioning network to fall back on. This raw wound became the opening through which new thoughts could seep in. I was seeing the limits of a western world view, and an openness to othered ways of being was made possible.

In my final year of university, I was offered the opportunity to travel to complete a school placement. I applied for the international Cook Islands placement, and was accepted. I attended

the orientation and, throughout the presentation, could not escape the inexplicable knot in my gut. I had a strong sensation that I wasn't to go. The unfamiliar feeling dragged its way through the meeting, evolving from an inability to focus on anything the trip coordinator was saying, to pure nausea, to mild panic. Then I felt guilty: so many people had applied and I had been so lucky to be accepted, what was wrong with me? Not even the thought of weekends in a bikini exploring a different part of the world could quell my anxiety.

Clear River was the other unique placement opportunity offered at that stage by my university. I could not shake the feeling that I would prefer to go on that trip. With no other way to explain it than a gut feeling that the remote community was where I ought to go, I held my breath, drafted an email, read it to my housemates for prior approval, and sent it to the Cook Islands placement coordinator. I didn't even have the guts to call and withdraw. Her response was kind but intimated that I had no guarantee I would get into the Clear River placement. I knew this but withdrew and applied for Clear River.

The email that confirmed I was accepted into the Clear River placement was an exhilarating moment. I wonder if the same gut feeling that led me to the placement had the same origins as the new feeling now – an anticipation that something was about to tip my life upside down.

Perhaps I was afraid I would see things in a community that I had never seen before. Things that would shatter my sanitary, book-bound ideas about Indigenous people. Maybe there was some discomfort about whether I would cope, that I wouldn't be able to put my money where my mouth was and survive a difficult environment far outside my life experience to date. Perhaps I was afraid that the pedagogies I had begun to espouse would not hold water here.

When I saw one of my favourite musicians board the same Darwin-bound flight as me and my nine other placement student peers, I took it as a good omen. To my relief, upon arriving in the town, I was breath-taken at the pure seascape beside the town, and landscapes that I did not even know existed in Australia. I settled quickly into the school. The lessons were challenging (I never knew that there existed so many non-verbal ways to disrupt a class… my students had these skills in spades) and I had to revise, revise, revise each lesson plan and then still find that I had 'pitched' my lesson wrong and it had either gone over students' heads or disengaged them altogether. My supervising teacher was a patient woman with a warm heart toward the community, and she thoroughly took me under her wing. I was even able to broach my social justice questions with her without her diving for cover.

I immediately saw the kind of teaching I wanted to do. I saw a chance to 'do good' (the very notion of which I would later problematize), to contribute to remedying the issues of disempowerment and inequality faced by Indigenous Australians, and a move outside the stifling status quo for which I had already developed a distaste.

Our placement coordinator, Glenn, had the long ponytail that I had always associated with intuitive thinking and disregard for social dictates. We would laugh at him because, when we asked him a question, he would look off into the distance and a long protracted 'yeaaaaahhhh' would keep us waiting until he had gathered his thoughts and suddenly came back to us a with a reloaded cartridge full of rapid-fire ideas that sent us, stunned, to rethink our entire orientation in life. Thus, conversations with him were enthusiastically embraced by me and a few others, as he was exactly what our genre of postmodern education-system-dismantling critical-thinking young-lefty teacher types were stimulated by. He seemed to understand my orientation toward questioning the entire education system in urban settings, let alone in a place where it was overshadowed by the context of colonialism as well.

My placement peers and I struggled most with the presence of 'the green cards' (basics cards), an apparatus of the recent Intervention that loaded welfare payments onto a card that could only be used on groceries and 'basics'. I wondered about connections between those green cards and the recent Intervention, though to the power relations associated with mining rights and access to financially valuable land. Similarly, I traced the then-principal's enthusiastic presentation of graphed data showing student achievement increases over his time at the school. I saw this as coming from a neoliberal shift occurring in education, manifested through accountability measures and an emphasis on that which was measurable to increase 'productivity' in the teaching workforce (Connell, 2013, p. 107).

These were heady days of late night conversations under the stars with my politically charged placement peers. Because nothing in the town felt 'real', as it was so far removed from our hometowns, it was almost like being on the set of a film, with an augmented sense of reality that made us feel that if we jumped in the air, we might not touch the ground again because perhaps gravity did not apply in a place like this. I stretch the point, but I mean to say that when you are enveloped in a place where it feels like all the rules that govern your every day life are in question, it does not feel entirely that you are operating in reality as you have previously known it. I found that this sensation had the effect of making me fearless. Although it was a

manifestation of the tourist perspective that often characterises white interactions with a place like Clear River, I liked that feeling.

We saw a lot of things that were wrong in how the structures of the town were set up. We saw disempowerment and we daydreamed about what kind of maverick teacher could come in and shake things up by teaching in a way that contextualised us on aboriginal land. My friend Josh went to great lengths to create maths software by which the students could count magpie geese flying through the sky, instead of plastic counters. We were full of good intentions, yet lacking entirely in an acknowledgement of the agency of Indigenous people, who had their own thoughts on the matter and were most definitely not sitting and waiting for us to come and provide them with a solution. I would later reflect on this time by summing up to anyone who would listen, 'When I was first here, I had all the answers. The longer I'm here, the less I know'.

I had lamented to a friend that the longer I was in my teaching degree, the less I felt that I really wanted to be a teacher. However, on this placement, I was finding a kind of teaching that appealed to all of my strongest impulses: to help, to deconstruct, to deviate from the expected path.

Late one afternoon after the school day, I was sprawled on the grass under a tree, outside the school music room, reading a book, when the deputy principal's head appeared over me, eclipsing the sky. 'Are you interested in working here next year?' I sat up, embarrassed, and pulled a leaf from my hair. 'Yes', I said. I was a bit surprised at my own response. I hadn't yet realised how resolved I had become that I wanted to do this. It was as though some subconscious part of my mind knew that this was a scenario in which it was better to commit first and think about it later.

While the contract would not be formalised for another three months, the repercussions were instant. I went home and told my partner-at-the-time, and our relationship quickly disintegrated as we messily parted ways to pursue different lives. My possessions were boxed up and stored in anticipation of being transported to the Northern Territory. I sat with my siblings and asked how they would feel about me moving to the opposite side of the country. My sister, wise beyond her years at all of fifteen, spoke on behalf of the two others: 'It's your time. We'll be ok'.

I visited one of my 'auntie' lecturers to tell her where my newly acquired qualification was taking me. It was then that she suggested I take the moment in time, as an idealistic critical pedagogue whose rubber was about to hit the road, to document my experiences and make a research project out of it. It had never occurred to me to pursue a masters degree this early in my teaching career, but I could see the vision in the uniqueness of this moment in time. It was with this naïve excitement that the first year of my teaching practice became, not only my first year of teaching in an Indigenous community, but my first year of a masters that would, by the end of a semester, become a doctorate. Thus, I began a project of self-study. In this original inkling of a project, my desire was to 'road test' my pedagogical aims, seeking to be a 'good' teacher who helped to redress wrongs within the small patch of society in which I had chosen to live.

Stunned friends gathered to send me off. At this stage I was anticipating a six-month contract. In the mad flurry of the travel itinerary I had created for myself, I found myself flying from New York City to Melbourne to Darwin to Clear River in a sickening succession of days. The disorientation manifested itself physically and I'm pretty sure I slept for eighty per cent of my first week in Clear River. I nearly cried the first time I walked to the shops to buy food for my empty pantry, and then got lost and couldn't remember which street my house was on. The camp dogs knew. I started heading down the wrong street and a cluster of eight of them politely and enthusiastically informed me this was definitely not my street, that I was unequivocally unwelcome, and to go back and try again. I complied. My journals fall remarkably silent at this point in time but there is one legible line that scrawls, 'I must be a glutton for punishment'.

My first year oscillated between sending me home in tears of despair ('I just… can't… make them… listen!') and triumphant moments of exhilaration at successful connections and relationships with my students. My first lesson, in which I gathered 28 students around a sheet of butchers paper with markers to write what they wanted 'our classroom' to be like, quickly descended into chaos. One of the only legible inscriptions they left for me said 'lollies'. The art teacher kindly left a compilation of photocopied 'crowd control' activities on my desk to help me out.

I had somehow lucked out and been assigned to what I still believe is the most beautiful classroom in the school – elevated on stilts, flooded in natural light with a thriving leafy tree outside the opaque louvres, and with ample space. The legacy of transient teaching staff had

left its stockpiled mark in dusty decade-old resources, photocopied worksheets and accrued furniture clustered like Tetris blocks around the room. Over the year I made it mine and both brightened and cleared out the space. The students and I loved the space, especially the 'reading corner' in which I had hung paper lanterns, causing one student, Josiah, to dub it the 'Chinese corner'.

While my memories now of what I envisaged that teaching to look like are vague and reliant on short journal entries, I knew that I wanted to both respect marginalised culture and enable students to become empowered, whether that be by arranging the chairs in a circle for dialogic conversations, inviting their voices to be heard, or by having elders come and speak as fellow teachers in the classroom. This perspective would be tested, solidified, challenged constantly, and it is with these tensions that the thrust of this research is concerned.

Perhaps out of intuition, perhaps out of not knowing where else to start, the first year defaulted to being a year of establishing myself relationally with the students. I didn't want to 'lord it over' them in the authoritarian models that I had seen on previous placements. I wanted my conduct with students to be infused with respect. My deputy principal, concerned that I would burn myself out, advised me that I ought to find a more efficient way of managing my class, as quietly getting down on the level of a student to have a whispered chat when they were mucking around was not going to be sustainable. But, by some miracle, my technique eventually won out, and although not the most orderly of places, I believe my students felt happy in class and had respect for the fact that I cared about them and did my best to understand where they were coming from. Eventually, I found a way to exhibit healthy authority as a teacher while making this power dynamic visible, and that I intended to use that power to help them to learn, not just to be mean. Over time I became comfortable with a level of empathetic authority that, I perceived, was more effective than oppressive.

I had anticipated throughout my teaching degree that the institution would be a constant nemesis. My anticipation was of having to fight and battle the dictates of the institution, justifying why I was defying it in order to conduct myself in a more ethical way. I was relieved to find that this was not initially the case. The school was a sort of choose-your-own-adventure; there was so little guidance as to what to do that I could make it up completely and justify it to no one. It seemed that the institution (at least in its modern, neoliberal accountability-driven format) had not arrived in Clear River yet. It would arrive about a term

after I did, in the form of a new, highly competent deputy principal who would quickly whip the school into shape. At the same time, a new member of staff arrived who was completing his teaching degree.

I had been a teacher for all of six months. Most support came from a 'team teaching' relationship that mostly consisted of me following someone else's unit plans with only a rudimentary understanding of the justifications or thinking behind them. I was yet to find my bearings in terms of where to set my academic expectations, and my literacy and numeracy teaching was disorganised, haphazard, and marked by low expectations. I was still trying to find the silver bullet of how to help students develop confidence in their identity and culture. I was insecure in what was going on in my class, but most of the time took an unhurried attitude to figuring it all out. I knew if I focused on relationships, I would get my bearings for the rest eventually.

I was approached around September by my principal. He asked me to take on a placement student for three weeks: a student teacher closely connected to a newly appointed senior school leader. I refused, and said that I wasn't ready. My principal's face drew into a thin line, he looked uncomfortable and shifted in his desk chair. 'Let me say this differently, I need you to do me a favour. You need to take this on as a favour to me.' As a young teacher, I felt vulnerable about my interactions with school leadership; still, I did not call this coercion immediately or acknowledge my own right to refuse. I felt cornered and unhappily agreed.

And so I had The Guest in my class for three weeks, only in the mornings, and I kept them as busy as I could. I noticed their impact on my teaching immediately – I felt scattered in the mornings when they arrived and couldn't focus properly to get myself prepared. I agonisingly felt every fumble – the laptop that wouldn't connect to the internet when I tried to show a quick YouTube clip in the morning, the mess on my desk when I tried to find and mark the roll, my face brightening when I struggled to explain something to the class coherently. I spent three weeks teaching like I was holding my breath to the point of passing out. At this point, the possibility of my 'performance' being reported back to leadership had never crossed my mind; it was a mere case of riding it out until this intruder was gone from my class, so that I could return to 'normal' functioning and hopefully do some learning with my class.

Other less pleasant moments were subtle, thinly veiled. I would look up to see them at my desk, having picked up an old maths assessment I had done with the students: basic addition-heavy

skill-and-drill, my earliest attempt at having a record of what the student could do. I saw it in their hand and I saw them looking at me – a look of incredulousness that I could only interpret as 'you call this teaching?!' The thinly-veiled disapproval would still make me flush with embarrassment years later.

In the year after they had been in my class, their position within the school rapidly elevated. Social and professional capital, such as professional development, rendered theirs a position of leadership and made it seem they were privy to how to 'move through the ranks', or even just how to be valued as a member of staff. Within the school they became some sort of symbolic 'Exemplar', the teacher whose practice we were to aspire to. Where previously there had been a reasonable rapport between us, it seemed that all friendliness and congeniality disappeared. In a small community, where space from one another is at a premium, minor attitudinal shifts like this are harshly felt, especially by a vulnerable and not-yet-confident teacher such as I was.

It was probably three months after they had been in my class that I began to wonder if and how they had 'reported' my performance back to leadership, to whom they were closely connected. A friend in the community told me that she had asked for her daughter to be moved up to my class (they were unsatisfied with her performance, and her teacher's, in the class she had been in). The school leadership had told her that this student's current class was academically higher than mine, although it was two year levels below. This mother wanted to know if this was accurate. I didn't know what to say. I didn't think this school leader would try to comment on anything to do with my class, as they simply wouldn't know. They had never set foot in my class; they knew nothing of my teaching ability. On what evidence were they basing this judgment, if not for my placement student 'reporting back'? I didn't know whether they were commenting on the cohort of students I was teaching, or how I structured my learning activities in the class and my ability to differentiate. I will never know the contents of that conversation, what had actually been said or what foundation they based these assumptions on, but I began to feel a certain unsafety, as though I was being analysed, weighed up and being found insufficient, 'in deficit'. This bred a certain distrust, not only in leadership but also in this student teacher I had allowed into my class. The paranoia, paired with my need to be an accepted part of the school community on whom my entire life in the community was based, was crazy-making.

The rapid promotion of one such early career teacher through the school hierarchy, the open valuing of them as an individual, contrasted strongly with the marginalisation and subtle devaluing that seemed to be going on around me as another early career teacher. This served to give me a heightened awareness that there were certain priorities that were valued within the Institution, and certain priorities that were not. I could not help but internalise that the things I was open about valuing and prioritising in my classroom (namely relationships with students, and respect for Indigenous knowledge) perhaps positioned me as a teacher of less value.

It was in micro-interactions such as these that I began to see the way the workings of the Institution shaped my thinking, my priorities and my desire to do what I needed to do to belong, to alleviate the discomfort of the constant liminal space with a feeling that at least the Institution valued me. The difficulties that I faced in this regard are a part of my experience of teaching in this environment that I cannot overlook.

This experience unfolded over a period of time in which two things were happening. One was that the school was increasing its rigour and tightening up its procedures in ways that were more than necessary, given the sloppy functioning that had been my initiation into the teaching world. The other was that I was beginning to voice more my perspectives on issues pertaining to social justice: about the two worlds of knowledge that existed in the community (i.e., that the western education system was not the only knowledge in town), the importance of language in the classroom, and how local Indigenous vision for education should inform what we were doing. I had not yet realised that these two simultaneously occurring things were trains running in opposite directions.

The experience of othering within the institution, of feeling rendered as 'one of *those* teachers', had the unintended effect of assisting me in finding other ways of belonging in the community. This option included reaching out to spend more time with local people and to seek to connect with the community within which I was living. This is important to mention in order to locate my own flawed motivations in seeking to belong. I wish to be transparent about the fact that social belonging affects the way that we interact with each other. I wish to emphasise this so as not to delude myself with ideas of my noble intentions being elevated above the institution. In reality, the relationships that shaped my development as a teacher who valued certain things, were also shaped by my desire for belonging.

When, in my second year of teaching, my class was finally assigned an Indigenous assistant teacher, this relationship became of vital importance both to my standpoint and the way our classroom practice unfolded. While previously I had felt that I was flying blind, trying to imagine what it was like to be in the world of my students, I now had an adult who could communicate that very information to me, who could rightfully instruct me on Indigenous knowledge, with whom I could model respectful relationships between *bininj* and *balanda*. I clumsily set about establishing myself as Betty's ally, a person who wanted to help her in her pursuit of her teaching degree, and wanted her to know that I respected her authority as a knowledge holder. Betty often laughed at me. I think she found it entertaining that, when I spoke to her, I instinctively knelt on the ground beside where she was seated. While I was just doing what felt natural and respectful in interacting with her, I'm not sure she had ever encountered that before.

Betty's family heritage is Yolngu. She played a significant role in her family – a sort of matriarch who took on much responsibility. She was a quiet woman, but she had a reputation for speaking up decisively when necessary, and being able to utilise her authority as woman who 'knows everything' – that is, she had been through every level of ceremony. Betty was a gifted weaver and the fabric of our relationship seemed connected to this art form – much of our time spent together was out on country collecting materials for weaving. Betty was assigned to my class as part of her RITE (Remote Indigenous Teacher Education) training – she needed a certain amount of 'supervised' placement in order to pass. Her previous teacher had not worked well with her, misunderstanding her silences. In our shared classroom, however, Betty became more comfortable with voicing what she was thinking and in 'up the front' classroom delivery. Betty also took seriously the two-way learning that could occur between the two of us as 'experts' in different fields – she allowed me to lead her in matters of the western curriculum and classroom skills, and in exchange taught me as much of her language as I could retain, understandings about ceremony and culture (my comprehension of which was rudimentary), and offered her expertise on connections to cultural knowledge from the curriculum. Betty opted to not complete her teacher training with the arrival of her grand-daughter, choosing instead to take on the role of carer to enable her daughter to complete her Year 12 certificate.

With Betty, I was finally able to express my desire to give space to Indigenous knowledge in this classroom that had, so far, been run on the knowledge most familiar to me. Betty created

excursions in which she taught the girls 'on country' (local vernacular for teaching that occurred on traditionally owned land, grounded in place and local knowledge), using the themes of our English texts as springboards to select the knowledge she would focus on. One significant trip was during a unit of work on 'Water', through which we examined a film text that documented the inequitable access to education faced by many girls around the world due to their need to walk long distances to collect water from bores. Betty took us out to a local beach region to dig for water. With Betty, I felt that we were genuinely sharing the teaching, and we were both happy.

When Betty left my class after two-and-a-half years in order to work with a Prep and Grade 1 class, I felt her absence deeply. The next assistant teacher was Brenda, who worked with me until I took leave in 2016. Brenda too began her RITE training around 2009, and while she chose to leave her studies due to family commitments, she had hopes to one day complete this training. Brenda was a very articulate woman who had worked in many capacities due to her strong communication skills. Brenda had worked at the school previously when the school was bilingual; she took leave from this position after bilingual education was discontinued in 2008, and her role in the classroom with me was her re-entry to teaching after a long absence. Brenda's role within her family was significant, as the mother of four and grandmother of two, with an ongoing family illness taking up much of her time. Brenda was passionate about relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, and took pride in taking in non-Indigenous staff as 'family' and friends. Brenda also helped facilitate the 'Stage 1 Language and Culture' unit, leading interviews and assisting students with translation. Interpretation was another of Brenda's gifts. She was also passionate about remedying the great problem that she saw in terms of non-attending students missing out on a two-way education. She saw her role in teaching as catching the students who otherwise 'fall between the gaps', and spent much of her time in the classroom coming alongside struggling students and assisting them with classwork.

After four years, I was slowly easing into a sort of confidence about teaching in the Clear River environment. The vocabulary I used as a teacher was more appropriate for my audience now. I had a greater grasp on the notion of structuring classes using a 'scaffolding' model, through which the students could slowly gain confidence at a particular skill and take it on when they were ready.

While I was feeling more confident in my abilities to imbue students with strong literacy skills, the uneasy conflict within myself was always present, the ongoing question of what it meant to be ethical and to ensure that my pedagogy was contributing to a more socially just world for Indigenous students. The omnipresence of my research journal (and timely emails from my supervisor inquiring as to its health) gave me a forum in which this question was returned to intentionally. This helped in the sense that, rather than being a constant state of angst and uncertainty about whether the pedagogical work I was doing was 'good', I was actually putting words to these dilemmas and actively seeking to address them. The internal conflict lay in the fact that it felt that my ethical aims were often at odds with at least the discursive world of literacy and the 'progress' narrative behind it.

In 2015, I was assigned a SACE (South Australian Certificate of Education) Stage 1 [Year 11 equivalent] class, a unit of work that contributed to a student's Year 10 or 11 'pattern' (completion of core units of work) that would result in their receipt of a Year 12 Certificate. The unit title I was assigned to teach was 'Stage 1 Language and Culture'. This unit of work is organised to allow multiple entry and exit points for students through flexible work assignments. Ours included posters that labelled an animal in both the local language and English, an interview conducted with an elder, and a project in which students would devise an ICT product that would assist with the strengthening of language and culture in the community. The unit of work was taught by a team including myself and the Language and Culture group, and week by week we would touch base and work together to help students achieve these aims. It was here that Brenda and I got to do some really exciting work, occasionally calling Betty in when she was not busy, and I enjoyed the sense that the trusting relationships we had formed over four years were coming to fruition as we collaborated across these units of work. I thoroughly enjoyed the sense of two knowledge systems interacting with a common goal (enabling students' knowledge to be acknowledged in the form of a high school certificate), and our lessons together were high energy and imbued with a sense of controlled chaos, with many different projects being worked on by as many as 27 students at a time with up to four of us assisting.

Jan became another colleague while teaching these units. Jan is a senior elder in Clear River, and recently completed her RITE training and received her teaching qualification. When I first arrived in Clear River, Jan was deep in her studies but still took time to show me artefacts that I could use in the classroom, such as old Donald Thompson (an anthropologist who had worked

in the the region) books and language diagrams. A familial relationship according to the kinship role Jan had assigned to me meant that I spent time a lot of time socially with Jan. She then became a colleague who I worked closely with in the later years of my first stint in Clear River, as she was a significant member of the Language and Culture team with whom I liaised to deliver the Language and Culture unit. In this liaison, I focused on the requirements needed for students to pass the unit and contribute it to their graduation 'pattern', and Jan facilitated the cultural events necessary for the students to complete the outcomes. She facilitated these events across language groups, all the while abiding by cultural protocols that meant she spent the most time as a 'knowledge holder' when with her language group. Jan holds a unique and significant role in the community, as both an elder and highly knowledgeable woman, and also as a qualified member of the teaching staff at the school. When I later asked her how she wished to be introduced within this thesis, she catalogued the many roles that she played: Elder and senior leader for women's ceremony, looking after a clan as a law and knowledge holder, the role of grandmother and mother 'to have knowledge ongoing for future generations', school councillor, and supervisor for language and culture. She was passionate about two-way education (education that focuses on both western and Indigenous knowledges) and is a highly sought after and influential member of the community.

Jan was a force to be reckoned with when it came to organising elder interviews to be conducted by the students for their studies. She would take the lead, I would bring the keys for the truck and we would gather students into the back of it and drive to the house she directed me to, where she would yell out of the window for a particular *gapula* or *jin-gapula* (old lady or old man) as per Clear River custom. With our interviewee located and picked up, she would take us to a location where we could comfortably conduct an interview, sometimes under a tree, sometimes in a quiet room of the library, sometimes on our classroom floor. Jan's pedagogy involved directing the students like a choir to speak up and ask different questions, and prompting the elders to tell longer stories when she thought they had broached something that was important knowledge that needed to be imparted. I listened to the best of my ability, snatching words that I recognised and pointed-at images in historical books as clues from which I could infer the direction of the conversation. When a student or teacher remembered that I could not follow the rapid fire conversation taking place, I would remind them that I awaited the students' translation so I could then join in and understand!

We were thrilled at the end of the year to have eleven students complete their requirements and pass this subject, a significant achievement given that it more than doubled the rate of completion for other units for that cohort. At the end of this particular year, I was approaching four years of work in Clear River and aware that it was time to spend some time with family. This coincided with the availability of a year's study leave to complete my doctorate. While I deliberated over staying on, I decided that a break from my work in a location so far from where family lived was necessary. My weeks leading up to leaving were full of barbecues with students' families, fish and chips with Betty, Jan and Brenda, as many trips out bush to collect pandanus as I could sustain, and cruising around town with cardboard boxes of treasured possessions to leave with those to whom I owed a debt of gratitude.

I sum up the story of my experiences to date because it is relevant and connected to my belief that our perspectives, and what we believe to be truth, arise from our unique experiences in the world. From the beginning of my early career, I had a good grasp on the notion of praxis – the idea that an ethical teaching pedagogy needed to be developed through serious reflection on how I conducted myself in the world and how this affected real-world issues. Reflexivity and praxis were the two beacons I carried into the uncertainty of beginning teaching in a setting I felt woefully unprepared to teach in – if all else failed, at least these two concepts would help me to continue to improve and correct what I perceived as my own shortcomings in my practice.

Visiting Clear River on placement, I developed a maverick mentality. I was critical of the few overtly racist teachers and the disengagement of the students, and in my mind I began to imagine applying a social justice pedagogy I thought would work. These attitudes were subsequently challenged as I examined my own 'silver bullet' thinking and my presumption that these issues were mine to fix without a basis of relatedness. The resulting data over four years is the story of my own well-meaning attitudes being problematised as my praxis unfolded.

2.2 Clear River

How do I describe a place where I have lived, but have no title to, have no ownership over? Do I describe it in the sterile terms of departmental language, including statistics about residency, school enrolments, school attendance, literacy levels as reported by the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)? Or do I describe the heady smell of saltwater,

the constant murmur of traditional song during the regular ceremonies that took place around town? Do I include the less sanitary but nonetheless novel aspects – wild camp dogs, the permit-controlled presence of alcohol once a fortnight and the resulting fiascos – or do I stick to safe topics like the heat that alternated seasonally between dry and humid, and the red dust that seemed to seep into every garment I wore? Do I remove my experiential lenses completely and then attempt to describe Clear River as the locals would, as those who have most right to speak about the place would describe it? Do I name the language groups, the tribes, the song lines that pass through there? Surely that is not mine to describe. Moreover, the ethical clearance I applied for in order to do this study expects me to make the town anonymous to protect the colleagues and friends whose voices appear within these pages.

I will keep my introduction to Clear River concise. The community is an Indigenous community regarded as 'remote', with a fluctuating population that, including the many surrounding outstations and homelands (small communities of close kin living on land traditionally significant to them), is somewhere under 3000 people. Clear River is a centre for Indigenous culture and language, with over 17 distinct dialects and languages converging in the area, once a trading post.

In terms of physical composition, the town has two small grocery stores, a post office, a small accommodation building, a shire building, an arts centre, an aged care centre, a crèche, a swimming pool, a football oval, an airport, an outdoor store, a mechanic workshop, a ranger station, three take-away food shops, a school, a clinic, and a women's centre from which women's employment initiatives such as cleaning and printmaking are run. The population of Clear River was estimated at around 3000 people at the most recent census, but this takes into account the way in which inhabitants often oscillate between the town and the surrounding outstations.

Education in such a setting brought to the fore many complex issues, as well as the gift of learning to negotiate them. Being a town that is so rich linguistically and culturally, the western education provided through the school is often secondary to the cultural and social events that make up the local lifestyle. While I cringe at mentioning things like attendance and 'low literacy', as they are hashed and rehashed into the stereotypical story of education in Indigenous communities referred to as remote, these are the types of themes that take up a lot of teacher discourse.

3 Beginning the Research

3.1 The Research Question

I have already outlined the themes that emerged in the early phases of the open ended inquiry. Here I explore the more specific question that evolved as the research unfolded.

In seeking to develop an ethical praxis, the question that became most pertinent to me was 'how can teachers respectfully engage with otherness?' This question originated from my observations that non-Indigenous teachers are exposed to, and in a power relationship with, individuals whose lived experience was vastly different to my own. In this position, I was pushed to simultaneously make sense of and interact with this difference. I had become concerned with the way that many of my taken-for-granted beliefs (as a middle-class, white, English-speaking woman) define the way that we respond to those that are 'Othered', and that in so doing this would be having some adverse effect on student dignity, self-esteem and learning. I believed that I had a responsibility to reflect on the ways in which my interactions could either disrupt or entrench issues such as internalised racism, deficit bias and hindered cultural pride in students. This formed the basis of my decision to explore empathetic practices that could be applied to interactions in spaces of otherness and 'liminality' (Burns, 2012). Liminality, for me, described the sense of discomfort and fluidity in this space that was new and unfamiliar to me. This sense of the unknown gave me a heightened awareness of the transformative and reflexive potential of this space.

Early on, I described my research as 'looking at how I teach students that are different to me'; this very sentence demonstrated that I was situating myself as the centre, from which my students were Other (Kearney et al., 2014). With this awareness came an increasingly de-centring project, in which I rethought my view of myself as centre. I seek to avoid placing myself at the centre from which students are othered, instead seeking to examine myself as part of a context, a self interacting with a culture. I acknowledge the ongoing journey that I am on to recognise my own privilege, to hear the dichotomies that I reinforce through my own language, and to always seek and find the residues of imperialism and racism in my own thinking. My ontological turn toward radical openness to other ways of knowing and being, is and always will be ongoing. It is perhaps here that the great paradox of my experience with

autoethnography becomes evident. While the methodology focused on my 'self' as a non-Indigenous person, which I felt to be flawed, it was through the act of reflecting on my self that I became more able to de-centre myself and become aware of my need to deeply listen to othered voices.

Within the educational institution I was also, at times, positioned as an Other. In a political environment where strongly held views regarding Indigenous education clashed with one another, my position as a teacher in pursuit of a socially just pedagogy at times seemed to position me as less of an asset to the Department of Education. However, I believed that voicing political perspectives and values allowed me to experience what many of my Indigenous counterparts were accustomed to, that of being on the outer, of being marginalised. In addition, I felt it morally necessary. While I may have been able to empathise with what othering felt like, I could not ignore the fact that my 'othering' and that of the Indigenous teachers I work with came from different locations. I could, in a sense, choose to be othered, and by altering my behaviours, avoid this othering. My Indigenous counterparts had no such luxury.

It will become apparent throughout the reading of this study that, over time, my perspective shifted from a 'social justice' model (a model of relating in which I was the helper, come to assist the members of the community) to a more specific 'empathic' model (in which the focus became more about genuine interpersonal relationships and empathising with all human others. Empathy became a key component of the relationships formed in classroom interactions, creating the foundation for a dynamic that sought to understand diverse ways of knowing, being and doing. Empathy also informed relationships that sought to understand the differing positionings that individuals took up, or were assigned, and how these differing positionings shape the understandings we create about the world.

3.2 Sensing a Dichotomy

Early on in my teaching praxis, I observed that my focus was divided – it oscillated between what I felt obligated to do at school (become a proficient teacher who could competently tick the many boxes required in my duties) and the ideals of critical pedagogy I had begun with. The two agendas seemed at odds. I felt ashamed of the way that the ethos of my study did not knit with the ethos of my emerging classroom practice in the way I had envisaged. I felt dishonest when I came back to my autoethnographic journals and wrote of ideals that referred

back to critical pedagogy, critical race, emancipation – because, in the day-to-day reality of learning to be a teacher, these were not themes I seemed to spend most of my time thinking about. I was distracted by another business – the business of keeping my head above water and trying to teach in a way I felt I was bettering the lives of my students in measurable literacy outcomes. This feeling was exacerbated by leadership that consistently raised the bar of what we ought to be able to achieve within our classrooms. I felt positioned in deficit as a teacher, and this intensified the heady motivation that came with 'proving myself', by way of directives to produce more data, more evidence of student growth, and more effective and efficient achievement.

Occasionally, though, there were moments that I felt I could wholeheartedly write about the marriage of my teaching practice and my ethical ideals. The relational aspect of teaching was one aspect I took pride in – my aims to, first, do no harm, to have positive, healthy relationships with those with whom I worked – and every now and then dialogue would be sparked and we would put away the literacy and numeracy work for the day and engage in moments of frank and transformative conversation in which we would discuss pertinent themes of race, achievement, otherness – and these episodes gave me hope.

A vulnerability emerged when I began to sense the erosion of my own trust in critical-pedagogy-as-social-justice to answer the questions I was asking. Much has been written on critical or social justice pedagogies (for example, Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2005; Hooks, 2003; Kincheloe, 2004). I do not wish to perform an exegesis here on the work done, as that does not fall within the scope of this study. These were key in shaping the motivations, questions and outcomes with which my fledgling pedagogies began. What I do wish to acknowledge is that a shift occurred in my thinking, from believing that I could simply enact the writings of these authors to find a socially just pedagogy, to finding that such a pedagogy is situational, contextual – bound in place and in relationship with people: not a disembodied and dislocated theory to simply be carried out (Somerville, et al, 2012).

I could write deftly in the prose of critical pedagogy, grasping and wielding the concepts that I had learnt to adore in my undergraduate degree, connecting with them as sense-making concepts that helped me see the relationship between social justice and education. Yet suddenly I began to question these ideas in my context. The visions these concepts gave me (a circular classroom setting where dialogue took place instead of teacher-directed learning, where power

was constantly challenged in every manifestation, where my students took the lead) seemed increasingly incommensurate with what I felt able to do within my classroom. My attempts to embody this felt increasingly like trying to enter an environment already rich with context and politically fraught (a white education institution trying to carry out its social order on an unwilling, colonised audience) and trying to ram in my square peg solution. Previously, I had envisaged drawing on de-schooling practices to liberate my students – moving further away from mere rituals like sitting in rows and raising hands in favour of getting back to the essence of what learning was, as Dewey (1963) and Illich (1973) had encouraged me to. Systemic discourse in the local school environment seemed to say that, for the white institution to work in this context, its rules needed to be abided by and I was becoming increasingly colonised by this – I was trying to school society, not 'de-school' it (Illich, 1973). I was seeking to establish classroom behaviours rather than analysing and dismantling them with my students. I was trying to establish order, not question the role of order to begin with. I was trying to survive, not trying to question the hegemony of the institution I was part of. Increasingly, I felt colonised by the idea that students preferred, even felt more secure with, me laying down the law, establishing boundaries and playing the role of 'knower', so surely I was doing the right thing now? I began to realise that my endeavours for dialogic classroom – for rethinking the power dynamics with my students and decolonising that classroom – were far more difficult to put into practice than I anticipated.

When I discussed this seeming disconnect in my practice with other colleagues, even those informed by critical backgrounds concurred that the notions I was trying to bring to the classroom (dialogue, democracy, etc) were artefacts of perhaps the best kind of western classroom. The more I learned about the inner workings of teaching English as an additional language, the more I recognised that the kinds of classroom practices I was trying to use were situated in particular settings, workable with students from particular backgrounds, literate in particular western discursive practices (Wells, 2007). For my students in Clear River, my best attempts at bringing those kinds of dynamics only created confusion and isolation, disorientation and marginalisation. While previously I thought I knew what it meant to teach for social justice, this was now in crisis. Perhaps there was work to be done that preceded the possibilities I had previously dreamed of? Either way, this crisis enabled me to become more aware of the pertinent issues in front of me: namely, the othering that was occurring within the classroom and wider school community.

I have used the terms 'colonised' and 'decolonised' here, and I ought to take pause to clarify my meanings around these. Morgenson (2012) has succinctly outlined the aims of decolonisation through utilising Indigenous methodologies to talk back to western institutions and knowledge: 'By exposing normative knowledge production as being not only non-Indigenous but colonial, they denaturalise power within settler societies and ground knowledge production in decolonisation' (p. 805). Thus, for me, the word 'colonisation' denotes the norming of western ways as superior, with all of the subtle and not-so-subtle behaviours and thinking that follow suit; and 'decolonisation' refers to running counter to this through exposing the colonialist tendencies within ourselves and the education institution, and replacing these narratives with more Indigenous-centric knowledge and approaches.

These notions, as I have used them, refer to the ongoing intellectual processes of colonisation that continue to exist in this a 'postcolonial' era. I refer to the ways that the supposed superiority of western ways, laws and education were held over 'out groups' to the extent that ways of knowing being and doing outside of this canon were devalued and marginalised. My understanding of colonisation posits that much of the ongoing and insidious process happens in minds – both mine as a Western educator, and in the minds of my students and members of the community. If I was to engage in decolonising processes, those that questioned and ran counter to Western primacy and progress narratives, it too would occur in my mind and I would be questioning my own taken-for-granted logic at every step. Yet to understand the subtle ways of both colonisation and decolonisation in my setting was to see the way that my very thoughts could be both colonised and decolonised. Whose voice was I favouring, and whose logic was abided by in the most innermost of my thoughts? This was the locus of colonisation for me.

Thus, the decolonising processes I was trying to participate in were dual. In my teaching, I was seeking to decolonise my pedagogy. In my research, I was seeking to learn how to think in a way that shifted my position from tacitly dominant middle-class white woman to a more sensitive, listening and intuitive, reflective and decolonised human being. I draw on decolonising and Indigenous methodologies, characterised by Martin (2003) as recognising Indigenous worldviews, knowledges and realities; honouring cultural protocols and social mores, emphasising social, historical and political contexts, privileging voices and experiences of Aboriginal people and identifying and redressing the issues important to them (p. 205). I wanted to learn from these methodologies without falling into appropriation or connoisseurship of them.

3.3   New Ontological Spaces

I had begun to interact with the concepts that I felt might be able to help me – concepts around reducing othering, postcolonial spaces and discursive interactions. I became interested in the way in which material spaces play a role in 'reconstituting relations of power' (Hirst & Vadeboncoeur, 2006, p. 205). This developed into an interest in Third Spaces (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996) and liminal space (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2007; Jarvis, 2007).

Third Space, as originally addressed by Bhabha and further investigated by Soja, is the articulation of an ontological space that overcomes binaries in our lived experiences. Coming from an emphasis on the need for spatiality in the way we understand the world around us, Third Space addresses the way in which much of our experience is broken up into discursively accepted binaries: male/female, subjective/objective, Indigenous/non-Indigenous, scientific/mystic.

In overcoming such dualistic, essentialist thinking, Third Space offers to open up 'our spatial imaginaries… to any attempt to confine thought and political action to only two alternatives, by interjecting an-Other set of choices' (Soja, 1996, p. 5). A 'creative process of restructuring' is engaged, not in order to ignore the binary constructions altogether, but to 'draw[s] selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives' (Soja, 1996, p. 5).

I desired to create a 'new' model for how the classroom would work. As I surveyed my options for being a 'good' teacher in Clear River, I saw only 'old ways', that is, old clichéd templates available to me for dealing with the epistemological differences between my students and me, in the way our understanding of the nature of knowledge and the 'reality' of our world comes from different places. I hoped that if I could learn to reduce othering, and to understand the perspective of the Others in my classroom, the Otherness would be replaced by a different, more accepting and unifying dynamic. I hoped that I could pursue the creation of a new way of operating, by collaborating with the Indigenous assistant teacher and my students. Thus, my project began with two key ideas – liminality and otherness.

In searching for an ethical beginning teacher praxis in a racially and politically diverse context, I recognised that there was a gap in the literature addressing the reflexivity of non-Indigenous teachers trying to 'do good'. While this work will not close this gap, it seeks to step into it and

to begin to sketch out some practices that can reduce the othering of Indigenous people and their intellectual traditions in the schooling space.

3.4 Dilemmas and Limitations

Here I take some time to engage with the limitations of my stories, and the dilemmas of my research. I additionally cover some important preliminaries to the contents of the thesis, some silences and underplayed aspects, as well as some themes that will emerge more strongly toward the end of the journey.

I firstly wish to disclose the way the act of reflection enabled me to repeatedly catch myself enacting reductionist, colonising ways of thinking about this research. I had a beginner's grasp on both colonisation as a historical and ongoing tradition, and the way that it manifested in the education system in Clear River through standardised and neoliberal practices such as normalising white or urban experiences and standardising the 'products' of education into yearly achievement levels that, by implication, positioned Indigenous students as deficient. However, whenever I caught a glimpse of myself in my reflections, I saw an image of someone falling into the tropes of the expert, the connoisseur, of reductionist definition-obsession as I tried to grapple with these dilemmas. Here is where I was failing in decolonising dispositions, where the colonising gaze was still evident in my thinking. How do I understand and respect without 'owning' and smothering? How do I construct new ideas when I am so close to a topic that has been pillaged for research gain for so many hundreds of years? How do I critique my own colonial logic, embedded in the way I tried to make sense of my professional practice in a neoliberal setting? The line between the neoliberal agenda of the institution, and the pervasive taken-for-granted beliefs and attitudes that I already had, became blurred. I recognised that, in still seeing myself as saviour and centre, I may speak all the right things but my internal attitudes are subject to ongoing transformation and decolonisation. This is where reflexivity toward these taken-for-granted norms became essential.

Another fine line I am aware of is the difference between studying what can be learned from difference and reducing othering, and simply devolving into a study of the 'Other' (Denzin & Giardina, 2009), further entrenching stereotypes and status quo. It was a long time before it dawned on me that perhaps the nomenclature of referring to all these challenges as 'otherness', served to entrench the otherness I purported to be opposed to. Perhaps labelling all the complex

experiences under this one umbrella served only to further solidify the othering that my students were experiencing. After all, naming something does not excuse it or erase its effects. Naming the othering that I saw could be a first step, but if all I did was slap that label onto everything around me, I was achieving nil in the movement to try to reduce this othering.

While I document the stories and learnings that occurred for me over my time teaching in Clear River, I by no means see myself as having 'arrived' in reducing othering and being inclusive as an educator. This project merely represents the experience of one teacher and the learnings that may be available therein. This captures a slice in time, one part of an ongoing and lifelong attempt to decolonise my own mind and reduce my contribution to othering and exclusion in my teaching practice and life.

I recognise the limitations of a white non-Indigenous woman speaking about Indigenous education, and have chosen instead to limit the scope of the study to purely how a white non-Indigenous teacher can seek to position themselves and ally themselves with Indigenous communities in order to 'first do no harm' and to seek an ethical teaching praxis. My research focuses on myself as a non-Indigenous teacher and it is this position that I wish to 'speak back to'. I do not see myself as a connoisseur of either Indigenous people or of intercultural relationships. I see myself on a trajectory of learning about how to be respectful of all intellectual traditions. This is a starting point, a continuing journey of learning to do relationships with respect.

I do not hold any claim of cornering the market of experiences that a teacher might have within such a space. I do not claim to have portrayed the entire spectrum of potential experiences and reflections – only a glimpse. My story is only one.

I have sought to avoid speaking 'about' Indigenous people. Bhabha cautions of what this would produce:

> a strategy of containment where the Other text is forever the exegetical horizon of difference, never the active agent of articulation. The Other is cited, quoted, framed, illuminated… The Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse. (1996, pp. 65-66)

Nakata's research (2007) embodies this, in his detailing of a history of imperialistic description of Indigenous people. It is these tropes that I wish to avoid entirely. Yet in acknowledging my

own fallibility, I recognise in myself the boisterous caricature of the western thinker, always naming and always articulating but never listening to the Other's articulation and enactment of their own self.

One key silence in this study is that of Indigenous student voices. Because the teacher is the subject of study, collegiate partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers are the focus. Limitations of the project include the absence of comprehensive data in the student voice. However, as I constantly sought informal feedback as part of my practice, student voices are present through narratives of their expressions and how I learned about their subjectivities through what they expressed in class. I acknowledge that, in this format, their voices are mediated by my own. In the early stages of the study, I dismissed the notion of collecting data from my students as too much of a conflict of interest. Over the course of the study I have rethought this and recognised that, if I completed a similar study in future, I would recognise the need to formalise the student voice that created the 'feedback' on which I was reflecting on my developing practice. However, the scope of this study is confined to the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and the feedback and dialogue created in those relationships.

I recognise also the risks to relationships when relationships become a focus of writing of this nature. Josselson speaks about the danger of romanticising, of rose-coloured glasses when we are speaking about our relationships (1996). An additional danger in this type of writing is that of using the 'relational capital' generated between myself and my Indigenous colleagues as a means of self-promotion. Yet another caution might be against non-Indigenous people becoming over-reliant on relationships with Indigenous people in similar contexts. I foreshadow the following discussions of my experiences and relationships with the fact that these tensions are held at all times, but do not diminish the integral role that relating and relationships play in such work.

I highlight the delicate relationship between privilege and subjugation that will become evident throughout the unfolding story of the thesis. The ongoing struggle within the community, embedded in a history of colonisation, racism and intergenerational trauma (J. Atkinson, 2002), highlights my privilege at not facing these struggles. Tilley-Lubbs has described the tension that I navigate:

> [W]hile I investigate the social, political, and economic contexts that have shaped my perspective, I can recognise myself as a potential oppressor, an important revelation that influences me as a researcher, especially in vulnerable communities. (2016, p. 5)

And yet, while acknowledging my potential to be an oppressor, I also at times feel powerless and silenced. Within the institution, both I and my Indigenous colleagues find ourselves subjugated in different ways. The delicate balance and tension that emerges from this is that of finding common ground and relatedness within our unique struggles, in order to set up ontological practices (such as knocking, unsettling, ceding and collaboration) that lead to partnerships.

An acknowledgement that I must make from the outset is that gender plays a role in my experiences, and therefore the relationships that can be formed in partnerships. My relationships described here are with older Indigenous women, and when I speak about partnerships an assumption is made about appropriate partnering of people. I cannot imply that the same relational interactions would be possible if I were a man interacting with these Indigenous women, for example. Consideration is also given to the unique relational interactions that come with kinship systems and Indigenous ways of relating and fitting together. These all bring to bear on the relationships that are possible. It is my wish that my experiences be understood with this in mind and that my exhortations for partnerships and collaboration be viewed within the context of appropriate partnering as per the wishes of Indigenous colleagues and communities.

Language is another aspect that has presence within the thesis but has not been extrapolated to its full extent. Language played a large role in the relationships within the school environment, shaping the kinds of conversations that could be entered into, contributing to subjugation of speakers of non-dominant languages, and creating additional challenges to relationships through othering and notions of difference. Yet, language also played a role in the building of relationships – for example, the step into a deeper partnership that occurred when I began learning language from the Indigenous teacher with whom I was working. While language is not at the forefront of this project, I wish to highlight that it is present within the kinds of relationships formed and the kind of knowledge produced within this project. I was able to reflect on the role of language as initiation, as learning of language was the way that my Indigenous counterparts initiated deepening friendship. In my English-centric view, it took a while for me to grasp how important it would be for my colleagues to feel understood in their

own language. My imagination had not yet extended into the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Sapir, 1929; Whorf, 1940) that language shapes our very thinking, fully enough to understand the essential role language might play in relationship. While I began to recognise this, the scope of this project has not done justice to this vital aspect of relating in linguistically diverse places.

I acknowledge the power I have in selecting narratives from years of journals in Clear River. I take this responsibility seriously. I have presented the narratives that best explain the themes that have emerged for me, as the subject of this study. In so doing I have at times culled beautiful stories that have warmed me to the core, and at other times excluded narratives that best exemplify the extreme challenges and conundrums that I was unable to resolve. This is not in an attempt to censor, but simply a consideration of the space within these two covers.

3.5 *Benefiting from working in an Indigenous Community*

I believe it necessary within both a project and career oriented around the notion of 'doing good,' to acknowledge the benefits that I have received from such work in order to avoid positioning my self as simply a white do-gooder. Applebaum (2010) has highlighted the way that 'white moral standing is one of the ways that whites benefit from the system' (p. 4) and I recognise that my positioning as a teacher 'doing good' cannot be understood without recognising that I benefit from this system.

In doing so, I must be honest in admitting that my white moral standing as an 'ethical practitioner,' and as a woman completing a doctorate through working in an Indigenous community, is a way that I have benefitted from the very system I hope to alter. I acknowledge the way that I have benefitted in more ways than can be counted from living and working in place that has taught me so much, and from the permission from Indigenous people to conduct research and to ultimately grow and benefit from this situation.

I believe that, as a non-Indigenous teacher in an Indigenous space, systematic privilege makes it effortless for me to benefit financially and through other forms of capital, 'on the backs of' Indigenous communities. This aspect has not ceased to disturb me throughout the course of this project. I acknowledge that I benefitted financially from my work in Clear River, and that I benefit from the attainment of a doctorate through my self-study in this space. I cannot divest myself from the connection to my own privilege in this context. I sit uneasily with the notion

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of benefitting from the politically fraught context of Indigenous education through pursuing a doctorate, and wish to acknowledge this benefit and make it transparent from the outset. I see this aspect as a counterbalance to my own sensation of being a 'helper,' in that my 'help' comes in return for fiscal benefits and, in some contexts, social capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 47); a reality check that reminds me I am not, after all, anyone's saviour, but an employed individual.

I must acknowledge here that as my original motivations for both working in Clear River and studying my work in doctoral form, were to do 'good' and 'help'. These motivations, I acknowledge, are part of the paraphernalia of whiteness, especially whiteness that is seeking to offset its own guilt and implicitness in disadvantage. In acknowledging this, an ongoing dilemma for me has been how to divest myself of the saviour positioning (Razack, 2001, p. 170). I am still motivated to do the right thing by the communities in which I work; however, the very act of writing about and for communities still places me on a tightrope from which I can easily fall at any time, back into the tropes of being the helpful white saviour. I call myself out on this at the outset. While I have sought out the positioning of 'student' from the outset, the tendency for white positioning runs deep, and I recognise my own fallacies in that respect.

Aveling describes a 'journey from my hitherto "emancipatory" position grounded in a white western paradigm, to being a reasonably effective ally', which 'has taken time and necessitated an in-depth exploration… that critically deconstructs whiteness' (2013, p. 206). While Aveling came to the position of choosing not to conduct research in Indigenous spaces, I have come to a different position. Given that I was already a teacher and already in an Indigenous space, I felt that by directing the focus of my research onto my self and other selves in a similar position to me, I might be able to make headway in how we as non-Indigenous people interact in these spaces. That said, I, with Aveling, fear falling 'straight back into the intellectually arrogant trap of thinking that we know what we are doing' (2013, p. 207). With Aveling, the focus then turned to how I could 'contribute in some small way to the study of decolonising methodologies by speaking 'to my own mob' (Kessaris, 2006, p. 360).

4 Research Methodology

4.1 Seeking to Understand Paradigms whilst Seeking to Understand Difference

To begin to outline the themes that would come to emerge throughout the project, I include a story that I wrote while teaching my students and struggling to get my head around the notions of radical difference outlined by Kowal (2015, p. 35). I explore this again later in the thesis. Many times throughout the editing of this thesis I have wanted to retract this story, as the more I have grown to understand the insidious nature of othering, the more I cringe as I can recognise that even these attempts to understand and be reflexive were still embedded in othering discourses. I have ultimately chosen, however, to include this story with the acknowledgement that the premise is flawed, that it walks dangerously close to essentialising and homogenising my students, but that it presents an accurate image of how my mind was working to make sense of what it meant to teach students with whom I did not share an ontology and epistemology. This was one place that my mind journeyed to in making sense of otherness in my teaching setting, and it therefore has a place in the narrative of my sense-making and the kind of thinking that teachers might undertake as they move toward more open and reflexive ways of understanding their students.

4.1.1 A Narrative On Cultural Difference

It is the first day of the school term. All the little Macs are excited and enthusiastic, resplendent in their brand new green, red, blue and yellow uniforms. Class begins and their teacher arrives. She is a PC. She's a lovely PC – warm and enthusiastic. The 'windows' logo is bright and gaudy on her homescreen, yet she compliments her students on the smooth silhouette of the apple carved into theirs.

After the initial salutations, stories of holidays and pre-emptions for the school term, it is on to downloading updates.

The little Macs are enthusiastic to run and collect a blue cable from which they can download at higher speeds. The 'download' button is pressed and the students await the exciting transformation.

It is in the far right corner of the room that the first error signal is heard. Little Mac blushes and looks quietly around hoping no one heard it. At the front of the room another error beeps, this little Mac has no fear about raising his hand. Slowly around the room error after error signal pings, and before long an entire classroom is of little Macs with their arms flailing, calling for teacher.

At first PC thinks this can be addressed easily. We're both computers, after all, she thinks to herself. Both just as capable as one another. She checks the littlest Mac's screen and reads an error code she has never seen before. An error code that never occurred to her, that shouldn't even exist. She's flustered but responds as quickly as she can to each student.

She harbours a slight frustration. Maybe they're just not trying hard enough. Maybe they just don't want their updates. Maybe their home environment doesn't value updates the way she does. Maybe something occurred in their early childhood that effected their hardware?

Technicians are called in. They instruct the PC on better techniques for communicating to the children how to press 'download'. As a class they practice all together – fingers poised over the download key, simultaneously pressing down. They practice this for weeks. Surely rote would enable these little Macs to access what they need.

PC starts to notice other little ways that her instructions are confusing her children. 'What do you mean, Control-Alt-Delete does nothing? Of course it does!'

When the students talk about Mountain Lions and Yosemite, PC smiles and enjoys hearing about their backgrounds. They love to tell stories about how quickly their parents downloaded v10.09.01, and the amazing things that they can do now. The teacher listens, even encourages their stories, but still feels the urgency – they have not yet downloaded Windows 2017 and the rest of the country is preparing to download 2018 as soon as it is released. While their stories about new versions and their grandparents' software are wonderful, the real task at hand is to get these updates downloaded and try to regain some ground.

Occasionally students begin to whine. 'We've dooooooone this before. It still doesn't work! Makes no sense!' PC becomes firm. 'Sorry guys, but if you want to be strong and smart and survive in this world, you need to have Windows 2017. Everyone has

it.' She pauses, and wonders whether to keep talking. She does. 'We're actually an entire version behind the rest of the kids your age in the country, you know.'

She sees little screens around the room dim down, quietly ashamed. She sees the lights go out on some keyboards, she sees others defiantly turn up their volume. Did she say the wrong thing?

She doesn't want to shame the little Macs. She really cares about them deeply. She spends many nights and most of her days agonising over how to enable these downloads. She has even begun reading books on Mac operating systems. She just wants them to succeed in their lives, and the only way she knows how is to have them download the same system she operates on. That will be best for them in the long run… right?

While I recognise the dangers of essentialising categories of difference as though they are as binary as different computer companies, what I was grasping at during this point of my teaching was my crumbling notions of 'the gap', a simple notion of 'difference' that can be remedied (more on this shortly). In its place, I was beginning to recognise in the classroom dynamics notions of radical difference in terms of ontology and epistemology. Kalscheuer cites Hofstede and Hofstede (2012), who have argued that there are 'a few "mental programs"', that are learned in early childhood and become fully internalised and hard to change. They cite these unique programs as being the cause of much intercultural misunderstanding. As Kalscheuer further explicates, these mental programs are 'relatively stable, because once they have been internalised, they become a central component of one's own identity, which cannot be questioned because of the need for certainty' (Kalscheuer, 2008, p. 33). I came to see these mental programs as different ontological standpoints. As a PC operating hopefully and intentionally within a PC educational institution in a Mac community, my thinking became eclipsed by trying to find a 'good' way to understand difference, to try to understand the 'mental programs' my students were operating in. Within the classroom and school discourses, however, the 'close the gap' conception of difference was the one with which I collided day after day – not only in collegial and professional development discussions, but also in my own thinking.

'Closing the Gap' refers to Australian government initiatives that seek to close the statistical disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in markers of health, education and life expectancy (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services

and Indigenous Affairs, 2009). While I had never questioned the logic behind this, and understand the prioritising of remedying severe disadvantage, I began to observe the role that this discourse could play in the education system in terms of erasure. If education was as simple as bringing Indigenous students to 'sameness' with their non-Indigenous counterparts, prioritising of language and culture and alternate knowledge systems becomes erased. These things do not contribute to bringing achievement levels of Indigenous students to commensurability with their non-Indigenous peers, therefore these things are not seen as important.

Emma Kowal's work on 'white anti-racists' (2015) offers a complex look into the very subjectivity (my 'conscious and unconscious sense of self, emotions and desires'; Weedon, 2004, p. 18) that I had taken up in Clear River. Seeking to turn the research gaze from the colonised to the colonisers, Kowal examines not only 'what does it mean for a group of well-meaning, White, left-wing, middle-class people to leave their metropolitan homes to come to the north of Australia and try to empower a group of Indigenous people?' (2015, p. 32), but goes deep into how exactly white anti-racists conceive of 'the gap' and their conceptions of what it means to 'close' it. She begins with the following:

> The one thing that most people who work in Indigenous affairs can agree on is that Aboriginal people are, in general, different from non-Aboriginal people. They have a different history. They have a different culture. Some, especially in the north and the centre of the country, have a different language. They have different family structures, different expectations, different communication styles, and different social worlds. (p. 31)

This is not dissimilar to Stephen Harris's assertion that Indigenous and western cultures are antithetic to one another, featuring more differences than similarities (1990). How we understand this difference brings much to bear on how we go about seeking to make sense this 'difference' and how I as a teacher interact with it.

The gap, as Kowal clarifies, exemplifies the mentality that many non-Indigenous people bring to regarding difference, and the understanding that most government initiatives are built around. Kowal's shorthand for this is that of 'remediable difference… a difference that can be improved' (p. 32). This, she suggests, allows these differences to be made intelligible in a white

person's sense-making in a context of high interpersonal difference. For Kowal, remediable difference:

> entails a set of assumptions about what a 'good' life requires, such as functional housing, Western education, employment opportunities, and freedom from addiction and illness. The idea of 'inequality' is central to the expression of liberalism. We produce a myriad of statistics about those things we consider to constitute a good life, and we strive to equalise the outcomes for non-Indigenous and Indigenous people, to make the lines on the graph converge. (p. 36)

I think about the way we conducted our 'quality control' within the school – we referred to the Year 7 curriculum documents when we are teaching Year 7, and tried to build our students from their current levels of ability, up to where the Year 7 Curriculum document told us they ought to be at. This 'line convergence' notion permeated our functioning at all levels. This perspective was driven by a belief that if we simply explained things clearly enough, and made enough contextual references to fishing and hunting and ceremony and cultural concepts that tie our western education references to something tangible from their lives, our students would suddenly say 'Aha! I understand now!' and take gigantic leaps toward not only 'academic achievement' but also, hidden in the most subtle of our teacher motivations, 'be more *balanda*'. The notion of this gap in understanding and explanations has been applied to medicine as well, through narratives that imply that if the 'information deficit' (Kowal, 2015, p. 39) that stops an Indigenous person from attaining good health is overcome, Indigenous people will attain the same level of health as non-Indigenous counterparts (Trudgen, 2000). This stems from the belief that 'Indigenous people are different to "us" – to non-Indigenous people – but not so different that they are beyond the reach of our interventions' (Kowal, 2015, pp. 39-40). Thus, hope is maintained in the education system's ability to 'help' Indigenous people, and a teacher may carry their head high in conducting their work.

In contrast to remediable difference, Kowal outlines an alternate framework for understanding difference, dubbed 'radical difference', rendering 'remediable difference' untenable. Radical difference denotes differences that I tried to grasp in my narrative about a PC teacher to a classroom of Mac computers. Radical difference proposes an understanding of difference in which there are fundamental points of divergence between the two cultures in question, such that to try to superimpose the values, beliefs, goals, priorities and knowledge of one over the other will not be a successful task, missing the very point of the divergences at the core of the

cultural differences. While remediable difference presumes that the equality 'gap' is ultimately caused by lack or deficit on the part of the culture or community in question, radical difference factors in the agency of these cultures and communities to assert their difference, acknowledging that perhaps these differences are rooted ultimately in completely different ways of understanding and being in the world.

Now we are beginning to creep closer to examining the fundamental crux of my challenges as a teacher and researcher. If we come from completely distinct knowledge systems, thus being deeply different from each other in outlook and understanding of the world, what does it mean to relate, interact and even collaborate from one knowledge system to another? What does it mean to succeed, as both student and teacher, in the in-between spaces? Further, what kind of ontology and epistemology create the discursive environment necessary to engender deep respect and openness to other knowledge systems?

4.2 *Locating 'Knowing, Being and Doing'*

I looked out the window of the little plane. As we took off, the school and its surrounding cluster of houses grew smaller and smaller, until they all but disappeared into the red dirt. The ocean began to eat up the red plains until it was nearly all I could see. I sat back in my seat. I had been told to take this journey but was still confused about what it would mean. My supervisors had told me it was essential that I grasp ontology and epistemology and be able to express my stance within my research project. But to do so, I had to leave Clear River temporarily. When I was in Clear River all I could think about were the present day problems and the challenges I had to overcome within the classroom, the scenarios that I had heard dubbed 'red dirt thinking' (Osborne & Guenther, 2013), the practicalities of the here and now embedded within place and context. That still seemed far more urgent to me than this distant and abstract pursuit. So boarded onto a plane I was, removed from Clear River to take my mind to a different place, to learn to understand paradigms.

Once I had arrived in Melbourne I was swiftly ushered, with hardly enough time to register with a new time zone, jetlag and that weird feeling akin to culture shock, into a room where the two people I had to meet were waiting. It was in this room, far removed from Clear River, that I met two characters, seated at opposite sides of a long table. They introduced themselves as 'Positivist' and 'Interpretivist'.

This is how I wrote about paradigms earlier in my project. I struggled with the foundation of knowledge, how truth is determined and the relationship between knowledge creation and the human experience. What I was not immediately aware of, however, was the importance of grappling with these things in order to become radically open and respectful of other ways of knowing. I had become aware of the Indigenous knowledge systems at work around me, and these in their own right were challenging my ontology and the way I understood epistemology. Rather than dislocating myself and seeing paradigm as removed from the every day, I slowly began to see the connections between my research paradigm, knowledge systems, research methodologies and the radical openness that I wanted to pursue.

As a student of Indigenous methodologies, however, the most transformative learning for me was in becoming more open and reflexive on multiple perspectives and worldviews. Understanding multiple ontological standpoints became increasingly important to me as it dawned on me that the ways different humans think come from differing standpoints, and 'to acknowledge that a plausible account of the world can be given from more than one positionality' (Cockburn, 2015, p. 335). The more I learned about other epistemologies, the more open to these epistemologies I had to become. This had, in effect, altered my own paradigm in terms of what I had previously considered to be 'truth' and 'fact'.

This shift included an awareness of the relatedness of things. Martin and Miraboopa describe an Indigenous ontology as one that is profoundly relational. For them, ontology is a site in which we 'develop an awareness and sense of self, of belonging and for coming to know our responsibilities and ways to relate to self and others' (2003, p. 206), thus demonstrating the relationship between our ontologies and how we conduct ourselves. One cannot learn about such a fundamental relatedness, in comparison to the more siloed way of thinking that I had grown up with, without beginning to pay more attention to the relatedness of things in one's day-to-day life.

This shift was a profound movement that stirred me to broaden my understandings of the limitations of my own western ways of thinking. This is perhaps best summarised by St Pierre, Jackson and Mazzei (2016) who stated, 'Turns, ethical turns, become necessary when our encounters with the world can no longer be explained or justified by orthodox thinking, when new problems overtake us that demand our attention, our finest curiosity, and urgent

"experimentation in contact with the real"' (p. 2, citing Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 12). I was beginning to encounter the world in a way that my previous ways of thinking and orthodoxy could no longer contain or answer for. I was beginning to become aware of the limits of my own thinking. It was here that a 'turn' became necessary.

Methodological 'turns' that characterised the last century within social research, for example the qualitative turn and the narrative turn (Clandinin, 2007; Guba, 1990), seemed to parallel my own ontological turns. Shifts had occurred in the social sciences to broaden the view of what 'counts' as research, and here I was getting my head around the narrow western frameworks of what 'counts' as knowledge within society and the school. Both my own personal 'turns' and those that had occurred more widely within the social sciences spoke to me of the ways narrow conceptions of what counts as knowledge and research served to marginalise Indigenous knowledge systems. These 'turns', then, had repercussions for both my research and teaching, and also how I could become more ethical in how I thought about multiple knowledge systems.

4.3 Paradigm

Understanding a paradigm to be 'a set of beliefs that guides action' (Guba, 1990, p. 17) highlights its importance in shaping praxis and ethical action. Thus I would argue that understanding one's paradigm is of ultimate importance in a project that is ultimately about one's beliefs, dispositions and resulting praxis.

I have intentionally sought to walk a fine line: I have chosen not to 'subscribe' wholesale to a research paradigm. This is because I have sought to avoid trying to lay claim to what constitutes legitimate knowledge and being, when this very knowledge within myself has been called into question by asking 'who am I (as a non-Indigenous person) to decide what constitutes legitimate knowledge?' This positioning of uncertainty becomes necessary in a context where narrow notions of 'what counts' as knowledge have resulted in epistemological apartheid (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). In seeking to avoid hemming myself into one dogma of what counts as knowledge, I have embraced an ontology of openness to the many local and situated ways in which people come to know and construct meaning in the world around them, all of which are legitimate within their contexts. However, in understanding the importance of locating where our knowing, being and doing come from, I have sought to express mine only

as it pertains to the role that it plays within this study. I recognise that most readers will probably identify that there is, thus, a relativist origin to my thinking about 'what exists' and 'how we know', and that this could be located within a social constructivist paradigm. I recognise that it is impossible to divest myself entirely of the various knowledge frameworks that are available to shape and structure my thinking. However, I seek to highlight that, although this is what I might be recognised as within the western academy, I am seeking to learn more by transforming my own thinking about what is and what knowledge is, by becoming a student of the other knowledge worlds that exist beyond my own. I have chosen not to seek to locate myself in any of the 'big four' paradigms (positivism, constructivism, postpositivism and critical theory), choosing instead to describe how I grappled with my taken for granted assumptions about reality and knowledge in relationship to how I was making sense of interacting with a different knowledge system in my teaching and research work.

As I read Karen Martin, I began to learn from her description of a system of Indigenous knowledge (2008). I probed my 'Ways of Knowing' (to understand the limits of western thinking, to better understand that other ways exist), 'Ways of Being' (to examine my own privilege, to understand the history of colonisation, to develop relationships built on mutual respect, to gain awareness of non-neutral institutional workings), and 'Ways of Doing' (doing together, attempting to take active steps towards equality). This became a question in its own right: what does it mean to know, be and do as a white woman seeking to become aware of her own privilege in order to value othered knowledge systems and reduce the othering of Indigenous students?

This said, I take heed of the call from Denzin that we ought to 'avoid the essentialist tendency to lump together all Indigenous cultures as one' (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008, p. 137). Nakata (2007) outlines through his discussion of the cultural interface, that there is no homogeneous Indigenous person that can be said to be singularly and fully representative of Indigenous experience. However I subscribe to Martin's (2008) outlines of the ontological and epistemological premises of Indigenous knowledge, with many threads recognisable across diverse Indigenous experience, such as connection to place and relational protocols. My aim here is not to quantify and become a connoisseur of Indigenous knowledge systems, but rather to understand the relatedness of an ethical teaching practice regarding Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), and to seek what I may learn as a teacher by engaging with them.

The work of Nakata continued to build my understanding of the complexities in the way different knowledge systems interact at the 'cultural interface' (Nakata, 2007). I began to see how differences in epistemology marked not just different discrete facts, but 'different theories of knowledge that frame who can be a knower, what can be known, what constitutes knowledge, sources of evidence for constructing knowledge,' (Nakata, 2007, p. 8) and the same for what constitutes 'truth' (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001). Further, a fundamental shift occurred when I realised that 'One knowledge system cannot legitimately verify the "claims to truth" of the other via its own standards and justifications' (Nakata, 2007, p. 8). Through understanding the depths of how differently our paradigms shape the way we perceive the world, and that these paradigms do not lend themselves to understanding one another through gazing at an Other through our own framework, these learnings helped me recognise how learning to interact with other knowledge traditions was not a straightforward kind of learning. It would require more in-depth wrestling with the very foundations of my knowledge – an endeavour that did not seem entirely possible.

With this in mind, I concur with Guba that '[t]here can be many constructions, and there is no foundational way to choose among them' (1990, p. 25). Never was this more evident to me than when immersed in a community where different constructions of reality were evident every single day, rubbing up against the process of western knowledge transmission expected of me as a teacher. This is how I came to understand what Guba meant when he said that 'reality can only be "seen" through a window of theory, whether explicit or not' (1990, p. 25). Without understanding the theories that my students brought to bear on the world, their conceptualisations of reality were baffling to me. This highlighted that I had no clear way to decide what made my constructions more legitimate than theirs. Thus, I began to engage with the elasticising sensation of expanding the limits of my thinking to accept constructions of reality that I could not locate within a western scientific paradigm. I would later come to name this sensation (see Chapter 13) and see it as a useful concept for a teacher seeking to respect othered knowledge systems.

In taking such a stance, I reject the pursuit of 'how things really are' and 'how things really work' (Guba, 1990, p. 19) as an objective reality, as I understand these to be highly contingent on a person's standpoint (Jaggar, 1983; Pohlhaus, 2002). I recognise the epistemic significance of the social location of the knower (Pohlhaus, 2002), which can 'both make possible and

delimit knowledge' (p. 285). In Clear River, I was able to see how these standpoints created different perspectives and forms of knowledge.

With Harding and Hintikka I believe that '[w]hat counts as knowledge must be grounded in experience [which] differs according to the kinds of activities and social relations in which humans engage' (2003, p. x). In aligning myself as such, I understand the relative and experiential way in which knowledge is constructed, and as such it follows that reality itself is constructed from these experiences.

I do not believe that reality exists outside of us, but as a series of constructions that we create collectively. This is how theories such as Bhabha's *Third Space* (1994) are significant – they offer us metaphors about how we come together and can construct and reconstruct new forms of knowledge. Where decolonising perspectives come to challenge constructivism is in asking who it is that is allowed to do the constructing, and whether I see the community as passive or active participants in this construction. This is what Martin speaks of when she identifies the complexity of 'using western science knowledge frameworks to construct Aboriginal knowledges', an approach that 'is inherently impaired, because it's inherently colonial' (p. 56). Much of my learning down the track would take place by 'beginning-to-know' how my Indigenous friends constructed their understandings of the world, becoming a student of othered ways of knowing, being and doing.

4.4 Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Here I describe how my learning around Indigenous Knowledge played a role as a theoretical lens through which I could understand my experiences as a teacher. I began to understand this crucially important aspect of my work environment (IKS) as a subjugated knowledge positioned in dichotomy from the knowledge system from which I operate (Martin, 2008). This reflexive potential has a necessary connection not only to praxis, but to the selection of autoethnography as methodology through interacting with such a liminal space.

The question remains in my mind what exactly it means to interact with Indigenous methodologies as a non-Indigenous researcher. Learning about IKS as a non-Indigenous person involves a different way of interacting with knowledge. I cannot interact with this knowledge as a pursuit for mastery or connoisseurship, but rather to participate in a journey of growth and

relationship. I do not 'know', yet I come to be able to locate the presence of Indigenous knowledge, to be aware that it is located outside of my own knowledge, that I do not 'know' fully. I understand my knowledge to be entirely rudimentary, and position myself as more of a 'visitor' to such knowledge than a knower, certainly not a knowledge 'holder'. This again demonstrates a shift in epistemological understanding in me. Learning about IKS is, in this sense, knowing that knowledge exists and where it exists, and understanding its subjugated position, rather than knowing to be an expert.

This thesis operates on the presumption that ethical teachers ought engage with, and not ignore, IKS (Indigenous Knowledge Systems) in order to reduce the othering experienced by students and community alike. I wish, however, not to reduce IKS to Indigenous communities alone. I believe that teachers across Australia can benefit from the openness to Others that is generated when embracing the relational ontology so integral to Indigenous knowledge systems. There is much theoretical work yet to be done in regard to how a non-Indigenous teacher can ethically engage with IKS, to what extent and to what end. My experience was fraught with dilemmas concerning how not to behave like a connoisseur (Soja, 1996) when I began to grasp some aspects of Indigenous ontology and epistemology; not becoming a teacher of Indigenous knowledge as though it was another subject area for me to teach (because, indeed, I was assigned a Year 11 subject to oversee called 'Language and Culture'); and how much knowledge was actually appropriate to 'access' as a non-Indigenous woman. I felt that the extent of my engagement was to get a grasp of the breadth and depth of Indigenous knowledge 'out there', in order to respect it as an entity. The question is, then, do I then continue to see my Self as a 'non-knower' and continue to position myself as learner? Or can I draw on some aspects of IKS as a teacher, in effect learning from the community members around me and incorporating their relational ontology and epistemology into the way that I interact within classroom spaces? I feared that in seeking to alleviate othering that occurred within the institution, in my eagerness I could easily fall into the other extreme of not respecting boundaries, of thinking that I could overcome otherness completely by conflating the boundaries and limitations around what I as a non-Indigenous person could actually know, and not respecting that some forms of difference are preserved (such as cultural norms around who may know things).

Rather than simply reflecting my understanding of reality and knowledge, this engagement with ontology and epistemology – and my subsequent rejection of positivism – is important to

my argument on an ethical level also, in regard to social justice and decolonising both research and education. As Martin posits, 'decolonisation is not only directed to Peoples and Communities, but equally to the decolonisation of knowledge, theory and research' (2008, p. 55). This means that decolonisation is a process that I can and ought engage with as both a non-Indigenous teacher and non-Indigenous researcher.

I reject approaches to truth and knowledge that continue to construct 'Aboriginal knowledge… as "non-science"' (2008, p. 55). Instead I seek to acknowledge that there are 'multiple domains and types of knowledge, with differing logics and epistemologies' (p. 55). Martin has documented in great detail the fundamental way in which western science 'is supported by institutions and economies as the yard stick that measures what knowledge is, and what it is not' (p. 56). In moving away from these colonial models, my 'search for a paradigm' was driven by the question of 'what view allows the most respect and ethical interactions with othered knowledge systems?' Thus, my paradigm for the research was not seeking to decide what constitutes knowledge and what does not, but rather to position myself as a radically open and ethical ally to those who were doing the constructing.

While it is not my role here to quantify an Indigenous worldview, my focus was on the need to broaden my own perspectives on reality and knowledge, and how they are conceived of in more diverse ways than a Western epistemology permits. In so doing I wish to 'rattle the cage' (Mackay, 1998) of my own knowledge system, and focus on the limits of what can be known in my own worldview. In acknowledging the limits of the western worldview, I seek to challenge my perspective, reduce othering and increase respect for Other worldviews. This additionally precedes my argument for a *multilogical* disposition – a way of seeing the world that is open and respectful to the many and multiple logics that inform the way different individuals see the world, even holding seemingly contradictory views in tension as equally legitimate (Kincheloe, 2008), further developed in Chapter 10. Such a self-examination of the limits of what I know, in conjunction with seeking to expand openness to other knowledge systems, constitutes what Kincheloe and Steinberg call the opportunity to 'come to understand the overtly cultural processes by which information is legitimated and delimited' (2008, p. 137), a reflexive opportunity with the potential to transform interactions in the classroom and schooling environment. Semali and Kincheloe (2002) describe the power of Indigenous knowledge to create such a transformation, in which 'westerners of diverse belief structures and vocational backgrounds may experience a fundamental transformation of both outlook and

identity, resulting in a much more reflective and progressive consciousness' (p. 17). Indigenous Knowledge Systems are ripe with reflective potential through which even non-Indigenous practitioners can be transformed in the way we understand knowledge and the world around us.

4.5 Autoethnography

> 'Ooooh', my colleague said. 'You were approved to use autoethnography as your methodology?' She was also working on a PhD and we frequently exchanged notes on how we were going. 'I tried that but they said it wasn't a rigorous enough methodology. They thought that was the easy way out.'

> I smarted a bit. It definitely wasn't feeling easy. I indignantly wondered what other medium her supervisors would suggest for a project like mine, trying to create a snapshot of the ways a beginning teacher's praxis develops and all the challenges therein.

I first heard about autoethnography in my supervisor's office. She described a means of recording and observing the minutiae of a given standpoint, analysing it through various theoretical lenses. For an overwhelmed beginning teacher already nervous about how to stay on top of my first year of teaching, the idea of keeping a journal seemed appealing in both its therapeutic capacity and its manageability. Its strengths, however, as a methodology for my particular project lay in my research question. Born of curiosity about how my ideals and yet un-tested pedagogy for social justice would play out when 'rubber hit the road', I loved the idea of writing this journey as it happened, seizing the developments, shifts and changes in me that occurred over time. Moving to an Indigenous community, with its accompanying themes of colonialist influences and cultural border crossings (Giroux, 2005), made me all the more aware that this teaching setting as much as any other required deep self-reflection.

In writing autoethnography, I am seizing the opportunity to reflect deeply on problematic and complicated teaching work. In doing this reflection, I am digging beneath the day to day practices that make up my classroom presence, and digging into the assumptions, beliefs and knowledge frameworks that sit beneath them, in the skeleton of my actions, shaping the embodiment of my being in the classroom space. In writing about these reflections, I am casting the taken-for-granted thinking at the core of my pedagogies out into the open, where it can be

seen more clearly, like an uprooted tree whose every gangly root is now able to be examined. In drawing on a range of disparate yet connected theorists, it is as though I am inviting many sets of eyes to look over this uprooted stump with me, from multiple perspectives and with lenses I have not seen through before. My job as an autoethnographer here is to honestly, faithfully and vulnerably document not only the uprooted tree but also the dialogic conversations that occur around it, albeit conversations that occur largely in my imagination as I reflect, read, and continue to shape a relational praxis. I bring the reader in through trying to render in three-dimensional form the moments that make my thinking and the institutional complexities of my work apparent. I take the reader with me into meetings, into the minutiae of classroom interactions, into micro-exchanges with colleagues, into my administrative busy-work as well as my literacy core business. From these moments, we journey into the recesses of my reflections and grapplings, inviting readers to feel the dilemmas and tensions and awaken to the gaps, silences, oversights and contradictions in real time with me. All the while there is momentum, momentum that propels us further away from perpetuating praxis and pedagogy predicated upon habitual systems and practices, and further toward new practices and relationships that take shape from reflection, from consideration and from challenging my core beliefs.

Thus, the appeal of autoethnography was multifaceted. It provided an opportunity for deep self-reflection at the level of the very words that I used to reflect when I journalled. It gave me a way to document how my ideals and beliefs translated into actions. It allowed a study of great depth into experiences and perspectives. It allowed myself to examine the intersection of my personal beliefs and the political context, situating myself as both subjugated and subjugator within such a complex context. And, I had hoped, it would contribute to decolonising narratives.

4.5.1 Self Reflection and Praxis

The crux of the project that I was imagining was one of close self-examination of my own taken-for-granted beliefs, especially as they pertained to border crossings (Giroux, 2005) of cultural difference. As examination of taken-for-granted beliefs is part of the inbuilt validity mechanisms of the methodological process of autoethnography, it seemed that the two would knit nicely together. Autoethnography rose from a determination to focus not on breadth but on depth, not to gather shallow data on the widest sample size, but to focus on personal experiences in great depth, examining the intersection of self and society and the relationship

between the two. Wall (2008) cites some key autoethnographers who champion the method's ability to 'allow readers to feel the dilemmas, think with a story rather than about it, join actively with the author's decision points (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), and engage with the story line morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually' (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2003, p. 44).

Within existing literature about otherness and racism experiences in the classroom (Biddle & Priest, 2014, 2015; Buckskin, 2013; Priest & Biddle, 2014; Rollock, 2012), seldom is the teacher's personal praxis the subject of attention. I thought this called for a spotlight on my day-to-day thinking and activities that closely examined how I addressed these themes in pursuit of an ethical practice. The political nature of being a white teacher in an Indigenous community called for a methodology of research that made connections between the larger political context, and the day to day practice of a teacher 'at the chalk face'. This is one of autoethnography's strengths. Wall (2008) highlights that just establishing the personal connection to an issue often understood only in terms of policy or politics has the effect of personalising the political, contributing perspectives at the intersection of the personal and the political not otherwise contributed through research. As Laslett articulates, 'personal narratives can address several key theoretical debates in contemporary sociology: macro and micro linkages; structure, agency and their intersection; [and] social reproduction and social change' (1999, p. 392). My selection of autoethnography as method was, in part, due to the tensions between the macro and micro that I anticipated finding in my first years of teaching in a politically fraught context. I sensed a tense connecting thread that ran through the wider political nature of racial dynamics in the education system (in which one knowledge system was treated as subordinate to another), through the question of how the education institution could thus conduct itself in a more ethical way, and into the 'micro' picture of my personal responsibilities as a participant within that system. This tension also manifested itself on a daily basis with my negotiation of prescribed teaching methods that I felt were aligned with more neoliberal and western-centric ideals. This is what I mean when I refer to the political and personal interplay that necessitated a mode of study that allowed me to examine my personal negotiations of wider political themes.

Thus, from the outset the notion of praxis shaped the study. Praxis refers to teaching practice that is thoughtful, moral, ethical, and committed to the best possible outcome for humankind. While practice is concerned with the technical pragmatic day to day mechanisms of teaching,

a movement towards praxis is a movement towards a deep kind of reflection that causes an educator to reflect on the effect they wish to have on the world. In the words of Kemmis and Smith (2008), '[i]t is the kind of action people are engaged in when they think about what their action will mean in the world. Praxis is what people do when they take into account all the circumstances and exigencies that confront them at a particular moment and then, taking the broadest view they can of what is best to do, they act' (p. 4). Praxis is relational, concerned with the connections between the human participants in the classroom, with a view not just toward measurable outcomes of achievement, but also the deeper concerns of empowerment, respect of culture and difference, for the betterment of all members. This therefore involves reflecting upon myself and the taken-for-granted assumptions that I bring to the classroom, as a member of the space that affects the experience of the others.

The concern with praxis within this study is that the reflections I embark upon must necessarily be concerned with the long-term good of the students and the community, the place in which we are situated. Herein lies the connection to the social justice aims I began with. The relevance for an autoethnographic study is that it takes the minutiae of self-examination and utilises these reflections to ensure that one's practice is always being pushed towards a more ethical way of being in the world. Praxis in this context ought not be blinded by notions of what I (as a non-Indigenous woman) think is right for the people with whom I am working, however. Such an approach would fall prey to the logic of white saviourdom that I would come to critique. Kalscheuer posits that a postcolonial praxis seeks

> to pose questions such as: 'How does my own subject position, in terms of history, economics, race, ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, sexual orientation, religion and occupation affect my research? How might these factors make my research possible? How will they affect my interactions with participants? How do they help me decide what to write and what to keep silent?' This would require putting one's practice to crisis, in the sense Spivak and others have formulated their postcolonial critique. (2008, p. 36)

Autoethnography, I feel, connects to praxis most in the way that we begin to pay attention to the meanings of our words through our reflections, and in so doing find clues that expose assumptions underlying our ethics and beliefs, and therefore actions. It is the interconnectedness of these three elements that I believe differentiates 'praxis' from mere 'practice'. In autoethnographic reflection, I can listen closely to my words and I can see the

patterns of my thoughts. As Biesta posits, the very act of listening to our own words helps us to pay attention to 'pathways of meaning and association', and to recognise the relatedness between our 'ways of saying, ways of doing, and ways of being' (2010, p. 540). Autoethnography allowed me the opportunity to notice the words that rose up from my journals in relation to one another. I was able to see the patterns by which words like 'busy', 'progress', and 'mandates' seemed to congregate together, whereas 'ethical', 'listening', 'empathy' and 'culture' seemed to inhabit a distinct discourse altogether. This close attention to my own words assisted me to identify the themes at play and the dichotomies within my thinking.

Presuming that most of the fabric of colonisation is located within our systems (that is, systems made up of documents, documents made up of words, words that embed themselves into my thinking and shape the logic by which we view the world), it seemed to me that, in order to disrupt this cycle, it was at the level of my words that I needed to begin to reflect, to pull out these particles of colonised logic, to engage in a dialogue with authors that could help me to reimagine these realities so that my thoughts and actions could also be reimagined. This is where I felt autoethnography could be decolonising.

In my practice, I have found reflexivity and the notion of praxis to be a way of looking beyond my taken-for-granted first responses to otherness, and to probe my underlying attitudes to find better frameworks. Autoethnography allowed me to embrace a 'permanent move and change of attitudes' (Kalscheuer, 2009, p. 30) that created a reflexivity and perpetual liminal space to that end.

4.5.2 Values into Action

I originally approached this methodology because of a desire to document how a teacher's ideals translate into actions: how the beginning and best intentions of a teacher were challenged, sometimes successful, sometimes broken by the harsh realities of the teaching environment. The additional challenge of teaching in a community in which I was 'out of place' meant that my own internal sense-making became a rich field of inquiry, and the first few years of my teaching experience offered an opportunity to inquire into the intricacies and delicate nature of beginning an ethical practice. While other methodologies may tend to overlook the experiences of individuals in a given context, this is the very arena in which autoethnography is most richly applied.

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The selection of autoethnography originated in a desire to closely examine personal ethics and understand the self. Closely linked with self-reflection, autoethnography offered an opportunity to think about my own power and my responsibility. In a scenario where I felt the institution wielded an inordinate amount of power that conflicted with my sense of agency, autoethnography highlighted the way that power is located outside of simple institutions – it is also located within individuals. Autoethnography offered me the opportunity to focus reflexively on the praxis that was emerging and to hone my focus away from my sense of disempowerment and on to the power that I actually had within the relationships I had influence over. This moved me further from despair and closer to a relational pedagogy that I felt could 'do good,' while simultaneously removing me from the 'centre' of my conception of doing good. In summary, autoethnography was exciting to me because it entailed a close relationship with reflexivity and praxis, which I felt would be the keys to creating a teaching praxis that would contribute to better, more ethical outcomes for my students.

4.5.3 Personal and Political, Self and Society

Autoethnography's strength lies in its ability to invite readers into Others' experience and allow researchers to 'research themselves in relation to others' (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 17). This seemed to me entirely pertinent when I was a teacher making sense of myself in relationship to a community from which I was an outsider. Additionally, as Tilley-Lubbs has identified, the intersection between the self and society is the essence of autoethnography. In a project in which I was grappling with notions of selfhood, othering and the Institution, autoethnography facilitates the attempt to think about my praxis in order 'to understand it from both the individual and the group perspectives' (Tilley-Lubbs, 2016, p. 5).

I found the notion of standpoint useful in order to position myself within autoethnographic research. Slightly different to simply describing a perspective or viewpoint, 'standpoint' came to be used by feminist scholars to situate both the types of knowledge and power that are generated from specific sets of experiences and being in the world (Cockburn, 2015, p. 12). According to Cockburn (2015), the essence of 'recognising "standpoint" is to acknowledge that a plausible account of the world can be given from more than one positionality' (p. 335).

My utilisation of this notion of standpoint, however, is complicated in the sense that, while usually standpoint theory is used to express the struggle of the oppressed, I am expressing my standpoint as someone who is simultaneously subjugated and privileged. Rather than my standpoint looking in simply one direction, I am 'swivelling' to look from two locations, from beneath the institution, and from a position of power in which I have the potential to do harm.

Autoethnography broadly says: 'Here's what it's like to live life from my standpoint'. Giving primacy to my standpoint thrusts both agency and responsibility back onto me as a teacher in a context that is politically fraught or ethically complex. This is significant, as such a complex position often defaults to feelings of being 'stuck', of having one's hands tied. The act of autoethnography has served to force me beyond this point.

Autoethnography additionally provided an outlet for my need to speak back to the forces and positioning that jostled me around in my first year of teaching. Envisaging first that my work would involve writing narratives about my role as a teacher creating collaborative Third Spaces (Bhabha, 1994) with my students, these narratives instead often reflected my frustration at how I was being positioned – the Third Spaces and liminal spaces that I was taking up for myself as I felt pigeonholed and cornered, marginalised or looked down on. Autoethnography became a space to reassert myself and to rearticulate the narrative that I saw happening, the journey that I was on personally as I tried to make sense of my place in such a context.

4.5.4 The Decolonising Potential of Narrative

I hoped that I would find decolonising possibilities within the methodology. I was inspired by the potential power of 'decolonising narratives':

> Narratives that create new spaces of resistance – classrooms, courtrooms, nursing homes, hospitals, bus stations, street corners, faculty meetings, the hallways of academy, sporting fields, cyberspace, treatment centres, journals, conferences, churches, books, new battlegrounds. (Diversi & Moreira, 2009, pp. 208-209)

I wanted to contribute research that would speak alongside these narratives to help decolonise spaces like my classroom. I would later recognise the ways that to contribute to decolonising narratives as a member of a colonising society would be far more complicated than I originally anticipated. In their chapter on 'Autoethnography as a Praxis of Social Justice', Toyosaki and Pensoneau-Conway speak of the method's efficacy for 'invest[ing] in the capacity for

transformation' through narrative, investing in a view of social change 'one person at a time' (2013, p. 572). In a way that I would only fully appreciate later in the study, this self-reflection played a role in my personal transition, away from erroneously taking responsibility for the betterment of Indigenous people, to taking on the responsibility if changing my own attitudes and dispositions. In this sense, it was I that would begin to be decolonised through reflection and engagement with Indigenous Knowledge Systems, not the classroom or the students as I originally thought.

In exploring my position in a postcolonial sense but seeking to move beyond white guilt (Kowal, 2015, p. 160; Maddison, 2011), autoethnography allowed me to closely examine my self but with an eye to my relationship to others. As a non-Indigenous person in an Indigenous community, it gave me an opportunity to locate myself within place and in terms of belonging to part of a dichotomised society, articulating my standpoint at multiple intersections, allowing myself to speak but also to listen to Othered voices. In this sense I saw autoethnography as a form of productive recentring. In the study, I am in the 'centre' of my focus for the purposes of reflection, however this is conducted in order to 'de-centre' myself.

5 The Research Process

5.1 Challenges of Autoethnography

At the beginning of the study, I felt some confusion about where the 'line' would be between telling engaging stories and rigorous inquiry. I wanted there to be a 'line' to begin with, so that I might ensure that I stay on the right side of it. As a young researcher I felt eager to show that what I was creating was 'real' research, although I had no clear idea yet of what that might look like. This question is not an easy one to answer, as autoethnography as methodology is as diverse in application as the contexts it explores. The variables include the degree to which the study focuses on the self, the degree to which it focuses on the society, and the manner in which the research process is applied (Reed-Danahay, 1997).

A family member turned his nose up at the methodology. In a few sharp sentences he outlined his main criticism – my partial, biased perspective, enshrined as data. How could that ever be relied upon? How could that ever yield anything beyond a taken-very-seriously personal opinion, with appropriate literature arranged around it to support it? These critiques were not unfamiliar. 'Me-search'; 'atheoretical, ungeneralisable and self absorbed' (P. Atkinson, 2006, p. 403), producing 'low-quality qualitative research and research results that are quite stereotypical and close to common sense' (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, & Silverman, 2004, p. 2). These and other criticisms were familiar and at times internalised by me.

Much of the criticism appears situated within traditional assumptions about what counts as scientific scholarship and the production of knowledge (Ellis & Bochner, 1996) located in a perspective of 'rigid conceptualisations of what should or should not be counted as scholarship' (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 235). It helped that I saw a connection between such delegitimisation of certain types of scholarship, and the delegitimisation of Indigenous knowledge systems documented by Nakata in *Disciplining the Savages, Savaging the Disciplines* (2007). It helped me to situate the struggle of recognition for my methodology as legitimate scholarship, with the larger struggle of recognition for marginalised knowledge systems within academia.

The knowledge created through these narratives does not claim to be empirical; it is not the sort of knowledge that makes claims of absolute and universal truth. These narratives instead open spaces for new thoughts and practices, to extend the boundaries on how we currently think about knowledge and what constitutes it. I have challenged my own cognitive boundaries around 'what counts as knowledge' so far as to be able to wholeheartedly consider this 'open space for new thoughts' as a legitimate form of knowledge construction.

In a study such as this that examines myself in relation to those around me, the distinction between self/other, researcher/researched, is eroded. Additionally, as evidenced in the interviews conducted later in this study, the relationships between myself and the Indigenous teachers with whom I worked became the very fabric of my inquiry and our conversations, rather than something to be controlled and removed in order to obtain 'impartial' data. Thus, the relationality, rather than something seen as contaminating 'objective' data, was the topic of the study in itself. This placed an emphasis on 'relational ethics', which Ellis outlines as the core of relationship that 'requires researchers to act from our hearts and minds, acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others, and take responsibility for actions and their consequences' (2007, p. 3). As I was the topic of self-examination for the large part of the study, there was no distinction between researcher and researched, a consideration that only put more onus on me to be more honest, transparent, and critique and question myself further. To think deeply about the meanings and origins of my actions and practice, and to work to document and critique these faithfully, involved a messy kind of rigour that, partnered with critical honesty, I believed created an honest and trustworthy piece of qualitative work.

Thus, the challenges that face an autoethnographer are multiple. I struggled to trust my ability to craft a reasoned and balanced view of experiences. I deliberated over which aspects of my day to day life were most crucial to document. I was riddled with concern about how blinded I was by my privilege in how I represented what had gone on in the classroom. I recognised the risk of positioning myself as the white saviour and my Indigenous friends and students as merely a support crew in the Narrative of Jess. This, again, is evidence of the way that writing autoethnography necessitates thorough self-examination – and is also in part why I decided to incorporate other voices through interviews into the study to balance the monologue. I struggled with articulating the difficult and political aspects of life as part of the community school, aware of the biases that I brought when I regarded certain dynamics and politics, for example my heightened criticism of leaders with whom I did not have a positive relationship.

I did, however, come to terms with the fact that I am a subjective being who brings my unique experience to the fore in this research, openly acknowledging this and not pretending to present any empirical or objective material but rather the personal experiences felt in my context, as me, a white, middle-class, privileged woman. As experienced by anyone who writes an account of a life, there are the fears about how documenting one's story 'robs it of complexity' (Kraus, 2003, p. 284). As soon as my thoughts became words on a page they seemed one-dimensional, conclusive on things I was not actually conclusive about, obtuse shades of grey funnelled into the nearest available words whether they fitted or not.

Autoethnography highlights the struggle to know the self. Knowing the self is not natural, I mused. The self is not defined, clear around the edges, simply waiting for documentation. The self is not self-evident, like hair colour or eye colour or height or weight. The self is blurry, uncertain, slippery, endlessly changing, teeming and fluid. Therefore, writing the self is discovering the self, in a way that cannot be objective, that cannot be verified. In order to be trusted, it must be honest, an accountability that only the author can hold oneself up to. This is an uncomfortable reality of writing the self. Bryant Alexander speaks about bleeding identities, the way that identities breach their borders within writing such as this (cited in Boylorn, 2014). When I read that, I think again about my fluctuating identity, between Super Literacy Teacher and Social Justice Warrior, between Privileged White Girl and Student of Indigenous People, my eagerness to Do the Right Thing and all the in-between places where I was actually not sure which identity to perform. Yet even this very act of coming to understand the plurality of the self opened me up to understand the plurality of the 'other' that I might be tempted to see one-dimensionally. Here I began to understand the complexities of 'facing the other' that Levinas outlines (1979; Levinas, Smith, & Harshav, 2006).

At times, I found the messiness of the methodology overwhelming. The seemingly endless directions that documenting my experience could take me necessitated constant decision-making and refocusing. The context in which I was teaching was already complex and challenging at best, daily throwing into my face moments of self-doubt, uncertainty, confusion and lack of clarity. Learning to 'do research' while experiencing this liminality, added an extra layer of complexity. Autoethnography is a method that offered a form of therapy, reflection, venting, untangling, documentation and analysis on a teaching praxis and epistemological field that is, at its best, messy (Mellor, 2001). The messiness of the resulting methodology, data collection and analysis was therefore just 'part of the territory'.

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While I have emphasised the many benefits of autoethnography, I have also alluded to some long-abiding reservations about the limitations of this approach when conducted by a non-Indigenous person in an Indigenous setting. As I will detail shortly, the clarity that I had around why autoethnography would contribute something new to this intersection, did not mean that I had no qualms or dilemmas about this methodology. I have outlined some of the broader criticisms of autoethnography, here I seek to discuss my own personal struggles with my choice of methodology.

Firstly, I became increasingly aware of the tensions around being a non-Indigenous person stepping into an Indigenous space to conduct research. Where my research began to examine knowledge systems, I recognised additional dangers. There is an often-crossed line of non-Indigenous people stepping into another knowledge system to 'master' it or become connoisseurs of it. I wished to avoid such presumption. As such, I wished to ensure that the subject of the research was not 'the Other', but myself and my experiences. This, however, brought a new challenge: it brought into question the 'whiteness' and inherent privilege of centring on myself, and begged the question of whose voice is *not* being heard within my personal narrative. However, this and other dilemmas about being a non-Indigenous researcher in an Indigenous space have stayed with me, as I will explain further.

As time went, on I became increasingly aware of the limitations of autoethnography in the specific context of my research. I recognised that the subjectivity of my 'writing about myself' would always be held in tension. The issue that returned to the forefront of my mind, however, was that of my centrality to the study. Autoethnographic stories can give an insight into voices seldom heard or usually overlooked; for example, the deep lived experience of those living with eating disorders (Tillmann, 2009), those parenting adopted children (Wall, 2010), those facing any manner of struggle by way of race, gender, disability (Hancock, Allen & Lewis, 2015). Powerful autoethnographies enabled speaking back through lived experiences, from the voices not often heard. This enabled the personalising and contextualising of real life issues. Yet when I thought about my own situation I found it difficult to take the same pride in my selection of methodology. While I faced some struggles as a teacher trying to do the right thing in a difficult institutional environment, as a whole I felt that my position was one of relative privilege in terms of my white voice being represented within the institution. It was not I, but my Indigenous counterparts, whose voices seemed most necessary to contribute an alternate view within the academy and the institution. Therefore, I could not take as much pride as I had

hoped in 'speaking back', as I could not shake the feeling that, from my position of relative privilege, it was not my voice that ought to be doing all of the 'speaking back'.

Tilley-Lubbs writes about this complicated positioning as privileged people conducting autoethnography in settings in which we must remain open to our tendencies to become 'oppressors'. She connects this to Paulo Freire's call for teachers to see themselves as cultural workers, extending this call into our thinking about ourselves as researchers 'who have the intention of including those voices that are often not heard, or even worse, that are ignored' (2016, p. 6). Calling researchers to therefore conduct research with marginalised voices rather than for them, Tilley-Lubbs proposes a solution to this conundrum that I faced about autoethnography as an opportunity to 'to create a bridge between the excluded and the included' (p. 6). I began to question what I might be able to do to conduct research that created such a bridge.

A further dilemma I began to feel was that the very notions I was pushing toward were relationships and partnerships, and both of involve weaving together more and more closely voices and, indeed, imagining the perspectives of others. Therefore, to speak as though my voice was one individual voice removed from all others seemed to contradict the third space I was trying to enter into. While autoethnography is especially effective for examining the nexus between self and other, my entire frameworks for this were being challenged as I regarded Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing that placed more emphasis on relatedness than any other framework I had interacted with before. As I was becoming more and more interested in the role of partnerships in creating better outcomes and a more ethical praxis, I questioned the appropriateness of autoethnography (at least, in the form that I had been using it) to examine partnerships. I decided that this tension necessitated the inclusion of other mediums that made two-way dialogue more of a priority than the thoughts and voice of one individual.

While I had begun with autoethnography, I had begun to reach the limits of what the methodology could contribute to my own de-centring. An increasing focus on partnerships, relationships and collaboration was arising in my inquiry. With myself at the centre of the research, I recognised a tension that perhaps the research needed more than my self-reflections. By incorporating interviews, I was able to take the same principles of deep analysis of life experiences and the 'fabric of life' that autoethnography examines, and bring this disposition to a forum where I could hear othered voices through yarning circle-modelled interviews. In

this sense, the move toward incorporating interviews to address the silence of othered voices within the study was similar to what Chang, Ngunjiri & Hernandez call collaborative autoethnography (2012).

The ironic tension still exists in the fact that, although centring me in the beginning of the study, autoethnography ultimately served as the reflexive vehicle for me to be able to de-centre myself. In this sense it proved itself as a worthy medium to continue with, even after acknowledging the ways it didn't fit perfectly with the inquiry as it unfolded: because it served as the means for me to come to these realisations in the first place.

5.2 Incorporating Interviews into the Research Design

My major misgiving about the research design I embarked upon, a discomfort that has never gone away, has been whether the most important voices to come out of Indigenous educative spaces ought to be non-Indigenous voices. There is a great paradox in studying the self, and focusing on my own voice, in a context in which Indigenous voices are so vital but are given so few forums to be heard within academic institutions. I have not shaken this discomfort since it began to arise halfway through the study. I sought to balance this perceived gap through seeking Indigenous participants to speak back to my own self-reflection, not simply as a remedy to a flawed research design, but because it was the wisdom of these women that had truly begun to shape and transform my thinking. I will detail this shortly.

I argue that keeping the location of the research inside the head of a non-Indigenous individual, as autoethnography does, has the potential to impede the kind of radical re-imagination that is possible if I begin from a locus outside of my Self. A better locus would be the community in which I was working, and the alternate constructions of knowing, learning and teaching that already exist 'out there'. I see autoethnography, while being an effective tool for reflection and self-critique within my own mind, as limited in terms of *where* the study is centred (that is, in the mind of a white woman) and therefore what kinds of thinking have been favoured and voiced – my own non-Indigenous, western-centric ways of thinking. The answer to ethical thinking and teaching is not located within my mind, as perhaps the mode of autoethnography has implied. There are aspects of ethical pedagogy that existed in the community, outside my familiar schooling structures, that pre-date my existence in Clear River, and that could have very nearly been missed if the focus of the study stayed inside a non-Indigenous person's mind

and thinking. Yet perhaps this study will show that, even when beginning with a focus on one's own thinking, reflecting on the relationship between self and Other can result in a de-centring of the self as one becomes more open to the ways of knowing of an Other.

While I stood by, and continue to stand by, the logic of my decision to closely track my evolving pedagogy and to pay close attention to the internal dialogues that took place as I made sense of social justice and othering and many other complex issues, my research risked being tone deaf, whitewashed, ignorant of the voices it was blinding itself to by omission. This was a great concern for me. I was also increasingly struggling to see the separations that I had once seen: self/other, my practice/the school community; my practice/my Indigenous teaching partners' practice; teaching/learning… As these dichotomies dissolved in my thinking, arguably as a result of being colonised by a more interconnected, relatedness-based Indigenous way of knowing, I could no longer see myself and my practice as separate from, aside from, removed from, the relationships within which I was working. 'My practice' seemed as problematic a term as ever – for when the interactions in the classroom were at their best, it was because of the interplay of relationships, not because of some mastery in 'my' pedagogy that I could take sole credit for. To ignore the relationships within the classroom would be to do a disservice to the very relational pedagogy and ethic that I was discovering.

Firstly, I wished to capture the perspective of Indigenous knowledge systems from local knowledge holders who have an active role in the western education system and also the authority to speak about it. Secondly, I wished to receive genuine feedback on how my aims as a teacher and the successes I was reporting in my journals, appeared to a second set of eyes from a second perspective. Thirdly, I wished to ask many of the questions that I had wanted to ask but perhaps not had opportunity, to really hear the perspectives on education of my Indigenous counterparts, in a conversation more open and lengthy than the ones we had throughout four years of practicing together, and in a way that allowed them a wider audience than just the two of us.

I recognised that many of the aims regarding social justice that I had set out with – both in research and teaching – were hinged on positive and trusting relationships with my students and the community. In learning about the goals of the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (www.matsiti.edu.au) and the writings of Indigenous knowledge systems proponents such as Nakata (2007), Chilisa (2012) and Yunkaporta (2009), I was

becoming increasingly aware of the limitations of my own knowledge and the vital role that the Indigenous assistant teacher played in the education space.

In symbiosis with this wondering was my growing frustration at the way the institution seemed not to value or acknowledge the potential contributions of Indigenous staff, the way the systems we were part of served to silence them or render them unnecessary. This manifested itself through Professional Development sessions that were located outside of the Indigenous teacher's experience, alienating them through unfamiliar jargon. All the while, school discourse necessitated that these teachers attend if they wished to be seen as 'good ATs' (assistant teachers). It also manifested in the prevalence of Indigenous teachers being rendered only as classroom help and not as an integral part of the learning process. Occasionally, professional development sessions (PDs) would seek to remedy this by training teachers in effective team teaching processes, but often the discourse seemed to be dominated by an eye-rolling disregard for this tenet of teaching practice, with the entire onus for effective collaboration rendered onto the Indigenous staff to 'turn up' and 'contribute'.

I couldn't help but feel that, although there were definite challenges to setting up a healthy and collaborative discourse with Indigenous staff, much of the onus could and should be on me as a teacher, as a power-holding 'Outsider', coming into an Other's physical space, and that I could take on more of the work to shape a healthy and workable dynamic.

> I am also supervising a local Indigenous woman on her final placement, which is a really overwhelming task. She is definitely a teacher in her own setting, but in the *balanda* setting that is our school, she seems set up to fall short of the standards set her. This has me in a bind. It is a really difficult situation that I am not sure how to tackle. I am trying to boost her confidence every way I know, through providing her comfortable avenues to speak and begin to warm to her own voice and how to use it. It feels we have a really steep journey ahead of us. (Journal, March, 2013)

I read over this now and critique the language that I used, seeing the irony of calling myself a 'supervisor' of this Indigenous woman when the role was largely reversed in the end. I aspired to create a space of empowerment within which my Indigenous colleague would be able to succeed in her placement requirements, while simultaneously drawing on her Indigenous pedagogy and practice to enrich the presence of IKS in our shared classroom. The more that I awakened to the multiple knowledge systems at work in our schooling environment, the more

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I began to focus less on myself as the onus of knowledge, and begin to see the essential role that Betty played in moving away from the epistemological apartheid I was beginning to identify. It was Maxine Greene's work that provoked my thinking at this point, urging me to understand that

> because [different classroom participants] come from different backgrounds and have sedimented their meanings differently, they intend the common meaning structure from diverse angles and vantage points. The schools, with their traditional presumption of a 'normal' world and an official meaning-structure, have not only emphasised the given-ness of what is taught, they have customarily neglected distinctiveness of viewpoint… (1978, p. 70)

I understood her call for a pedagogy that 'will free persons to understand the ways in which each of them reaches out from his or her location to constitute a common continent, a common world' (Greene, 1978, p. 70). Indeed, I was beginning to understand these 'different locations' not just in terms of my standpoint as a researcher, but in seeking to understand the standpoint of the Indigenous participants in the classroom.

My Indigenous colleagues were becoming great teachers to me. I began to more comprehensively see myself as a learner. I had the privilege of being taken under their wings, being guided about not just subtle cultural facets that I would have overlooked, but also about life in Clear River in general. My clumsiness with figuring out how to work within a dynamic like this was evidenced in the following episode.

> Had a good conversation with a colleague and fellow-PhD student the other day about the struggle I feel when, in classroom interactions, the pressure of time and things to get to mean that Betty and I fall to the same old subject positioning and fail to create a newness out of our interactions. I hate this, because my relationship with her is complicated and not as simple as the subject positioning of teacher and student-teacher. She is a very respected woman and my elder, and she holds sacred knowledge that I will never understand. I respect her. However, often it is my job to take the lead. My friend pointed out that all it takes sometimes is a small conversation to enter the liminal space. I will seek out a conversation with Betty this week where I can ask her if she is ok with us having two types of interactions – in the classroom I will take the lead and try to help her be the best teacher she can be lending her my (limited!) experience as a teacher. But in life, I see her as my elder and respect her as

the one more knowledgeable than I am. In the classroom she is a learner with me about how to be a better teacher, but in life I am the learner to her as a knowledgeable older woman. (Journal, April, 2013)

While this interaction was only the beginning, and I was yet to recognise the myriad ways I would come to defer to her as an educator also, it marked a beginning of attempting braver conversations to move beyond taken-for-granted interactions. These interactions extended outside of school hours and often into bush trips over the weekends. As these relationships flourished, it seemed that collaboration seemed more able to emerge.

Denzin and Lincoln highlight that, rather than borrowing stories and narratives from Indigenous peoples, as non-Indigenous scholars we 'must construct stories that are embedded in the landscapes through which we travel' (2008, p. 6). In constructing these stories, I became increasingly aware of the way in which I was not traveling alone, *could not* travel alone, but was constantly learning from and drawing on the strengths of those around me, namely my Indigenous students and assistant teacher. Therefore, I sought to broaden my original research design to allow for input from Indigenous voices, such as those of the assistant teacher. Following the Yarning Circles model (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010), the interviews were semi-structured, allowing the assistant teachers to answer questions and take the conversation in a direction that suited them. The Yarning Circle model, rising from and used often in Indigenous contexts, is appropriate here because it caters for the varying conversation protocols of different cultures (2010, p. 38). Being inherently respectful to the type of conversations that are most respectful to Indigenous participants (namely, the types in which they lead the interviewer/listener through a story in order to make their perspective understood,) interviews modelled on Yarning Circles place an emphasis on the need for respectful relationships to be in place to enable this type of communication to happen (p. 38). Yarning Circles connote less of a process of questioning, and more of a sense of journeying with the participants into their life worlds to comprehensively understand their perspectives and the knowledge that they create/created together in that space (p. 39). They take the structure of a purposeful conversation on the research topic, with a beginning and an end, but with a relaxed and informal nature (p. 40). Beyond merely placing ownership of the direction in the hands of the participants, however, Yarning Circles enabled the process to become more like a classroom for me, in which the participants shared their wisdom and constructed a series of lessons for me to learn from in regard to their pedagogies and views of education. These

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interviews provided a collaborative reflexivity, weaving Indigenous knowledge from local Indigenous teachers together with reflections on our shared practice. In a backdrop of trying to re-establish power dynamics, here it occurred naturally with these Indigenous teachers schooling me.

5.3 Ethics

I initially held the belief that, because my study was focused on my own self, ethical clearance was not necessary. I operated under this assumption for over a year, faithfully documenting highlights, lowlights, monthly foci, critical incidents, overwhelming feelings: in general, a detailed journal of emerging first year praxis. While reading over this journal a year later, I was confused. How was it that I was examining my own self, but that this process inevitably became a story about Others around me as well? The 'aha' moment arrived when I remembered again what autoethnography is: the self, the society, being examined as methodology. It was not only my self that was being examined, it was the society, the community and environment, the classroom collective that was being examined 'by proxy' as I explored my own practice. It was, after all, a narrative about how my practice engaged with and interacted with the society in which I was working. It was here that it emerged that I ought to obtain ethical approval to acknowledge and actively incorporate the wider community with in which I was working, through both methodology and ethical clearance.

As the original study was to be self-study only, I reassured myself with the fact that student voice emerged through the narratives that I wrote about; however, I took care with these as to not overextend past the boundaries of the ethical clearance guidelines I had begun with. I was hearing my student's voices every day, and I hoped it would be clear through my journals that I was listening deeply (J. Atkinson, 2002; Ungunmerr, 2017) and incorporating their feedback into my own reflections constantly. The addition of other voices in a structured way, through interviews with students, for example, had not occurred to me until well into the study, itself an interesting recognition of how I had conceived of 'research' and the centrality of my own voice at the outset. By the time this occurred to me, I recognised that my focus in the study had begun with concern for student othering, but had widened to focus on the partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers, how othering occurred within this relationship and would therefore contribute to student othering.

I sought permission from the Monash Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC), spelling out the importance of incorporating wider voices into the research. Having gained this permission (Project Number CF15/1263 – 2015000593), I also sought permission from the Department of Education, for whom I worked, to conduct research (Reference 9625). In doing so, I sought tentative letters of support from both my direct line manager and the assistant teacher with whom I wanted to conduct a 'yarning circle'. I then met with the school's Indigenous reference group, spelling out my desire to discuss my practice with the Indigenous teachers with whom I had worked, and seeking their feedback on my teaching praxis. It was in this reference group that the participant numbers were broadened, as other teachers that I had worked with voiced their desire to participate also.

Having been approached by two additional participants I had worked with, I sought permission again for an amendment from the Monash HREC, allowing for the new participants who had volunteered their participation. Once plain language statements and consent forms had been discussed and signed, I began with first one-on-one interviews with those participants who voiced a desire to do so. This culminated in a final 'yarning circle' in which all of us gathered with cups of tea and some food to discuss our practice together.

I read the work of Geia, Hayes and Usher (2013) on 'yarning' in preparation for the interviews. Their work highlighted to me some of the different ways of storytelling and communicating that I had not been able to locate in my 'grid' (Kalscheuer, 2008), and therefore not recognised. I sought to open my mind to less linear conversation styles – to anticipate wide-ranging yarns that would come full circle as the stories come to fruition. I wondered how much I had missed in previous conversations through anticipating my native western linear give-and-take in conversations, instead of anticipating the way that stories can cast a wide net and then draw it back in. Thus, this learning extended into my day-to-day interactions and relationships, and did not stay confined to the realm of research methodology.

While I had provided a list of the kinds of questions I was interested in, the participants showed their own initiative, sometimes questioning me about my practice, sometimes explaining their own perspectives on the two-way teaching relationship we had. At times, this conversation would undulate between English and a shared language of the three women, always 'looping' back then to rephrase in English and bring me back into a circle of shared understanding. Where

this understanding may have been missed, I jotted down the words that I needed clarification on and sought this from them later.

I hold in tension that beyond only my voice being heard, Indigenous voices must be heard. However, I tried to focus this study on how *I can become more able to hear*, in the hope that I can extend the current field of knowledge around how pedagogues and 'white anti-racists' in general may be able to more sufficiently hear Other voices.

5.4 Research Process

Much autoethnographic journalling was written at the end of a school day, often a hurried last-minute scribbling (or smashing into a keyboard, to be more accurate) before marking the roll and ticking off the last few items on my t- do list in preparation for the following morning's class. I scrambled to feel 'on top of' my work as a beginning teacher. The more overwhelmed I felt, the more I turned to the journal to draw out my thoughts. As such, they were often harried, distracted, characterised by stream-of-consciousness lack of deliberation. As I would later become aware, the manner of my own selection, omission and self-editing in this process illuminated the limitations of the data set, as has been discussed.

Because I was unsure of 'what' to write, because I was not always aware of which moments in a non-eventful day would emerge to be critical incidents in hindsight, I wrote what was foremost on my mind. This was often reflecting the pressures of the institution and what I felt I 'ought' be doing. The very organic nature of the data generation means that sins of omission are evident throughout. I recalled in hindsight the innate 'selection process' that occurred in thinking about *what* to write. Even when perhaps I wanted to write about how excited I was about a student's literacy grades having risen, I edited these out because I felt that I was to write instead about the social justice themes I purported to abide by. In so doing, I exacerbated the 'Competent Literacy Educator versus Social Justice Warrior' dichotomy in my own mind. To get around this, I began to write in a stream-of-consciousness style, trying to spill exactly what was on my mind as it came out. After about six months, I then referred back to my original questions. What does it mean to be a white western woman teaching in an Indigenous community? What does social justice look like in this classroom context? I thought about what the answers where to those immediately, and checked in about what themes were emerging.

My writing times were my time to 'check back in' with my values and ethics as a teacher and to remind myself of the values I wanted to espouse within my classroom. I had not been fully prepared for how much the language and discourse of the schooling environment would 'shape' my dispositions and thinking, and often my times of journalling and focused thinking on social justice within the classroom felt like a shift of focus; a dichotomy began to form in my brain between the 'two teachers' I was being – on the one hand, striving to be a competent literacy teacher, kicking the goals that were necessary to be seen as a good teacher within the institution, and on the other hand holding on to radical values that did not fit within the institution, looking for places to resist and decolonise the classroom in a way that was not at all highly regarded within the school. I felt two distinct voices forming and struggled to reconcile them. This was a tension that I may not have become cognisant of were it not for the deliberate time I spent sitting and reflecting and comparing back to previous goals and ideals for my teaching praxis.

My original conception of research unveiled hidden dichotomies in my thinking. Stories happened and then I had to theorise about them. The relationship is, of course, far more complex than that. I documented the stories and minutiae that came forth from my practice (practice that is, of course, theory-laden). I then reflected and sought to untangle the theories from whence the actions came. Where these theories were hidden or taken for granted, I sought to make plain the theories that underpinned my actions, seeking to enact theories that created more ethical actions. This meant, for example, pinpointing when my actions came from colonialist or privileged impulses, seeking to create new actions informed instead by new theories, such as Third Space theory, altering the way I acted upon our classroom story, all the while nudging my praxis closer to a more reflexive and ethical one. Theory and narrative were thus closely woven together, just as theory and practice are.

After garnering four years' worth of journals, and four subsequent interviews, I took some time to pore over this data and to examine the themes that emerged. I knew already from my occasional read-overs of my journals that there were emerging themes of Self, Social Justice, Institution and Other, but the ongoing question was one of ethical practices that reduced othering within the classroom.

I was able to code the majority of data into the four categories above, but the remaining data seemed to spell out 'verbs' that a teacher could implement in their practice. The verbs that I ended up settling on – the ones that best seemed to encapsulate the collective thoughts of both my reflections and the perspectives of Indigenous participants – were relational verbs that, for

me, encompassed the precursors to genuine collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers in the classroom space. These conversations always had an eye to what appeared to be the best way to facilitate students' belonging in the classroom, feeling confident, and taking pride in themselves, even while the conversation was about interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers. The verbs that I ended up coding the remaining data with were: Knocking, Unsettling, Ceding and Collaborating. These came to encapsulate the phases that I felt I moved through in seeking to become a more ethical practitioner in an Indigenous space.

6 Making Sense of Difference

A Boxing Match with Myself

I am in their home

They are foreign

I am in their backyard

They are difference

I stand on their soil

They are not supposed to be here

I am visitor

No, you are owner.

(A. Johnson, 2014, p. 87)

6.1 Contextualising and Understanding Otherness

As a beginning teacher, teaching in a context in which I was aware of my difference in relation to my students, I began grasping for terms that could explain the discomfort and disorientation I experienced.

When I speak about the 'difference' that overwhelmed me when I first arrived in Clear River, I am referring to differences in language, but, more than that, the different ways of perceiving reality that language represents (Postman, 1971). I am referring to the aspects of life that I could not locate in my own familiar 'grid' (Kalscheuer, 2008, p. 31), as they pertained to all areas of life: gender and roles, transition through adolescence and adulthood, responsibilities of family members, which aspects of life are celebrated, how death is spoken of and ritualised, how health is maintained and ill health is treated, what characteristics are valued, kinship, how relationships are navigated, how disputes are resolved, how an individual gains respect and authority. More deeply, I am referring to the ways we regard/experience the world and construct our knowledge about it.

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However, I am not seeking to objectify the actual differences that confronted me, but to examine myself in the sense that Kowal (2015) describes, shifting the gaze of inquiry to the colonisers rather than the colonised and, in this location, the teacher rather than the students. In this sense, I was seeking to shift my gaze from gawking at 'difference', re-entrenching othering as a result, moving instead to examine the ways that I interacted with the sensation of difference and the recognition of processes of othering within the classroom.

Binaries were abundant in the classroom: black/white, educator/students, Indigenous/non-Indigenous. The students, I would soon realise, had further categories that they had internalised that informed a negatively-connoted sense of difference and deficit in relation to people such as myself.

I always thought that 'centres of power' (Giroux, 2003) referred to institutions – governments, schools, policy-makers. However, Staszak describes othering as 'a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ("Us", the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups ("Them", Other) by stigmatising a difference – real or imagined' (Staszak, 2008, p. 2) Thinking about Otherness, as Staszak encourages, allowed me to see how, at least as far as identity markers are concerned, by being a white, middle-class heterosexual I was actually a form of centred power that positioned me at the centre and cast off anything else as 'Other'. In the classroom, in the community, I represented a centre of power. This thought was ground-breaking to me. I had never personalised my privilege to this extent before.

The kind of sense-making that occurs in the minds of busy, overwhelmed teachers in confronting settings, is not sanitised, removed, and abstract sense-making. It is immersed in the confusion, liminality and immediacy of the day-to-day. At the time, I noticed how easy it was to fall prey to superiority, a vague feeling that my own native culture is just 'better', a deficit way of regarding difference. Especially as it pertained to the 'unsanitised' forms of difference Kowal (2015) speaks of, I wondered how to avoid such a fallback position of 'us' and 'them' binaries. I wanted to utilise reflexivity in order to more deliberately process my sense-making in this regard, so as not to fall to the easiest, readily available ways of making sense of people and places, and thus relating and interacting in the status quo.

As time passed, I began to realise the way in which some points of difference were so great that they were almost imperceptible. I began to sense a danger in these areas – that difference imperceptible would become difference silenced, difference unacknowledged would become

difference overridden. I began to look for theories and practices that would enable me to become more empathetic to this difference, indeed more perceptive and open to discovering what I did not know.

As a white, able-bodied, middle-class woman, I had lived most of my life with only rare challenges to my ontology. It was only through 'bumping into' the Other to whom my worldview and ontology contrasted so strongly, that I began to realise how much my standpoint informed the way I understood the world around me. During the initial experience of this uncomfortable liminal space, I craved to understand this difference so that the unfamiliar became familiar, the 'different' became 'manageable' (Kapoor, 2004). This impulse, I realised, is what creates binaries, the unchallenged ordering system by which we 'tidy up' the complexities of the world we experience (Soja, 1996, p. 156). To be aware of otherness in a meaningful way, I knew I needed to have a heightened awareness of not only my own ontology and epistemologies, but the potential for other human standpoints. Hugh Mackay speaks of a process of rattling one's cage (1994). By this he means the process of increasing awareness of the limits of what we perceive.

In Clear River, it was as though I became a child again, clumsily making sense of the world around me. I recall being four years old, standing in a convenience store, observing with great curiosity a girl my age, wearing a dress but with a shaved head. Her head cued to my mind 'boy', but her dress signified 'girl'. Making sense of how gender worked, I decided to ask her. 'Are you a boy or a girl?' Fortunately for me she laughed at my question, unoffended and entertained. Unfortunately for me my brother was quick to report my faux pas to my mother.

Moving to a location in which difference was such an overwhelming component of our day to day interactions, I felt like I was once again that child, trying to make sense of how things work, trying to figure out how to interact with an Other. Rather than engaging with how to distinguish gender, I was engaging with how to interact with difference and how to avoid othering.

In this section I outlined and contextualised the ways that I found myself responding to otherness. As this was the overriding theme that I grappled with in the beginning of my teaching career, it marked the beginning of a search for more reflexive and ethical ways to interact in ways that reduced the othering that I saw. In the following section, I outline these early ways of responding to foreground the learning that occurred as I found new ways to interact.

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6.2 Early Responses to Difference

Conquergood (1985) has articulated four flawed stances that ethnographers often bring to 'difference'. These are the appropriating 'Custodian's Rip Off', the naive 'Enthusiast's Infatuation', the instagrammers' 'Curator's Exhibitionism', and the nihilistic 'Skeptic's Cop Out' (1985). While my own dispositions veered the closest to Enthusiast's Infatuation with my eagerness to 'do good' and naivety to the complexities within, I gradually understood that none of these were ideal stances, especially if genuine relationships were the end goal. Here I explore the responses to difference that I observed within myself as a newcomer to a diverse community.

Blindness It became evident early in my career that there was much that I was 'missing' simply due to the fact that I did not have eyes to see it.

> Sitting on the hot sand under the fatiguing afternoon sun. Energy is seeping out of me and pooling into the grey sand. 'Look', the old lady says. Her bottom lip juts out to indicate the direction I was to look. I scan the horizon. I can't see anything. I check her eyes and then scan again, where her eyes seem to be pointing. She can see something I can't. I squint, I tilt my head forward, wordlessly indicating to my companion that I still can't see. She laughs. She pulls my head in towards her until my eyesight is aligned with her pointed arm. There on the horizon is the slightest flicker of movement that is only just detectably by my eyesight, a pixel within the entire landscape I behold, and only because she has pointed me precisely in the right direction. 'Dolphin'.

> The potential majesty of a large aquatic creature is less impressive to me than the fact that she had seen it. How? How do we stare at the same landscape and yet she sees things that entirely escape me? How is it that in viewing the same scene, we see entirely different things? (Journal, October 2014)

Hall tells me that 'people cannot interact in meaningful ways without the medium of culture' (1966, p. 188), that our very culture assists us in daily decisions about what we pay attention to and what we overlook, in order to prevent information overload (Kalscheuer, 2008). Yet participating in the dominant culture in a location like Clear River, I noticed myself falling for the fallacy that if I do not know it, it does not exist. The assumption, subtle and silent, is that if I do not see it, it is not worthy of seeing or knowing. I began to sense the danger, as a teacher,

in a place that sees and knows the world differently to me. There is a difference that is so great I cannot see it, and my oversight effectively silences fields of knowledge I am not even aware of.

In unreflexively maintaining this disposition of unseeing, I unintentionally bought into an orthodoxy that Rigney (1999) identifies as Indigenous Intellectual nullius. As an ethical pedagogue, my praxis ought rather support, 'the struggle for Indigenous intellectual sovereignty… to move our humanness, our scholarship, our identities and our knowledge systems from invisible to visible' (Rigney, 1999, p. 10).

Kalscheuer (2008) speaks of the colonising gaze and the way that we attempt to comprehend difference by 'locating it in our own grid'. We regard the world through our own sense-making frameworks and make sense of difference by sorting it into our existing categories. This creates skewed understandings of Other culture, made sense of through the reference point of Western understanding, oversimplifying otherness with an attempt at universality. Acknowledging that it is 'impossible to divest myself of my culture' (Kalscheuer, 2008, p. 29), yet being aware that different worldviews lead to different understandings and indeed misunderstandings.

6.2.1 Empty Buckets (Ignorance)

Some attitudes toward Indigenous students betray a belief that they are the metaphorical 'empty buckets', bereft of knowledge. Hirst and Vadeboncoeur (2006) outlined the way that a neoliberal approach to education, with its focus on standardised forms of knowledge, effectively blinds itself to differences. Avoiding engaging with complexity, schools respond to difference with 'containment' that views individuals as 'singular and fixed', and maintains 'the borders between what is "same" and "different"' (p. 211). In the schooling institution I worked within, this unwillingness to engage with the complexity of the multiple knowledge systems at work manifested in treating Indigenous knowledge as something that belonged outside the gates or 'out at ceremony', but was not drawn on or acknowledged within the classrooms.

Such binary thinking affects how we interact not only with difference, but also with knowledge systems. Weir (2009) described how Indigenous knowledge is delegitimated through western thinking:

Theirs is a knowledge system based on relationships and connections with country, so it is often characterised as a contextual or holistic knowledge… In these holistic understandings of relationships with other living beings, Aboriginal people keep mixing the modern binaries, combining nature with culture, human bodies with rivers. (p. 15)

This interconnectedness of things, this rejection of western binarism, is why western epistemes position Indigenous knowledge as inferior or lacking. Rose describes views of Indigenous knowledge as 'chaotic', 'unable to be quantified', yet highlights that Indigenous knowledge, through its underpinning of connectedness, 'lays the groundwork for building ethical obligations between species, and between all sorts of life forms' (1999, p. 175). Here, Rose is describing the way that the very connectedness, the refusal to silo and categorise and binarise, inherent in Indigenous ways of knowing, is the foundation on which ethical relating is built. However, rather than valuing this knowledge system, within the school system in Clear River it received only fledgling representation within the school curriculum, conceived of as simply 'difference', and the prevailing discursive model pitted students as empty vessels, deficient in western knowledge and therefore devoid of knowledge altogether. This is perhaps the gravest form of othering that occurs within the education setting.

6.2.2 Beyond Celebration: Appropriation

Speaking specifically about Indigenous knowledge systems, Kincheloe and Steinberg warn of the risk of well-intended ventures becoming exercises in appropriation. This is where responses to difference can transgress boundaries between 'celebration' and 'appropriation' (2009, p.141). Further, some western allies conflate their very identity with that of Indigenous peoples, a kind of over-identifying that does nothing to truly contribute (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). There was a distinct point in the project, early in my first year of teaching, when I began to recognise that I could not 'cast off' my identity as part of the privileged settler culture, in order to take up the culture I was beginning to learn about. Even the very utilising of yarning circles later in the research process would raise this question for me again, that is, how to walk respectfully with and learn from the pedagogies and methodologies around me, without over-identifying and appropriating. While this was a form of conversation that I could learn from in order to more respectfully facilitate research in the location, this ought not become a site where I commandeer Indigenous ways of operating merely in order to claim cultural sensitivity in my project. This is one example of how the consideration of appropriation manifested itself.

6.2.3 Positive Orientalism

Kowal described the notion of 'positive Orientalism' (2015). Similar to the fetishising interaction that Said originally described (1978), this response to difference focuses exclusively on positive traits, albeit with the good intention of reversing the negative bias of the colonial gaze. In this approach, when complexities arise, they are excused through a perspective of 'overstructuration' (Kowal, 2015, p. 43), an approach that blames any issues entirely on structures, reducing Indigenous agency and speaking about Indigenous people as though they are agency-less children. When initially beginning to understand the role of structure in systematic disadvantage, it became easy to fall back on the tropes of essentialising the entire community into a positive bias. I was enamoured with the beautiful natural environment, the gentle 'traditional' skill sets and stories, the tight-knit kinship that makes me envious of highly involved family dynamics. I felt that these elements were highly under-represented in white Australian discourses on indigeneity, and I want these to be heard loud and clear. There were more complex issues that arose as I became involved in community life, but I didn't feel that these issues were mine to speak or even think too hard about. Relationships with my students and their families drew me back into these issues from time to time, but I could easily remind myself that 'I'm a teacher, not a social worker', and draw myself back out of the cognitive discomfort that it caused me. I asked, who am I, after all, as a privileged white woman, to play judge and jury on another way of life? Yet the notion of orientalising a people, and examining my impulses to do this whether 'positively' or 'negatively', was something I had to confront.

6.2.4 Exoticism

In a similar vein, there is something to be said for the exoticism with which newcomers paint the Other. The excitement of interacting with Others whose appearance, language and mannerisms are new and different, provides a sort of honeymoon phase in which Otherness is a source of entertainment and excitement. This can extend to become a form of social capital that is gained by interacting with the Other (especially where social media is utilised to capture and advertise these exploits). As Staszak has highlighted, such a response to difference does nothing to alter the status quo, because 'although it seems that the Other is sometimes valued, as with exoticism, it is done in a stereotypical, reassuring fashion that serves to comfort the Self in its feeling of superiority' (2009, p. 1).

6.2.5   Stigmatising and Othering the Dominant Culture

In my haste to find other ways to constructively frame difference in my classroom, the following vignette explores a self-deprecating response to difference that almost mirrors Kowal's positive orientalism.

> Late last week I found myself in a troop carrier, driving a carload of students to a nearby floodplain where we were to catch local tarantulas. These were intended to be transported down to Melbourne and taken to a venom lab. As I drove, an impromptu conversation struck up between a student and Cheryl, our Indigenous teacher, wondering aloud how our Clear River spiders would interact with their Melbourne counterparts.
>
> 'Those spiders will be scared when they get to Melbourne', a student mused. 'Ha, they won't know what hit 'em! Those Melbourne spiders will be asking "where you from?"'. As the conversation evolved, the imaginary dialogue between spiders grew funnier. Cheryl's voice was peppered with laughs as she engaged the kids in the back of the troopie: 'Our Clear River spiders, they'll start to show off to those smart Melbourne spiders. They'll tell em, "You're city slickers, but if we took you out bush, you'd need us to survive! We know all the bush food knowledge!"'. I was smiling as I was driving, musing on the ways that we were embodying – through the spiders we had just caught – the navigations of otherness that we experience daily.
>
> We began to haphazardly brainstorm this story this week and I realised that this anecdote exposed a lot about my positioning and construction of otherness. Halfway through our brainstorming, marker in hand, a ballooning bubble of ideas on the board – I began to wonder how wise I had been to take this spontaneous moment and continue to run with it, drawing more out of the students. I listened to my own positioning as I let the students tee off on the 'strangeness' and 'otherness' they had seen in Melbourne on excursion – shiny shoes and spiked hair and eccentric clothes. I was cheering the kids on to kind of make a mockery of Melburnians because Clear River kids are tougher and know how to survive out bush. I realised that this kind of thought was not necessarily helpful in assisting my students' construction of otherness, and exposed the flaws in the way I position myself in relation to the 'otherness' of my kids. I feel the need to bring myself down a few pegs and almost posture in self-deprecation in order not to be positioned as the lofty, wordy, knowledgeable *balanda* with a superiority complex. How can construction of otherness be a really positive,

<div align="center">86</div>

helpful experience for my students as we write this text, as opposed to simply falling into the same old clichéd positioning that happens around *bininj/balanda* relations here? Do we focus on the best that both worlds have to offer, while still permitting ourselves to laugh a bit at our idiosyncrasies? (Journal, October, 2012)

As a new teacher keen to enter into the murky terrain of discussing and confronting otherness, I wished to confront the 'elephant in the room' position it had taken in our classroom. My youthful attempts at taking my dominant 'other' position and subverting it, my desire to decolonise our classroom relationships, manifested in an apologetic focus on the strengths that we bring to the table. Correcting the imbalance of power that I saw defaulted to simply encouraging mocking of the dominant culture. I asked myself even mid-lesson how I envisaged this was going to help or alter dynamics of Otherness in Clear River.

6.2.6   Western Connoisseurship

Soja (1996) spoke of Western Connoisseurship – an approach that seeks to master the Other by comprehending 'them', becoming a specialist in 'their' ways, commandeering authority over 'their' culture. Such an approach to difference in an education setting can reduce the potential empowerment that the 'Other' might feel by being the expert in their field.

> The more invested I became in my work as a teacher and my relationships with the community, the more pride swells at how much I feel I'm learning. Suddenly I fall prey to the naivety of thinking that I 'know something'. (Journal, October, 2013)

Indeed, the social structures of non-Indigenous workers in the community seem built around this: a *balanda* who has been around long enough is ascribed authority, considered an informal expert on Indigenous life in the town. Regardless of how clearly I see this to be malignant, it becomes alluring in its promise of social capital.

I take to my journal with a new attentiveness to a desire to 'master' this new and unfamiliar way of knowing, a craving to shrink the difference gap between myself and my students:

> Relationships and place are central. They are central to my students existence and function. To acknowledge these seems to be to take a step forward. Yet these will take time – I need time to learn the people here, and forge relationships (real ones) with

them. I need time to learn the country well enough to centre our learning around it. (Journal, September, 2012)

At the time of writing that particular journal entry, I conceived of Indigenous knowledge as something that I could 'go out and get' and then facilitate learning on it. Still new to interacting with the ways of knowing of an Other, I did not yet factor in the different relationship to knowledge that people in Clear River might have. It had not occurred to me that perhaps there were certain people whose role it was to facilitate that learning, and that I, as a non-Indigenous teacher, could not initiate this. I was not yet aware of the relational aspect to ontology here – the sense of relatedness and role in who was ascribed access to certain knowledge (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). In my previous experiences, knowledge was accessible via freely available textbooks and resources. In Clear River, knowledge was held by the rightful owners and these boundaries were observed. A desire to possess certain information was overridden by the Indigenous ethos of avoiding breach of protocols that could damage relatedness (Martin & Miraboopa, 2003, p. 75). Correct as I may have been in recognising that relationships and place were central, I had not yet learned the way that knowledge interacted in these relationships and places.

6.2.7   Multiculturalism or 'cultural diversity'

This approach to othering clusters all racial groups together as a peripheral 'flavour' to be added to the dominant culture (Bhabha, 1994). Such a tokenistic approach leads to gestures that focus on easily digestible aspects of a given culture without serious engagement or acknowledgement of the culture as a whole. At times this would occur within the school environment when teachers from another cultural background would claim, for example, that we could not claim to 'walk in two worlds' because there are more than two worlds at play within the cultural space. They wanted it to be stated that we walked in 'multiple worlds'. While I understood the argument and it's justification, such an approach could serve to erase the unique position of Indigenous community members as connected to the land on which we were visitors, and as knowers 'on' whom the education system of which we were part was seeking to act in a way that I saw as colonising. Thus I could also see the danger of reducing outsiders' interaction with Indigenous people as 'just another' culture, as I felt that as a teacher I needed to engage more deeply with the culture of my students than just to conflate them as part of a multicultural melting pot.

6.2.8 Othering

I have outlined existing research on the alarming effects of racism on Indigenous students. What is less documented are the subtleties of othering that occurs within schooling settings where teachers are predominantly white, and the establishment of these differences as locked-in binaries. Even the seemingly benevolent 'cultural induction' training offered to new teachers often serves to 'close down all the abundant possibilities for human interaction when we regard the Other as human' (Johnson, 2016, n.p.). This is because such approaches can err on the side of stereotyping and mental shortcuts in the way we approach coming to understand people, rather than embracing the complexity and non-homogeneity of multiple human identities within a community.

My desire was to move beyond the 'binary ordering of difference' (Soja, 1996, p. 90) that I saw everywhere. Third Space offered me a way of questioning how I made sense of difference in taken for granted and ultimately unhelpful ways. The theories that I began to examine had the effect of exposing these binaries to be socially constructed, discursive constructs that had the effect of re-entrenching themselves when I took them up as factual and used them as lenses to make sense of my position.

Even when seeking to understand otherness and difference, we can become participants in re-entrenching it. This was Aveling's experience – she describes that she 'was largely unaware of my own deeply embedded preconceptions about what research ought to be, or that the Western paradigm from within which I was operating' (Aveling, 2013, p. 205). As detailed in the story below, this has a marginalising affect on students when not reflected upon.

6.2.9 Seeking Universalism

My mind seemed always programmed toward dialectics, resolving difference, reducing antagonism and contradiction (Bhabha, 1996) and replacing it with 'Aha! We are the same after all!' Wasn't this what I was meant to be doing? Wasn't this reducing difference? Venn diagrams became my mode of choice in the classroom – beautiful circles of resolution that merged at the middle to find our common ground. At the start of any unit of work – whether it was studying water, or law, or education systems – any theme that we would cover would begin with us, as a class, describing '*balanda* way', '*bininj* way', and then discussing the similarities that joined us in the middle. Here I felt some relief – it was a relief for me to be naming, participating in a nomenclature that gave language to things that made me uncomfortable, but

then concluding our conversations in a way that drew us back together again. Bhabha wrote about 'opening up a space that can accept and regulate the differential structure of the moment of intervention without rushing to produce a unity of the social antagonism or contradiction' (1996, p. 37). Perhaps the urgency he described is akin to the impatience I felt, wanting to name the sensations I felt in the classroom. Was I rushing to conclude my discomfort, at the same time further entrenching dichotomous ways of understanding my students? Was I actually achieving anything other than reiterating difference, reinscribing it? I would later tell a friend that I felt that it was important to keep my mind 'elastic', to continue to stretch out beyond the comfortable limits of my thinking in order to be open to uncertainty. This goes against every inclination, especially for those of us who have lived our lives surrounded by relative sameness that does not challenge us daily.

6.3 Regarding 'Different' Knowledge Systems

I grew to feel that the most important aspect of interacting with the notion of difference was how we regard it and construct our knowledge about it. Epistemological limits are 'enunciative' beginnings, as Bhabha describes, the boundaries that marginalise 'women, the colonised, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities… It is in this sense that the boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presencing…' (Bhabha, 1996, p. 35). If the boundaries begin presencing new things, it was here, discomfort and all, at the edges of our varying knowledge systems, that the creation of new ways of interacting would be possible.

I began to grasp the differences in ontologies between myself and my Indigenous counterparts when I began to think about knowledge and recognise that in Clear River, there was a different set of rules for who could know, and who could teach certain things, and who had permission to seek after certain types of knowledge. There was a different ontology around showing respect to these protocols, one that recognised the boundaries around who could know. There was a different ontology around roles that could be taken up.

There are marked differences in the way I 'know' things and the way my students know them; the way I make knowledge and the way my students have made their knowledge. There are differences in what I present as 'fact', and what is 'known'. For example, there is difference in the way Indigenous students speak of deceased family members in a way that indicates they are still present, in a way that integrates what I, from my western grid (Kalscheuer, 2008),

would dichotomise as real and non-real. This could cause me to position my students as 'other' to me, as they constructed knowledge from their lived realities in a way that was foreign to the way I did. There are also inherent differences in the processes of knowledge transmission, that have further repercussions for how we both participate in an education system.

At the 'chalk face', these differences that at first were an exciting, exotic form of intrigue soon showed how perhaps I, as a *balanda* teacher, could do harm through the ways my students were internalising my careless interactions with difference. The following story is one that not only shaped my practice, but constantly returned to me through my research, informing the urgency in my search for better ways to interact.

6.4 Black Skin Means Dumb

I was in the middle of teaching a literacy lesson, and pausing to pep talk my students about their capabilities, urging them to apply themselves even when a challenge presented itself. One of my more moody, but often non-participatory students piped up.

'But we can't. Black skin means dumb.'

I had heard only the words 'black' and 'dumb', and stopped dead mid-sentence. I swooped in. 'What did you say?'

My student ducked his head, but his eyes were still scanning mine, as though confused about whether he was in trouble or what could have possibly triggered such a sharp reaction in his teacher.

I steeled myself against the initial cold shock of what I had heard and asked again, calmly. 'Go ahead, mate. What did you just say? I'd like to know.'

He shrugged and spat out his self-evident 'truth' to me again. 'Black skin means dumb.'

I had sensed notions of internalised racism in my students. Glimpses of ways that students connected their intelligence/academic progress with their race, projected 'success' and 'achievement' and various other residues of the system we have created onto only those successful and dominant within it – us white people. But I had never anticipated hearing it articulated in such sharp relief.

My students had all paused at this stage and I had an undivided attention that was rare. Voices were murmuring in agreement – someone had voiced something they could concur with. I took more than a moment to gather my thoughts. Where do I direct such a statement?

Another student piped up. Imaginative, articulate, quick-witted and full of eccentric ideas. 'We hear you say that we can do it, but we got this voice in our head', at this point his hands formed two talking puppets, either side of his head, like the shoulder angel and shoulder demon motif in the film *The Emperor's New Groove*, which I knew he had seen. 'that voice is telling us, you can't do it, you're too dumb!'

I took in the sick self-deprecation that had my students all in agreement. I recalled a line from Freire – ' (the oppressed) are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalised' (1971, p. 30). How do I even begin to unpack and refute such an archaic, oft-disproven lie? How can I hypocritically provide lip service to the truth that my students' knowledge is not inferior, when the institution within which I participate seems to affirm this? In a moment I took it all in as evidence that we need Indigenous knowledge in our classrooms, forms of cultural and traditional knowledge embedded, valued and acknowledged in our classrooms. I needed my Indigenous teacher to embody and present that knowledge, and to be seen by my students as an equal – a 'different but equal'.

The limited interactions with differing worlds of knowledge within the education system comes to position students as 'deficit'. When Indigenous knowledge systems are excluded from the rigorous scheme of neoliberal measuring and ranking, what *is* measured shows a 'bleak' picture of deficit. The effect of this deficit notion is not neutral. Students are not protected from this perception, it filters through and is internalised.

6.5 A Reflexive Responsibility

It is my argument that teachers have a responsibility to navigate difference well. Giroux called on us to be good mediators, a process that requires reflexivity and heightened awareness of our own standpoints, as 'teaching is a form of mediation between different persons and different groups of persons and we can't be good mediators unless we are aware of what the referents of the mediation we engage in are' (Giroux, 2005, p. 17).

In my search for these 'referents', I turn to Nakata (2007), who has written at length about the cultural interface, which is an apt description for what teachers are interacting with daily. The cultural interface represents that intersection where differing knowledge systems interact. Nakata's framework reflects an arc, a boomerang in which the two knowledge systems converge only at the height of knowledge and reflection, that similarities are found only with effort and deep thought, not only surface understandings. Yunkaporta and McGinty add to this by extrapolating from how teachers interact at this cultural interface, describing the 'kind of personal reflective work that is needed to facilitate a paradigm shift in the way teachers view and work with Indigenous Knowledge' (2009, p. 59). Armed with this cultural interface framework, and that of Third Space, I began to see outlines for how a teacher might more reflexively interact with difference. This is where the inquiry began.

6.6 Conceptual Framework

A theme in my journals began emerging as early as two months into my practice as a teacher. What I had originally conceived of reflection, as a transaction between myself, my personal ethics, and my practice, was in reality a three-way tug of war that also incorporated the priorities of the education institution (and by proxy, the Education Department), interactions with Others both within the institution, my classroom, and the community. The simple linear process of developing a praxis that I had envisaged was actually feeling like a battle fraught with tensions. Four years later I, was able to conceptualise this relationship in the diagram below.

I used this image to depict the way my practice seemed to be shaped by my interactions with 'Others', my struggles to make sense of my self in the context, and the priorities of the Institution. I was aiming to reflect deeply on all of these layers that shaped my practice. As reflections emerged from my practice, I became aware of the tensions between my own imperatives and those of the institution. And the more I reflected, the more I recognised that the Self, Other and Institution were more interconnected than this early conceptualisation showed:

Influences on Ethical Practice
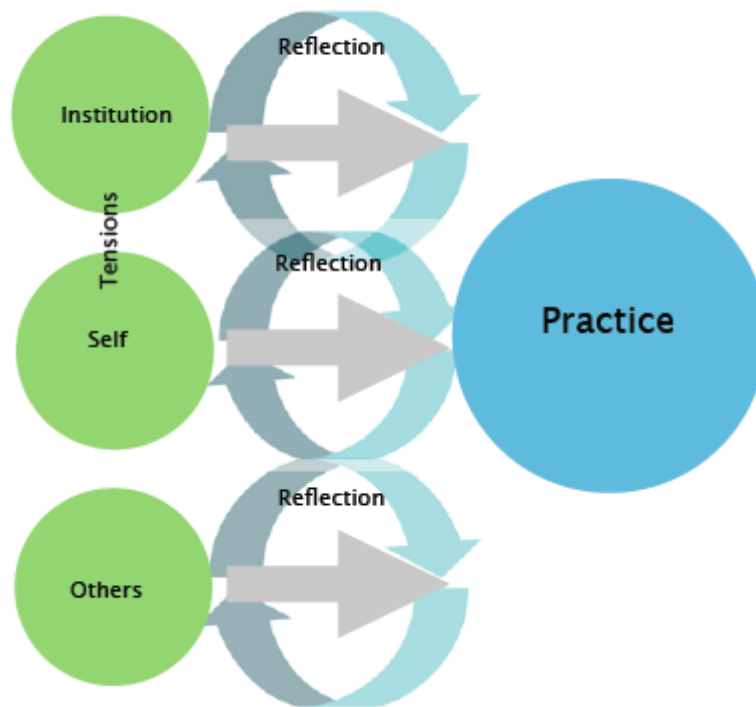
Figure 6-1: Reflection at all levels of a beginning teachers practice

I had recognised that my practice was affected by a number of things, and that my best hope for regaining my power and agency in a scenario where I often felt overwhelmed and over-run by priorities that did not seem in line with my personal ethics, was to spend time in reflection with a view to work towards, or at the very least think about, more ethical practice.

When I speak about 'praxis', I am thinking about not only the day-to-day activities of a teacher, but the ethical and reflexive component as reflected in the diagram below (Figure 6.2). I illustrate how I conceive of praxis as beginning with the innermost thoughts, being enacted through relationships, carried out through personal practice, and influenced by our role within an institution. While the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's 'Professional Practice' (2014) extols such reflexivity in terms of effectiveness in teaching, it does not extend into the deepest beliefs and dispositions of teachers. It is this aspect that Bahr and Mellor (2016) wish to build onto existing competency frameworks for teachers, emphasising the importance of 'personal attributes' such as empathy. Amos (2011) extends the call to teacher education programs to actively develop white teachers' reflections into a moral

and racial dimension. In this sense, I tried to illustrate the way that, from our external participation in a large organisation right through to our most private thoughts that are largely overlooked in teacher discourse, all levels of the way our praxis is enacted require reflexivity and critique of our professional practice. The following diagram illustrates how I conceived of these different layers of my teaching praxis, and how the reflective questions that I was asking myself were framed at each level.

Layers of Ethical Praxis

Role in Institution	Institutional Ethnography	Examine othering of	Indigenous Knowledge Systems
Personal Practice	Actions	Relationship between	Beliefs
Relationships	Self	Relationship between	Community
Innermost Beliefs	Self	Reflecting on	Ontology

Figure 6-2 Developing ethical praxis by reflecting at every level of practice

I needed to reflect on the role of the Institution in shaping my practice, and to think reflexively about the tensions that I experienced between this and my personal ethics. To do so, I drew on the theories of Dorothy Smith's Institutional Ethnography (1987) as a stimulus for better

understanding the way that I interacted within the institution as a member and to understand ruling relations as a way of understanding power. In examining how othering occurs at all levels of the institution, I explored how the function of the institution affected a teacher's ethical standpoint (Smith, 1987). I reflected on the connection between othering of students, othering of Indigenous teachers, and othering of non-Indigenous teachers within the institution. I questioned how *reducing* otherness takes place, and the role of reflexivity in accomplishing this. I wanted to examine the way that knowledge systems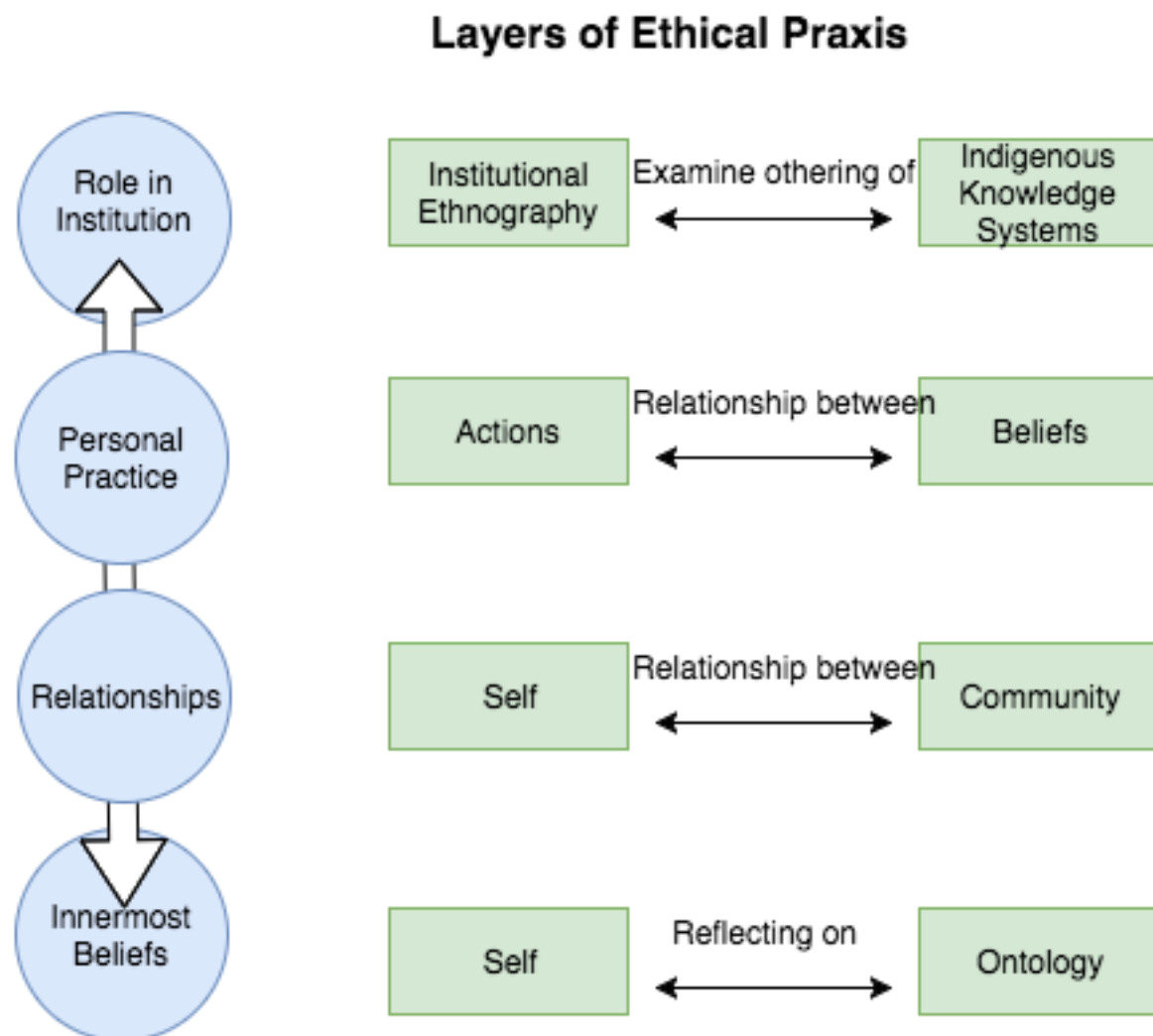 can be othered, and how part of my practice could include reducing this othering. My overall reflective question became, 'In an institution made up of Others, what am I doing to increase, maintain or reduce othering?' While I was not strictly conducting institutional ethnography, using Smith's insight into the functioning of institutions led me to a more complex insight into what it meant to be a member of an institution while trying to exercise my own agency. While both modes of self-narrative writing (autoethnography and institutional ethnography) give primacy to the voice of otherwise subjugated people, and are thus ultimately motivated by the same political standpoint, autoethnography tends to allow more focus on the agency of the self, rather than stopping at examining the power of the institution over our becomings.

To reflect on my Self I drew on whiteness and white privilege, using Indigenous Knowledge Systems (Semali et al., 2002) as a framework against which to measure that which I was blind to – an Other epistemology. Through utilising IKS reflexively, I wanted to turn reflexivity inward to my own ontology and epistemology and the understandings that underpin my openness to other ways of knowing and being. I was curious as to how an awareness of white privilege could increase a teacher's reflexivity and ethical practice. I performed a kind of productive re-centring, in which I centred on myself for the purposes of reflection, in order to de-centre myself within the classroom. I reflected on what key internal dispositions were necessary in order for me to robustly reduce othering within my classroom practice.

To reflect on Other**s** and the way that I interacted with them within the classroom space, I drew on Third Space theory (Bhabha, 1996) as a model for re-imagining dynamics in hybrid spaces. I drew again on IKS to assist me in seeing through the eyes of an Other, and I also drew on poststructuralist work on binaries to become more cognisant of the way I was part of reproducing binaries within my classroom. Here, identities were also a key theme as I became more aware of the positions that I and others took up within the institution, and how these could be altered or adjusted to be most ethical. With these three concepts kept in the forefront of my

mind, I was participating in autoethnography at the fullest, as someone examining both self and interaction with community.

I wanted to reflect on the way that I could conduct myself in order to develop relationships that reduced othering within the school environment. I also wanted to see the connection between critical theory and the development of strong relationships and partnerships (Drichel, 2012; Levinas et al., 2006) led me to examine the ethics of relationships and hold this up against my interactions within the class. The notion of Otherness allowed me to develop a sense of solidarity and empathy for the way that we each, in varying ways, experience othering. I examined and reflected on the characteristics of strong classroom relationships – a catalogue that included awareness of privilege, mutual respect, 'multilogicality' in listening openly to other ways of knowing, and shared resistance to institutional othering. I wanted to push the envelope further and find what current theorising about non-Indigenous/Indigenous partnerships was missing. Third Space was the overall framework that shaped how I saw relationships spatially. I wanted to understand the relationship between reducing othering and Third Spaces. I wondered whether reducing the othering that occurred within the classroom would enable more active Third Spaces to arise. All of these frameworks shaped the kinds of answers I was seeking, gave me beginning points for the inquiry, and offered lenses for making sense of what I found.

6.7 Interacting Theories: An Ocular Metaphor

I think about a 'way of looking' that might restore a third dimension – and suddenly I'm thinking about bifocals. I'm remembering trying on my parents' glasses as a child, stumbling as I tried to take steps with an unfocused floor looming in odd shapes through my new and uncomfortable vision, and trying hard to find a way to look that allowed me to focus again. I remember having to adjust and readjust, squint and relax, to try to find the way to look that allowed me clarity. And now I'm thinking of Clear River, and the liminal spaces I have inhabited here. The squinting, readjusting, attempts to relax alongside attempts to see clearly: these have all made up the process of trying to come about to a reflective and open disposition that might allow a 'space of community and conversation'.

What Levinas referred to as truth, 'an idea with two faces', sounds similar to what Indigenous theorists call 'two-eyed seeing'. Iwama, Marshall, Marshall, and Bartlett, describe two-eyed

seeing as drawing on the strengths of multiple knowledge systems in order to use this 'binocularity' to 'engag(e) the overlapping perspective of each "eye" giving integrative science a "wider, deeper, more generative field of view"' (2009, p. 4). When I first heard this term, while attending a symposium in Canada, my ears pricked up. I had just recently finished a sketch that I had sent to my supervisors, in which I had tried to explain my growing multilogism through the similar ocular metaphor of bifocals. My argument had been that I was learning to draw on the Indigenous and postcolonial theorists I was reading to develop a multi-lensed view of the world I had been working in.
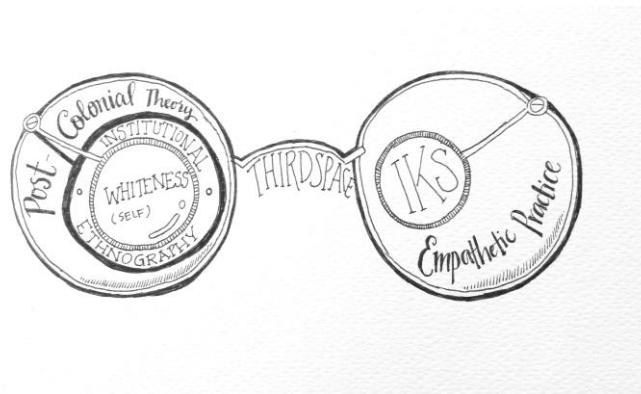
Figure 6-3: Theoretical framework as lenses

The lens on the left shows that I am starting with the broad view of postcolonialism to understand relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people at large. I am then 'zooming in' to see the functions of the institution and how those postcolonial interactions are embodied within the school context. The smallest lens zooms in on my most internal beliefs and thoughts, critiquing them through the lens of whiteness/white privilege.

The lens on the right shows my attempts to 'enter the imagination of anOther', seeking to understand the perspectives of the Indigenous people with whom I work. This is firstly an empathetic disposition to seek to understand their standpoints, and then zooms in to a deeper understanding of Indigenous Knowledge Systems through which I can then see my work through different eyes. I am not claiming to be able to see through these lenses flawlessly, as though I have connoisseurship over an Indigenous perspective; rather, the lens represents an openness to understanding and seeking to understand.

I would argue that Third Space theory is a productive space that can draw on multiple perspectives from which to see a clearer picture. It is through these lenses that I seek to understand what happens in my classroom. The later addition of yarning circle modes of interviewing allowed me to see how such an open form of discussion allows it all to come full circle, unifying both ways of thinking and seeing through negotiation and dialogue.

Shift from difference to othering

It is here that I begin to discuss my findings in terms of more productive ways to deal with Otherness. I wanted to move beyond the initial reactive responses to Otherness that I detailed earlier, and find ways to interact that actually reduced the othering that I perceived and sometimes participated in. While it was the othering dynamics toward students and Indigenous colleagues that I most urgently wanted to reduce in my praxis, this move toward eradicating othering in the way I interacted with people extended beyond just these two relationships.

Firstly, I began to see otherness as discursive, rather than concrete fact. While difference may belong in the 'factual' realm, the extent to which I 'othered' those that I perceived as different, was something I had agentic power over. I began to see myself as a participant in this discourse. In this sense, I began to own that Otherness was only as entrenched as the construct, and therefore my daily actions, affirmed.

Secondly, I turned to Bhabha's work, which highlights the possibility of difference being a productive space (1996). Through the image of a 'Third Space', through which binaries can be recombined, in which enunciative possibilities are opened up, I began to use this imaginary space as the locus to which I would take the binaries that kept arising in my practice. I did not use this as I originally imagined. While first I imagined Third Space as a way to enforce collaboration between myself and my Indigenous teacher in order to physically create something new (by way of a new and collaborative curriculum document, for example), I began to utilise the discursive device as the imaginary space in which I reminded myself that othering was discursive, that third ways were always possible, and that openness would engender possibilities that I may not have thought possible.

I continued to draw on Indigenous Knowledge Systems as a starting point for understanding what it meant to respect the intellectual traditions 'othered' by the current institution. In the beginning, my preoccupation with Indigenous knowledges was primarily motivated by wanting

to rebalance the scales of the deficit that my students had internalised, highlighting the strengths of their own knowledge worlds. Over time, this shifted to be an education that I recognised I needed for myself, in order to decrease the 'othering' that I discursively participated in, in my own mind.

Here you will note that my terminology has shifted from 'difference' to 'othering' – a conscious, discursive shift that changes the focus from a notion of inherent difference (that in my mind was always being contested) to the idea of othering as a problematic process in which I was likely to be a participant. Here, I begin to argue that interactions in which Otherness is a key dynamic require a form of emotional labour that requires support from the institution.

6.8 Returning to Difference with Different Eyes: understanding Othering

I began to see the ways that students internalised race and all its subtle messages throughout the institution. I reflected on how to responsibly and ethically harness these moments of students articulating race and positioning, and use them as a basis for education. For example, when students referred to cleaning as an activity that signified 'being *balanda'*, a colleague and I devised a unit of work in which we could identify for students when *balandas* first began learning about germs and cleaning – a unit on germ theory and poverty through the text 'Oliver'. Through utilising the English canon so readily approved for institutional use, we were able to directly address a deeply-held belief of our students and, in so doing, highlight the limits of western scientific knowledge and locate the time that *balandas* learned something they did not previously know, and how it affected their behaviour. Such an act of making intelligible the Other culture (in this scenario, English *balanda* culture) offered chances as a class to reflect on our knowledge systems and how they inform our behaviours. It was able to posit western knowledge as something that is always learning and growing, not something fixed and superior.

There is a sharp distinction between the discourse around how kids are viewed and spoken about by non-Indigenous administration and professionals in Clear River, and the way that adults are viewed. Often, the way the children were spoken about framed them as victims, beings who have been born into scenarios they cannot control, born into disadvantage. Children are spoken about as though if they could make the shift to being 'more *balanda'*, they would

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be happier and better off. Their parents are almost spoken of as the oppressors – the ones keeping the kids in 'the dark ages'. Teachers who have no problems being empathetic and compassionate toward the children of Clear River seem to lose this empathy once children cross the threshold into adulthood or parenthood and seemingly refuse to take up the mantle offered by *balanda* teachers, that is, the whiteness offered through the education system.

This I see as a response to what Kowal has called 'unsanitised difference' – the more uncomfortable and complex ways that adults interact in Indigenous communities that puts concerned non-Indigenous parties at ill-ease. The adults are the ones for whom most scorn is reserved - the frustrations from *balandas* at parents who don't 'get their act together', the rolled eyes at their customs and the patriarchy of the old men, the turned-up noses at card circles and crowded houses and customs that don't fit into the *balanda* grid. It seems that the adult population of Clear River symbolises the refusal to take up what *balanda* teachers have laid out. They have not become 'like us', therefore they have rejected us. I became worried about the implications this would have for my students' feelings about their families and their identities as, being the perceptive young people I knew they were, they were not protected from picking up on these discourses from within the school.

7 Mapping the Thematic Terrain: Self, Other, Social Justice and the Institution

I have foreshadowed the main themes that emerged from four years of data collection: the Self, the Other, Social Justice and the Institution. This section seeks to illustrate these themes. Here I wish to enable the reader to feel the tensions and day-to-day challenges as shaped by these four themes, in order to be able to grasp the aspects of relational praxis that arises from them. The four sections that will follow, 'Aspects of Relational Praxis', document my analysis in terms of the components of praxis that emerged.

7.1 Positioning

The selfhood of myself as a non-Indigenous subject became important when I begin to questions how I might position myself in a way that was the least harmful to Indigenous students, and at best contributed to their own sense of self. The sense-making process around how non-Indigenous people construct identities in communities features as the research foci with Kowal's work around the sense-making of 'white anti racists' (2015). This sense-making has implications for social justice, in research and also in teaching.

This said, feminist standpoint theorist, Sandra Harding (1992) highlights that members of the dominant society do not have to work at creating inclusion for their identities and subjectivities in their histories and everyday lives. She writes: 'Members of marginalised groups must struggle to name their own experiences for themselves in order to claim the subjectivity, the possibility of historical agency, that is given to members of dominant groups at birth' (1992, p. 128). I began to recognise my privilege, in the sense that I did not have to struggle to name my experience in the same way that my Indigenous colleagues did.

I had begun the project with an understanding of standpoint as useful to positioning myself as an outsider in the community, yet operating within an education system in which I was privileged. The difficulty within this was that my selfhood was in constant flux, rendering my standpoint a somewhat moveable feast. For example, in regard to the National Assessment Plan for Numeracy and Literacy (NAPLAN) tests, I could take up multiple positions. On the one hand I was actively critiquing it with my students and thus positioning myself against it, but on

the other hand being asked by the school to run a professional development session on preparing students for NAPLAN, and choosing to comply with that because of my desire to improve my standing within the school. What I wanted to understand more was how my standpoint was affected by the interactions within the institution, which I felt were having a significant impact on my sense of self as a teacher and individual, and the practice that I pursued. I wanted to harness my standpoint here in order to speak back to all the tensions felt between my various positionings within the institution.

Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, and Sabat (2009) outlined the complex ways in which positioning takes place, especially the agentic role that the 'positionee' can play in their very own positioning. They describe various processes; for example,

> the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines. There can be interactive positioning in which what one person says positions another. And there can be reflexive positioning in which one positions oneself. (p. 48)

I felt that all of these processes were at play in my positioning, at times a jointly produced story-line, at other times others positioning me, while at other times I positioned myself. This is in line with a Butlerian notion of performativity that 'precludes any prediscursive autonomous subject' (Charteris, 2014, p. 104). The interactive positioning that was affecting my subjectivity was a complex interaction between my attempts to reduce othering through positioning myself respectfully toward my Indigenous colleagues and students, and the ways that my assertions within the institution resulted in being positioned by actors within the institution.

7.2 Subjugation and Agency through Positioning

I return to the notion that I was reflecting on both my privilege and my sense of subjugation simultaneously. I feel that it is a delicate thing to claim oppression or subjugation. In a context where I was living in a two-bedroom house by myself, surrounded by overcrowded housing; as an individual who had received education in my first language and had a relatively secure guarantee of employment; as an individual untouched by the generational trauma caused by a history of genocide, the stolen generations and countless other historical wrongs; because of

my relative safety, financial security, power and privilege; and for innumerable other reasons, I felt unable to claim subjugation. I was aware of the unhappiness and powerlessness that I felt as a subjugated member of the institution, but felt it was wrong to speak and name it as such, because in my imagined continuum of power-full to power-less, I felt that others had it worse than I did. At this point in time I was only just beginning to learn about power as Foucault conceives of it, in which "everyone is involved in networks of power relations, and, moreover, that they are all involved both as actors on the actions of others and as the ones acted upon" (Kelly, 2010, p. 73). I had many presumptions upon entering the community about the power relationships between Indigenous and non-indigenous members of the school, and conceived of being able to divest myself of this power and 'pass it back to' those who I felt were it's rightful holders: the traditional people of that part of the world. Over time I began to see that 'all people are both wielders of power and subjected to power' (p. 73), and that I could both act on, and be acted upon.

Back again I return to Foucault's musings on the care of the self (Fornet-Betancourt, Becker, Gomez-Muller, & Gauthier, J. D., 1987), that Dr Miranda Johnson (2016) had posed as required reading in a conversation about work in fraught political contexts. Could it be that acknowledging my subjugation might be the key to caring for my self in this context? And could it be that a key to connection and partnership with my Indigenous colleagues was to acknowledge the shared aspects of our subjugation, albeit subjugation from different standpoints with different implications and differing degrees of seriousness? Could this shared experience be the fodder from which a third space might be generated?

While this dawning did not result in an instantaneous connection and ability to suddenly divest myself of all power, it did mark the beginning of my recognition that power comes in degrees, and having power does not necessarily equate to freedom from subjugation. The irony was that, as marginalised and ousted as I felt within the institution at times, I was still highly privileged, especially in contrast to the often muted, overlooked subjectivities experienced by my Indigenous colleagues within the institution. Situating myself as privileged was a struggle because I didn't 'feel' privileged in my relative role within the institution, but reflecting on myself as so became necessary to maintain empathy in an environment in which compassion fatigue was real.

Brenda goes to such pains to show me that she's not a slacker – calls me, discusses at length her different responsibilities that she needs to respond to (community meetings, mediating for parents whose children have been taken by welfare, taking her sick daughter to the hospital or clinic) as though asking for permission. She seems to know that the subjectivity she has stepped up into is one in which, as an Indigenous assistant teacher, she will be positioned as in deficit, a slacker, lazy, if she does not work hard to prove that subjectivity wrong.

I feel the equivalent in the way I interact with the institution, yet I take into consideration the addition of my white privilege. At our school currently, I am presumed to be incompetent and in deficit, in need of being taught the basics of how to be a teacher, unless I self promote and prove myself competent. Purely by means of being a remote community teacher, I am framed in deficit. I have doubly condemned myself by speaking about the importance of Indigenous languages and knowledge – now I am not only a remote community teacher, but a bleeding heart remote community teacher.

We are both fighting the subjectivities put upon us. (Journal, September, 2015)

My ongoing struggle with making sense of positioning and constitution of selves is articulated by Pinkus (1996). She discusses the many contradictions by which 'we may be constituted in one position or another, in one narrative or another within a story, or perhaps stand in multiple positions or negotiate new ones by "refusing" the ones that have been articulated by posing alternatives' (1996, para. 7). Indeed, that was my experience in Clear River, an ever-changing and unfolding story of varying identities. Yet I felt that I could still enact power and agency in this negotiation. Pinkus continues: 'Yet within their story they do not make explicit the notion of power that may enable or constrain this "negotiation". The very fact there is a notional idea of "resistance" (a Foucauldian concept) implies the concept of an "agent" or "agency", thus shifting the focus away from a being merely functioning under the control of social structures and practices' (Pinkus, 1996, para. 7).

I thought about the multiplicity of positionings that I, and my fellow classroom members, were participating in. I realised that, at least within the institution, I am othered when I try to reduce othering in this way. Rather than see myself as a white martyr, however, I chose to see my otherness as a taste of students' and Indigenous colleagues' day-to-day experience, an attempt to translate my frustration at my positioning, into empathy that would drive more empathetic practices.

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I began to see how the pressures that Betty felt within the institution were mediated through me. The pressure to ensure that Betty was 'working' in a way that the institution would recognise was something that I unthinkingly engaged with. Further reflection on this caused me to recognised the broad spectrum of ways that Betty was contributing to our classroom that the institution may not recognise. These pressures also separated Betty and me into separate entities in the neoliberal sense of individualised practice, and pressured me more into thinking about our individual effectiveness than our shared partnerships.

This could also be applied to finding new ways to position my students For example, there was constant reference to students' 'deficit', NAPLAN markers of achievement and a 'literacy gap' within the school. The view of my students that I had constructed, however, was mediated by understandings of IKS, positioning them as knowers. This resulted in me rejecting departmental discourse in many ways, seeking to position my students more positively, all the while reflecting on how I was still operating under these logics in my day-to-day work.

Additionally, I operated within a world that allowed me to see myself, and my culture, as centre. Part of the unsettling I was to go through was to remove myself and my worldview from the centre, and to allow other marginalised perspectives to enter my consciousness. Eventually, the vulnerabilities caused by these constant and conflicting subject positionings emerged as something I could harness as a tool for greater empathy for my students' subjectivities and experiences of othering – I was hearing a language that was not my own, but so were my students. I was being othered within the institution, but so were my students. I was framed constantly as in deficit, but so were my students. My experiences were more privileged than theirs yet similarly soul destroying. This utilising of my own othering to develop empathy became a helpful offset to the potential narcissism of self-reflection.

7.3 Department priorities mediated socially

Once I began to more closely examine the dynamics within the institution that were influencing my practice, I began to recognise the way that a tribe mentality permeated the claustrophobic schooling environment. A hegemony had arisen in a locale where the professional bleeds into the personal and social lives of its members. Tribes and allegiances were often begun along ideological lines. The innate need for belonging meant that conforming to the institution often felt necessary for social survival. This conflation between personal and professional lives made

remote community teachers especially vulnerable to the ruling relations that are acted out in terms of social capital. Social capital thus became a weighty tool of the institution for ensuring conformity. Indeed, I found myself aligned with the troublemakers – my street was given the nickname 'The Cul de Sac of Knowledge', and hearsay said the principal declared that I was 'going the wrong way' in terms of my ideological stance. On the other hand, a human Exemplar was increasingly held up as the ideal that other teachers ought to emulate. Teachers need to be able to think of themselves as good teachers in order to 'cope'. What the institution values, teachers will strive for in order to experience this appreciation. This had major implications for how I chose to use my time, often feeling that being philosophical about the ethics of my teaching was frivolous time that could have been spent being more 'effective', feeling that time dedicated to postcolonial spaces was robbing time from the more urgent Department-sanctioned concerns.

Related to this was my growing consciousness of the shades of grey between Department values espoused and values enacted. The influence of Department documents (values espoused) was not as effective on my practice as my internalised consciousness of the values enacted by our principals and the perceived 'need' to be valued as a teacher. Departmental mandates and documents may be the 'bones', but the 'muscles' that get these bones moving are the day-to-day socialisation of 'what counts' within the school. The subtle translation from Departmental priorities into my daily practice was mediated by my intrinsic motivation to belong. I was self-governing myself in line with the school discourse of what 'counts' as being a good teacher. In so doing, postcolonial and racial discourses seemed dichotomous to managerial discourse from the Department and school leadership. To engage with such discourses came with great risk for one's standing not only professionally but socially.

7.4 The Exemplar

The 'Exemplar', like the 'generic teacher' (Mayer, Luke, & Luke, 2008), was held up to us as the example of good practice, who was publicly awarded with social capital and more material gains in terms of professional development and leadership opportunities. A hard-working teacher, the Exemplar showed me what it meant to abide by the values that the Institution would, in turn, value. Context, Place, Language and Culture and contextual considerations did not seem to be prioritised in the Exemplar's practice, thus communicating to me tacitly that the

good teacher does not consider such things. This illustrates the way that, at least in this context, it is through social means that institutional discourses are handed down and internalised, not necessarily through documents and texts.

7.5 *My Struggle to Find a 'Good' Pedagogy*

I wish to illustrate the struggle to find a 'good' pedagogy in the Clear River context. As a novice teacher, and in a fraught political context at that, I was highly sensitive to the multiple views of what it meant to do 'good' as a teacher. The cacophony of voices that contributed to my dilemmas over what a good pedagogy might look like are illustrated in the following vignette.

> During a one-week school break and a subsequent dash to visit family in Melbourne, I made sure to wander up to the top of Bourke Street to my favourite bookstore. I was heartened by its familiarity – the claustrophobia of too many reading options in premium CBD space. My ritual was to begin at the window and then wind my way to the back, scaling all of the spines at eye-level and pausing to hover at a shelf until the perusing people in my way had moved. It was there that I found a title in white letters, 'Radical Hope'. The spine had a range of ochre colours that caught my attention. Funny how the colours of your environment start to play a role in what your eyes are drawn to. Noel Pearson. Indigenous leader and thinker. I found myself wondering if he might be able to answer the questions that I had. I felt like I needed a figure like him to shine a light on what this 'good' education would mean. I squeezed toward the checkout and laid my Visa down. (Journal, July 2012)

It wasn't long before I was taking to my journal to try to untangle the resulting mess of thoughts.

> I still find the quantity of 'topics to be covered' overwhelming in my teaching. Accelerated Literacy (AL) is a time consuming endeavour, however the whole premise of the program is that it needs to be done thoroughly, frequently, in order for English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) students to become English-literate. That leaves very little time for critical engagement and time for other rich English skills (I squeezed poetry into Studies Of Society and Environment [SOSE] this year just to make sure we had at least one rich creative activity). I am interested in reading more about how critical pedagogy and constructivism might intersect with EALD. The echo in my brain is of Noel Pearson.

Having read his scathing critique of Freirean thinking, what has stuck is his insistence that that it 'add(s) to the perpetuation of oppression by diverting education away from what the oppressed really needed…' He states that 'To begin to develop a students' critical capacity in early primary school is to impede a singular focus required for the mastery of foundational skills, such programs are diversions and must be steadfastly rejected by all those who want disadvantaged people to rise up in the world. Those who cling to these agendas don't consider whether their measures to arm children with critical capacities even succeed. Instead of critical thinkers and aspiring revolutionaries, these agendas (re) produce only lumpen, illiterate underclasses. It is hard to imagine any results more tragic – and more compliant with the status quo – than this.' (Pearson, 2011, p. 109)

This bothers me as, I respond strongly to Freire and definitely feel that critique of the oppression in my students' lives is part of my job. However I understand the sentiment that, as I have them in the age group that is most likely to stop attending school soon (numbers drop drastically around years 9/10), if I can help them to read and write then that will equip them with the 'most dangerous capability – the capability to read' (p. 109), whereas the risk I run with focusing on critical literacy entirely is that my students then leave with a few vague ideas but not the language or the literacy to be able to continue their own education and their own ability to stand against oppression. Herein, I have a dilemma about what is the greatest disservice to my students – and the question, can I do both? Can I provide opportunities for critical thinking around oppression for an ESL class, while also providing them with the language to understand these concepts, and also at the same time be helping them develop the skills of reading and writing? If I am short on time, which is to be the greatest priority? (Journal, August 2012)

The overall sense of my internal conflict, as evidenced in the vignette above, was a scramble to figure out what it meant to 'do good' in education in this context. While the question above was about literacy practices and related to the *Literacy Wars* (Snyder, 2008), what I was getting at was the greater challenge of figuring out what it meant to teach in a socially just way, with an eye to empowerment. I was seeking to teach in such a way that I was factoring in not only the outcome of the lesson itself, but also the whole message that each student would take home, as gleaned from the entire fabric of the way I taught: I was thinking about what my students would observe in terms of who I respected, whose voices were heard, and what sense of belief I imbued them with about their selves, their identity, their capabilities, and their culture. The words 'Black Skin Means Dumb' were words I never wanted my praxis to leave ingrained in

students' minds. I desired that the wider praxis, the way I conducted myself, did more to bolster students sense of identity and pride in themselves.

In contrast, however, the dominant views around me were those of economic means of justice; for example, 'Students need a strong and realistic sense that they could gain materially from continuing their education, that there are future options beyond what they can see in their local community' (Wilson, 2014, p. 142). Such a view of 'good', the one that was reflected in the Department I worked for, 'view(ed) education as a product to be used in social and economic development and teaching as imparting proscribed curriculum to pupils' (Burton, 2005, p. 6). The tension in trying to maintain this critical thought while simultaneously allowing my practice to be shaped by it (albeit out of desire to ensure I did not fail my students) created a visceral dissonance within my thinking.

I argue that these perspectives subscribe to the 'crooked rhetoric that naturalises "modernity" as a universal global process and point of arrival hides its darker side, the constant reproduction of "coloniality"' (Mignolo, 2007, p. 449). Mignolo's offered solution to this logic is one that involves considering how to decolonise the mind and the imagination, 'knowledge and being' (p. 449). Sardar, in his foreword of a 2008 reprint of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks,* describes a different kind of 'good' that he calls dignity, one that

> is not located in seeking equality with the white man and his civilisation: it is not about assuming the attitudes of the master who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table. It is about being oneself with all the multiplicities, systems and contradictions of one's own ways of being, doing and knowing. (Sardar, 2008, p. vii)

This was a model of social justice that was not about attaining sameness. This model spoke more about affording othered students dignity. Kovach is another voice that argues for western education to join in remedying wrongs previously done:

> Colonial history has disrupted the ability of Indigenous peoples to uphold knowledges by cultural methodologies. While colonialism has interrupted this organic transmission, many Indigenous peoples recognise that for their cultural knowledge to thrive it must live in many sites, including Western education and research. (Kovach, 2009, p. 12)

To summarise my conceptions of this dichotomy, Figure 7.1 below shows the trickle-down as I experienced it in Clear River. What we conceive difference to be affects our conceptualisations of social justice and, therefore, the requisite outcomes for education and what it means to be a 'good' educator.

Perspectives on Social Justice in the Research Setting

Views on Cultural Difference

Reparable Remediable (Kowal)	Distinct Culture Radical Difference (Kowal)

Views of Social Justice

Close the Gap Economic Equality "Populations" (Rowse)	Self-Determination Liberation or Emancipation "Peoples" (Rowse)

Implications for Schooling

Equality Participation in Economy Hegemony Sameness	Respect for Intellectual Traditions

Implications for 'Good' Pedagogy

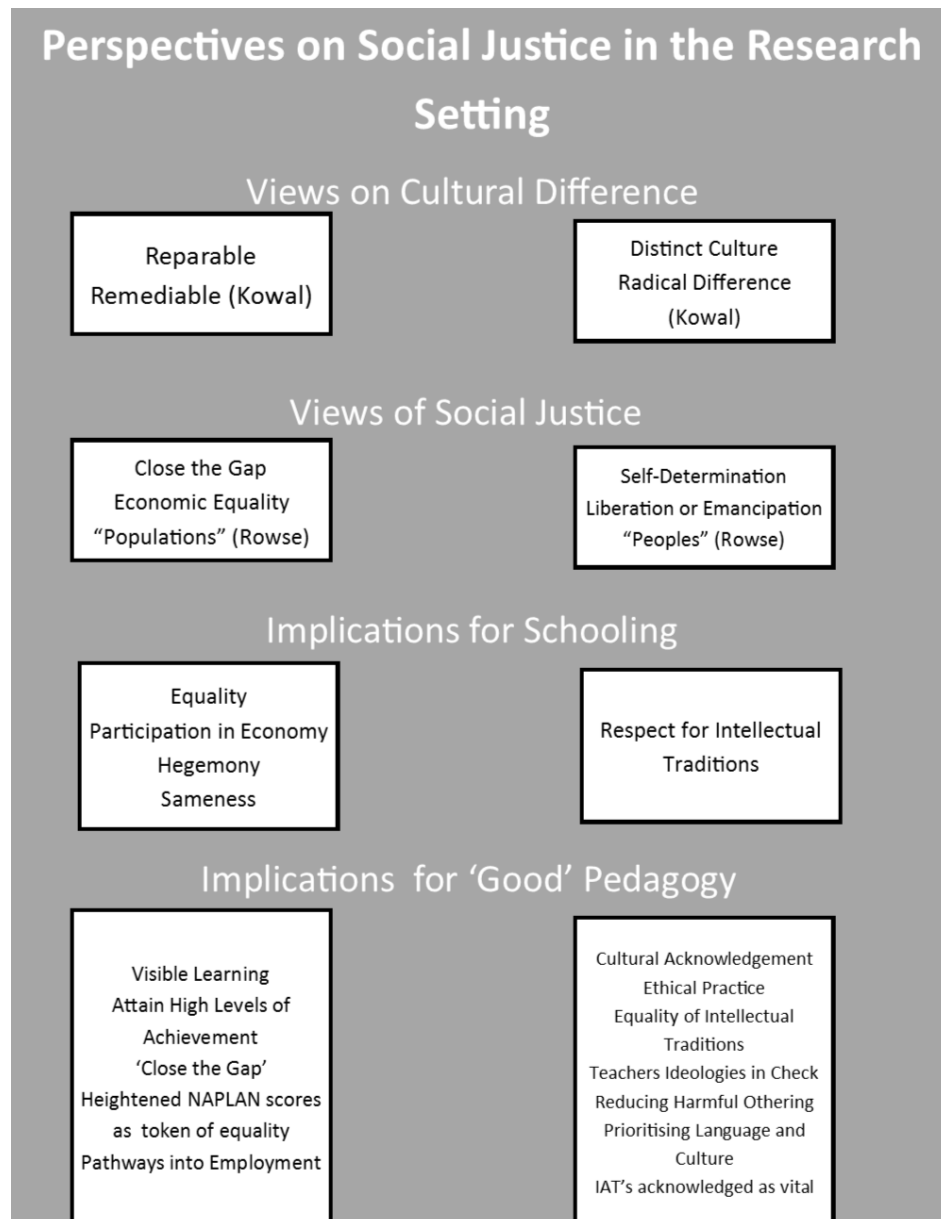|	
Visible Learning Attain High Levels of Achievement 'Close the Gap' Heightened NAPLAN scores as token of equality Pathways into Employment	Cultural Acknowledgement Ethical Practice Equality of Intellectual Traditions Teachers Ideologies in Check Reducing Harmful Othering Prioritising Language and Culture IAT's acknowledged as vital

Figure 7-1: Examples of Differing Models of Social Justice in the Teaching Context

What I was grasping at was how vastly different the perspectives on 'doing good' as a teacher were, and how these perspectives were underpinned by different views of cultural difference and models of social justice. I felt most affinity with the perspectives pictured on the right,

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those that valued Indigenous teachers and cultural knowledge and required deep reflection on my own personal ethics. The models valued within the Institution in which I was a fledgling teacher, however, reflected those drawn on the left side. When confronted with these dichotomous perspectives, as indeed they were constructed within the institution, I was left with serious questions about how to choose the right priorities as a young teacher.

7.6 A practice divided

My growing competence at managing the workload of teaching, and finding teaching modes that were effective, corresponded with the arrival of a new principal who tightened up the rigour of the school environment markedly. I reflected on what that meant. On the one hand I was relieved at the new structures that helped me to see what would work in terms of being an 'effective' teacher – this halved the cognitive overwhelm for me. On the other hand, this brought with it an overwhelming new amount of paperwork and testing to be done, that once again heightened my sense that I was spending more time on things with which my priorities did not align, and less time on the ontological aspects of teaching and being reflexive that I felt were essential to teaching right. An ongoing tension persisted between the institutional values (both espoused and in use); and the 'social justice' pedagogy I wanted to achieve.

I recorded in my journal a sense of 'my mind being split in two' when, for example, I read the findings of the *Indigenous Education Review* (Wilson, 2015), especially a section that inferred ceremonies to be a distraction to learning, recommending that the Department 'analyse the attendance effect of the range of community activities and initiatives including… funerals and ceremonies… and negotiate to achieve modifications that will reduce their effect on attendance' (Point 17, First Draft). The part of my brain that sympathised with the Western education logic, within which 100% attendance is necessary for any literacy gains to be made and for me to meet the assessment requirements that constructed me as an effective teacher, I found myself sympathising with the point. The part of my brain that knew the importance of standing by othered intellectual traditions knew that this kind of neo-colonisation was malignant.

The voices in my head were many and varied and conflicting: I held Freire (1970) as my guide for being non-oppressive, my undergraduate lecturer as the voice reminding me to go against the flow and not conform to outdated models of education, Dewey (1963) nagging at me to

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prioritise experience as the nexus of real learning, and then Noel Pearson (2011) berating me for wasting time on concerns that were not pure literacy. As early as February 2012 my journals were reflecting this tension.

> I have all the good intentions of getting community into the classroom, showing respect and dignity to the students, righting past wrongs and creating real community deep change, but am overwhelmed at how much the micro-functions of the day undermine that goal.

The most marked findings that related to the institution are the way that I felt constantly 'in two minds' about what ethical praxis was. I have documented already the many and varied notions of social justice as it pertains to Indigenous communities, and specifically education. As a teacher, however, especially a teacher with a distinct emphasis on developing a pedagogy for social justice, there seemed to me to be a chasm between the models of socially just education that were all about progress and achievement (the discourse of the Department), and the notions of radical transformative pedagogy that I had dreamed of, especially those that emphasised respect for other knowledge systems. In the shorthand that I had used for this in my journals (keeping in mind the nature of quickly writing my thoughts down at the end of a school day) these were nicknamed *Progress* and *Social Justice*. *Progress* was the 'voice in my head' that I associated with the Department and its mandates, *Social Justice* was the less popular, more political stance that I felt I needed to uphold. I recognise that this was my internalisation of the 'western notion of 'universal progress, or a chronology that is valid for all societies, allows societies to be organised into a hierarchy from the most primitive, to the most civilised' (Staszak, 2009, p. 4) that seemed to conflate itself in my mind with the aims of the Education Department for which I worked.

I was becoming aware of the limits of binary thinking; my reading on Third Spaces had emphasised for me the importance of both/and thinking to overcome the damage of dualities. And yet this binary seemed to run deep within me: a sense of 'splitting' between the agendas of 'progressing' Indigenous people – a push for achievement, a drive to 'close the gap' that characterised schooling logic – and the other drive that I felt more strongly – to respect an Other intellectual tradition, to check my White Privilege and value the knowledge and contribution of marginalised Others. Two very different trains of thought were running parallel

in my head, both with differing and conflicting implications for my teaching praxis. And yet these binaries were not solely within my mind – the strength of the dualising constructs of the discourse of the institution made it difficult to see beyond such frameworks difficult.

Smith spoke about how standpoint 'confronts the modes of consciousness and action of the great complex of objectified and extra-local relations co-ordinating people's activities across multiple local sites' (p. 161). When she wrote about the modes of consciousness – the extra-local relations that coordinated my activities – I immediately thought of the way decisions made within the Department are distributed to principals, who then create frameworks within their schools to value the kinds of behaviours that will enact these priorities. In writing about how I saw myself positioned within the school, my journals seemed to return to two positionings in particular, that existed in tension to one another. The way I write about them shows my awareness of my own agency in influencing how I was positioned, but also the tensions between the two dominant available subjectivities:

> Jess as Social Justice Advocate (see also: tree hugger, see also: bleeding heart, see also: idealistic young thing). In Professional Development sessions focusing on culture and intercultural relationships, my big mouth is wagging. I want to talk about whether students feel that local knowledge is valued or not, I want to talk about going further than token involvement of culture and assistant teachers. I want to talk about my concerns for what is lost when students go to boarding school. I am seated at a table with 'the Exemplar' and I 'know' they judge my capacity, I 'know' they don't think much of my 'leftie' ways, and I am being careful as to how I speak and how I frame things so as not to sound like an idiot. I also presume that anything too controversial that I say will be discussed that night when the principal and her friends gather on her balcony for Friday night drinks. I need to be prepared that anything I say can be fodder for trashing me behind my back. Pick my battles and make 'em count.

> Jess as Efficient, Effective Teacher: I felt from early on in my career that if I was to wear the hat of Social Justice Advocate, I would also need to be adept at Playing the Game – achieving all that leadership set out for me to do so that when I was 'called into the office' to explain my Social Justice ways, I would be able to justify it through my in depth knowledge of the curriculum map, or justify the outcomes I was achieving while also trying to implement a pedagogy of liberation. This meant ticking every box put in front of me. Assessments for reading, comprehension, early numeracy, independent working levels? Check. Assessment portfolios? Check. Any email from

assistant principals, attendance officers, principals calling for a response, I'll do my best to be on top of it. All of this seems to work in some invisible currency I understand in my head – do what leadership say to win credit points, and then I have a bank that I can draw on when I align myself with less popular opinions. These checks and balances are constantly wavering, and I am constantly trying to keep them in check. (Journal, September, 2015)

The very frameworks I have articulated above, those that frame what the Institution valued and recognised as 'good teaching', were the frameworks that I subconsciously began using to make sense of myself as a teacher. I began to get down on myself for the very act of being philosophical and reflexive toward my teaching. After all, within the discourses of the institution I felt that these activities were seen as a waste of time. For reasons I would never fully understand, whether it was that I voiced questions about our wholesale adoption of Visible Learning (Hattie, 2009), or the need to value our Indigenous Languages program, or whether just by virtue of being a beginning teacher, I felt I was positioned as lesser than the neoliberal, achievement-driven 'Generic Teacher' (Mayer, Luke, & Luke, 2008) model that managed to achieve success within the institution. So much of this internalised positioning, the way the values of the institution became embedded in my mind and my own self-monitoring, was based on hearsay – my mind-reading of how I felt I was being positioned. The unspokenness or subtlety of this positioning was crazy-making – based on slight put-downs, marginalisation from conversations, being overlooked for professional development opportunities, and second-hand gossip.

One particular episode that I felt positioned me as 'in deficit' occurred during a staff-wide professional development session on 'Relationship Based Learning'.

It's Monday. First Monday of the term. We're all shaking off the cobwebs of the term break and a slow long weekend. We have our first whole staff meeting for the Semester.

Principal wants to speak to us about Relationship Based learning, fresh from a Professional Development session with John Hattie, drawing on Russell Bishop's work (Bishop, 2003). I feel a bit smug. Of all the things you can fault in me as a teacher, relationships are generally not one of them. I react to the pre-packaged tick-box model of relationships that I feel I am about to encounter. I find it disingenuous. The way that I conceive of relationships embeds their basis in genuine concern for another

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individual, not for external motivations. Therefore, 'relationships' for the sake of ticking a box in an 'accomplished teacher' checklist have no resonance with me. I feel that for the few years that I've been teaching, relationships were regarded as an unimportant component of teaching. For me it has always been integral to human, ethical practice. I enjoy, I thrive on, getting kids alongside and earning their trust. Maybe this session will have some semblance of soul – we're talking about the one element of teaching that I feel neoliberalism can't touch. This won't be a political hotbed. This won't be marginalising for me. Easy.

There are diagrams. Diagrams to show the impacts that teachers, students, families and principals think affect a child's progress the most. It attempts to demonstrate that students rate their relationship with their teacher as the largest marker of effect on their progress. We are presented with decontextualised, far-from-local data. Not pertaining to the students we interact with everyday, but lifted from another location in another time. I feel impatient that diagrams are the medium to demonstrate a very personal, human component of teaching. I don't feel that this has anything to offer me in terms of my practice. I feel instead that the data and images obfuscate and sterilise what we are actually talking about – humans having empathy and connection with other humans.

I am distracted from the data-filled chart and begin to think about Principals' role in all of this. Their subjective standpoint has the power to 'read' texts such as Bishop for us, and to frame how these texts are positioned in relation to me as a teacher. The subtleties of their personal discourse are what I begin to focus on. Care about culture is not in vogue, but relationships with students are now a Hattie-originated, Departmentally-mandated priority for our practice. Principal has some power though to decide how we go about having these relationships, setting the tone for how we think and talk about them.

Principal keeps returning to the caveat of how 'confronting' and different this research is, and that it is not what we are used to. I bristle at the assumption, that we are all painted with the same brush. Their omission of other views is what makes me begin to feel Othered.

I notice the language they use when they talk about the Visible Learning Relationship Based Learning Professional Development (PD). Principal had commented previously in a social setting about being relieved that the Department changed the name of the

session from 'Culture Counts' to 'Relationship Based Learning', because 'Culture just puts everyone off'. I was taken aback at the time, at the assumption that all of us at that table would regard Indigenous 'culture' with the same disdain. I am stunned still, that it is excusable in 2015 to talk down to the importance of culture and respect for diversity within education. I am amazed that 'culture' can still be seen as a thorn in the side of education, instead of an asset, instead of a sacred entity, a knowledge tradition in its own right. I think of Nakata, his commentaries fresh in my mind about the marginalisation of Indigenous knowledges, about the willingness of institutions to abide with token gestures of respect for diverse cultures while simultaneously discounting their academic validity. That official discourse of Principal and their 'tribe' stuns me. The betrayal of what I presume must be tacit within the Principals' meetings they attend monthly makes me feel distrust for the ethics of the Department I work for.

I tune in again to the staff meeting, Principal says 'this was a PD that all principals had to attend, and this is something we have to take up as a school'. Their lack of favour for this idea is evident, almost an apology for its implementation. There are no such caveats on other types of PD and knowledge thrust on us – those to do with testing and data and progress and achievement. They are a given. Relationships though? Fluffy stuff. Not as important. Secondary. But maybe it will help the students progress more. So maybe we'll just have to entertain the idea. This is what I imagine is going on in their head. I wonder if relationships have always been this devalued within schooling situations. To teachers such as myself for whom these integral trusting relationships are the centre of why I began teaching in the first place, does this render me 'Other'? If I am more motivated by this relational aspect of my practice than by following the checklist that will lead to institutionally recognised student achievement and my career advancement, am I rendered in deficit within this discourse? Are relationships yet another discourse that I subscribe to – as well as the fields of Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and being an Indigenous ally – that frames me as distracted, in deficit and Other? More of the 'tree-hugging time-wasting shit' that bleeding hearts do?

A new chart. One that shows four quadrants. Four types of teachers. From my memory, the chart looked like this:

Highly Caring Low Skilled	Highly Caring Highly Skilled
Low Caring Low Skilled	Low Caring Highly Skilled

One is highly caring, but low skilled. I feel my cheeks flush a bit. That's the teacher I was when I began. I felt that I had done something right because I cared, and my students knew I cared, and relationships flowed relatively naturally, authentically. I knew I had their trust. That was my first achievement as a new teacher, in my first year. The only feather I felt I had in my cap as a beginning teacher. I knew that I was positioned as low skilled. I am defensive even now, in my fourth year. I was a brand new teacher back then, of course I was low skilled! But this label somehow cheapens the value of being a highly caring teacher. Highly caring, 'but…'. I feel as though neoliberal discourse has finally caught up to chide me for what I thought such a checklist-approach to 'quality teaching' would never be able to fault me for.

The other is low care, low skill. We can all point the finger in this faculty. We all know who THEY are. You don't want to be lumped with them. At least I'm the bleeding heart shit teacher. Not the arsehole shit teacher. This quadrant takes the pressure off those of us still burning under the critique of the high care, low skill label. I notice how silly it is that I'm feeling that way. How can a four-quadrant chart 'Other' me and render me feeling so in-deficit and marginalised? How can I be encompassed as a teacher – a complex, growing teacher – through one of four binaries?

One quadrant says low care, high skill. Those slightly sociopathic teachers. Highly efficient, knows the teaching pedagogy, but not particularly warm or relational.

The last is the holy grail. High care, high skill. Ted murmurs to me, 'Principal only thinks there is one of those in the school'. He refers to the Exemplar, the Generic Teacher. The neoliberal dream of ticking all the checklists and therefore setting the tone for what the rest of the school ought aspire to be. The Exemplar started teaching the year after me and was rapidly elevated to hero teacher status. I could speculate that they cared neither more nor less than I. They made it clear that culture and language were not a high priority to them though. Their disposition implied that they sought to treat the

schooling environment as exactly the same as any other school setting, not to support students in their Indigeneity and knowledge traditions. That wasn't their core business.

I feel defensive. I feel that I am being relegated to 'not skilled enough'. I know I'm being irrational, pessimistic even, taking it personally, but it bothers me.

Bec is talking in the back corner. She is from New Zealand, and this has struck a nerve. The talk about Russell Bishop, himself Māori, and his in-depth research about the importance of relationships within an Indigenous context, has hit a nerve for her. She is talking, passionately, with Tegan. Principal stops. 'Do you want to share what you're talking about with all of us, Bec?'

Bec takes up the offer. She starts talking about how her father didn't know his language, and that he was marginalised for that amongst his Māori peers. When the education system became more open toward Māori culture, she says, teachers were even learning language. She spoke glowingly of a shift that meant Māori culture began to be valued, even emphasised within teacher education programs. This is personal for her, it meant a lot to her father when this shift occurred, and it means a lot to her now.

Principal has mm-hmm'd a few points, then comments. 'Yep, and Russell Bishop would actually place those teachers in the high care but low skill quadrant.'

At this point I'm blinded to pay attention to anything else that is said. I feel that kind of red hot flushing rage. That instantly, as soon as 'learning Māori' is mentioned as a teaching objective, that whole cohort of teachers from an entire era can be pegged as 'low skill'. I've heard this before. Principal went the step further, to elaborate on that point to presume that even if a teacher makes the effort to learn language, even the cohort of teachers that came out of that initiative, were somehow lesser teachers – lumped into the low skill quadrant. I kick myself for not having finished reading *Culture Counts* (Bishop, 2003) yet, to not be able to dispute this claim. Again, I feel that Bec's attempt to broaden the discourse around a 'quality teacher' is filtered out by Principal.

I take in the way that Principal's personal discourse is becoming gospel before my eyes, the ethos that teachers will fall into line with. 'You can only abide by one agenda', it seems they are saying. I read between their lines and what I hear them saying is, 'If you care about students making progress and you can efficiently make them do so, you are highly skilled. If you care about culture, and language, and develop skills

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towards supporting them in their own ways, and you emphasise relationships, you are automatically low skill'. It's a stereotyping mental shortcut that means they do not make the effort to understand, to see what their teachers' true strengths are. I think about my own vulnerable subjectivities as a teacher, constantly in flux. I am constantly trying to decide how to toe the line while still staying critical about my problematised whiteness and the ethics of conduct that respects othered knowledge systems in this setting. It's important to me to try to learn from the relational ontology ways of knowing, being and doing that I see around me (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2008). My subjectivity is always changing, as I try to grow and encompass all the things I am 'meant' to be as a teacher – efficient, yet ethical. Yet I feel Principal is now saying, 'You care about culture. You must be low skill'. It seems to be the assumption they make. I know I'm personalising it, but it makes sense now. The way I feel I've been positioned. The way they talk down to the causes we care about – us bleeding heart teachers. I am agitated.

Am I agitated that culture is not respected? Or am I agitated that I am not respected? I find it hard to separate the two feelings. The things that I care about so strongly as a teacher, the things that I believe make a quality teacher in this context, are being criticised, reduced, marginalised, Othered – and so I feel defensive. I wish there was a forum to properly debate this. I try to quickly formulate my words into thoughts – but by now we have moved on to the next agenda item. I think. I can't think of how to tackle this. It seems altogether too fundamental, too underlying to the Principal's entire understanding of what a teacher is – to be able to question quickly within one meeting.

I wonder what it might take to change that perception–- to prove that teachers that care and want students to become empowered in their own culture and language, are highly skilled teachers. When did that dichotomy form and what feeds it? I want to work twice as hard. But for what – my own ego? Proving a point?

Six months later I am sitting with 'the Ladies' – the trio of three friends that I have worked with in the classroom. I am asking them about what it is they value in a teacher. How is it that a teacher can have good relationships with her students?

'It's by saying "Good morning!" Gunmala (I'm good!)! You know like, smiling, and like, patting on the back, you learn, you know?', Jan says. Brenda chimes in. 'And when you come, 'specially when you wanna learn about culture, when you come in to the school we give you skin name and then plus every day, visiting, and then we can take you out, like sit down and show you places and then find out whose that people

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belonging here and the language. Even one way funeral, come and like, just participate, you know? Come and sit and show respect. This is our law. (We're) always coming and inviting and seeing, and that's how you get closer like that you know? … You come along and sit down and then we talk to you, you know, this is how, and even friendship and skin name and talk about proper way, show respect to family, you can learn about families, laws, you know, skin names [*identity markers assigned at birth to designate role within the kinship system*] and ceremony… You can't step barging in, you just stand and someone will come along and check, so like you know and instead of people [saying], "Ah you got no manners going there", but when someone stand close to you like a teacher, that teacher that you know her, she's guiding you along to that, so this is what you gotta go there, or she show you this is the next family that you gotta sit down, and when they come, (there's a) connection that, "Oh I need something now". This is how you get along. Then it's like, "Oh, she's always in my heart", that's how you get close to that, she talk to you through, she talk to you, she direct you, sitting alone under the moonlight, near the campfire, talking stories, hear a lot of history stories you know, and hope you hear, ah that knowledge they got it from the old people, you find that you listen, you know, by the person that she trusted you to go along with her you know? So you there always. That's how you get closer.'

Jan speaks. 'That first teacher, *balanda* one, Betty, that's why she, same thing like you, learning, she did the same but knowledge and had a good relationship with the families. All the kids…' Brenda chimes in again, 'like sleeping out bush, every morning, taking them out hunting, just like establishing you know? That's how they getting all that information'. Jan continues, 'sitting by fire, telling stories', and then Brenda: 'So that's what, you tell us, when you come, come close, every day visiting, sitting down, the best friends, going together in every way you know? So it's all just my *jela* [sister] or my *gali kali* [darling], she's my best friend you know?' (Journal, April 2015)

Their input, informed by an ontology of relationality and a respect for the knowledge traditions that cannot be ignored in a genuine relationship, speaks so many volumes more to me than the stale, standardised version of relationship promoted through the PD. Here, rather than disembodied research presented as professional development, the graphed-out mandate from a department wishing to yield more impressive achievement from students, the call to relationship from the Indigenous teachers I was working with arises from their lived experience of Indigenous knowledge systems, in which relationship is key. Theirs was an exhortation to

live holistically, from the core of existence that is based in relationality. Yet through this vignette I see the clearer picture of how the values espoused by the Department start to encroach on and shape my sense of self. I begin to choose to be shaped, instead, by the relational ontology that the Indigenous teachers describe.

7.7 Approaches to Social Justice

In my sense-making around what it meant to 'do good' in my teaching role, I found that the struggle to find an ethical pedagogy begins with the struggle to find what social justice looks like in a space like Clear River. These differing models of social justice and ethics inform dilemmas between teachers' own sense of ethics and the mandates of the institution of which they are part. My conceptualisation of what social justice means had repercussions for how I motivated myself in my work, how I motivated students to learn, and how I interacted with difference. Ultimately these considerations would affect the degree to which I was willing to stretch my thinking and leave familiar ontological terrain in order to strengthen my relationships.

Australia's history is a patchwork of varied approaches and discourses regarding Indigenous peoples. I caught glimpses of the ways that the many phases of the Australian government's approaches to Indigenous peoples have trickle-down effects to the notions of 'good' that Australians apply to work in Indigenous communities. Some are influenced by the logic of the 'assimilationist' era, long gone as that era ought to be, and others more by 'self-determination' logic. My personal approaches were shaped not only by historical discourses of 'doing good', but also actively shaped by postcolonial theory, which opened me up to the perspectives of colonised peoples. My view of social justice was further problematised by hearing the voices of my students, and the resulting awareness of the messages they were internalising through their education (as in 'Black Skin Means Dumb'). These things worked together to create an imperative for me to alter the way I interacted with students, with a view to reduce othering.

It was common in the staffroom to hear stories of teachers trying to situate the importance of learning in order to motivate students: saying things like, 'if you want to be able to stand tall and talk back to the government, you need to learn this!', reflecting their beliefs on what a good future means for Indigenous people. It was my view that, as our beliefs about social justice for Indigenous people, (whether this speculation is our business or not) come through in the way

we interact with our students, it is necessary to engage in examination and reflection on these very beliefs. As we are not neutral – and education is never neutral (Freire, 1970), even when we try to 'keep our head down' and not speculate – there is a process of sense-making that occurs for non-Indigenous visitors to communities.

These discourses on what social justice entails have repercussions for teachers and other practitioners interacting in Indigenous spaces. For example, if I believe that the structure is entirely to blame for Indigenous disadvantage, I might then similarly believe that the essential 'difference' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can be attributed to remediable things such as cultural misunderstandings, rather than an inherent difference in orientation and ontology. The implication for my teaching might be that if I simply learn how to engage families and give my students a taste of success in the classroom, they might then be able to achieve and prioritise academic achievement the same way I might have in high school. The 'difference' between the Indigenous classroom and the non-Indigenous classroom down south will have then been 'remedied'. However, an alternate perspective, such as one informed by 'radical' difference perspectives, would understand that, because of profound differences in ontology and the way relationships are prioritised in communities, my students will continue to prioritise family and cultural activities associated with belonging within the community over the academic achievement I might have been promoting. This would be the explanation for my students' long absences at funerals and ceremonies and other activities to which relationship and belonging are central. This might then be seen as an act of agency and decision-making on the part of my students and their families.

The multiple ways of regarding difference and social justice in Indigenous spaces seemed in my mind to be a dichotomy exemplified in two discourses, 'closing the gap' (liberal policies focused on bringing up quality-of-life markers to be equal to those of non-Indigenous Australians) and 'self-determination' discourses, focusing on dignity as manifested through measures such as constitutional recognition. Rowse (2012) described a similar divide in policy discourses, through the language of 'peoples' and 'populations'. While some measures try to bring Indigenous people to statistical equality as a 'population' through measurements such as health and life expectancy, other approaches focus on respect for Indigenous 'peoples', with a focus on their standing as a cultural entity. Kowal (2015) outlined the idea of remedial difference (difference that can be overcome if only Indigenous people are assisted to understand or to overcome structural disadvantage) versus radical difference (a fundamental

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difference in priorities and ontology). Kowal documented such a dichotomy as being a question of agency, referring to the way non-Indigenous 'helpers' make sense of social justice in Indigenous settings through attributing much to 'structure', sometimes over Indigenous agency and decision-making.

To illustrate what this meant in my day-to-day experience, I think about the way that 'quality control' and accountability to the curriculum occurred within the school. We referred to the Year 7 Australian Curriculum documents when we were teaching Year 7, and tried to build our students up from their current 'levels of ability' to where the Year 7 Curriculum document tells us they ought to be. This was the approach even when students' literacy levels may have currently been at a Year 2 level. This 'line convergence' notion, of closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous achievement (Kowal, 2015), permeated our functioning at all levels. This perspective is driven by a belief that if we simply explain things clearly enough, and make enough contextual references to fishing and hunting and ceremony and cultural concepts that tie our western education references to something tangible from their lives, our students will suddenly say 'Aha! I understand now!' and take gigantic leaps toward not only 'academic achievement', but, implicitly, thinking and behaving in a way that is legible to our worldviews. This notion has been applied to medicine as well, through narratives that imply that if the information deficit (Kowal, 2015, p. 39) that stops an Indigenous person from attaining good health is overcome, Indigenous people will attain the same level of health as non-Indigenous counterparts (Trudgen, 2000). This stems from the belief that 'Indigenous people are different to non-Indigenous people – but not so different that they are beyond the reach of our interventions' (Kowal, 2015, pp. 39-40). Kowal's proposed 'radical difference' is the notion that causes conflict in such a 'close the gap' stance: that perhaps Indigenous people have a 'right to difference', located in an entirely different ontology, epistemology, and worldview that involve different priorities than the ones non-Indigenous administration might lay out for 'them'.

7.8 Working within an Institution

> There was a presence that had a profound influence on my teaching practice. Sometimes she would affirm me, and I would feel the warm sense of belonging that heartened my continued efforts. Other times she seemed to tug me away from my friends, especially my Indigenous colleagues, and want my undivided attention and loyalty. Sometimes she

seemed to be subtly trying to set me up against them. She seemed to be able to capture my attention enough to make me want to conform and be accepted by her, yet doing so created such deep divisions in me that the cognitive dissonance nearly drove me to tears. Sometimes she would say such vulgar things that I would want to scream 'do you hear yourself?!' But she constantly reminded me that she was why I was here in the first place, that she held the keys to my duties and my success as a teacher, that I needed her, that I would have had no education myself to begin with if it wasn't for her. She had a name. She had multiple names, actually, because she was made up of multiple humans like me. I came to call her the Institution.

7.9 Difficulty of engaging with ethics in culture of urgency

On a more personal level, my reflections constantly returned to agonising over rigour. My growing competence as a thorough and effective teacher of English invoked a concern that I did not lose sight of what was ethical. In the dichotomy that continued to present itself in my mind, I feared that, in order to be the most competent English teacher I could be, I ran the risk of diverting my energy away from the important threads of supporting Indigenous knowledge and culture and respecting these within the classroom (that is surprisingly labour intensive). I wrote,

> I am happy to be rigorous, but I don't want my rigour to be directed in the 'wrong' direction'. (Journal, March 2013)

The exposure of my right and wrong binary discourse aside, I exhibited an awareness of where I channelled my energy. In my mind, there was a tug-of-war in my time between doing that which met the Department's priorities; and that which met my own ethical priorities. Often my journalled reflections indicated how 'off topic' I was to what the Department would have said I should have been focusing on and agonising over as a beginning teacher. I internalised this as 'deficit' on my part, often berating myself for being so caught up in the philosophical aspects of my work and not being pragmatic enough, like the exemplar teachers around me that the institution held up as successful. I then constantly returned to the question of whether these dichotomies could be bridged by a pedagogical third space. This became the holy grail I pursued.

Semali and Kincheloe illustrate the kind of division of labour I refer to, necessary to understand and draw on diverse Indigenous intellectual traditions as part of a teachers' professional practice. They exhort teachers to seek to understand the world views existing in the community, and recognise the ways that these 'overarching presuppositions' may not coincide with those of conventional (western) science (2002, p. 86). Such advice is sound and reflects the kind of awareness of othered intellectual traditions that ought to shape an ethical teaching praxis in such a context. However, such work is intellectual labour, and labour takes time and energy. With the administrative burden of compliance, data collection and Visible Learning, how ought a teacher assign time to intellectual pursuits such as these, for which there is no structural support?

There was, however, structural support for assessment regimes and quantifying our work and student achievement. I would later come to see this tension as due, in part, to what Kemmis and Smith refer to as regulation quenching praxis, 'undermin[ing] good practice' when 'the administrative burden of compliance is transferred to practitioners, reducing the time they have to conduct the practice which is their primary concern' (Kemmis & Smith, 2008, p. 60). With this phenomenon permeating the school, as a teacher I was held responsible through these administration-heavy accountability practices, with no means to speak back to the way this was actually eating into limited time I had as a teacher, with very little else left for reflecting on my developing pedagogy and the ethical conundrums associated with being a non-Indigenous teacher in this space.

As a member of the institution, I constantly felt that I had little institutional support for addressing the ethical challenges I was facing within my pedagogy. The commodified list of ethics as published in documents such as the *Code of Ethics for Northern Territory Teachers* (2014) did little to help me, as the enormous elephants in the room of racial and colonial subjectivities, of Indigenous knowledge systems, were never to be mentioned. This is to say, the Institution had a sense of ethics that did little to answer the questions raised by my own. The vulnerable subjectivity of a beginning teacher made it tempting to simply adopt a mode of doing what I was told in order to survive. Step-by-step guides to what to do and 'recipes' for teaching were welcomed with relief. I have since realised that while part of this was due to being a beginning teacher, a great part was also due to the unfamiliar terrain of teaching English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), fresh from a teacher education that only prepared me for teaching within the age-level structures that might be relevant 'down south'.

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My efforts often resulted in a sense of defeat, especially when I tried to do anything related to otherness and IKS, for which there was definitely no pre-defined path. Hacking through my classroom practice with a critical machete was exhausting. My efforts corresponded with high levels of self-disappointment when I could not translate these visions into reality. I perceived how impossible it would be to gain support for ethical and philosophical concerns within the classroom that are not department-mandated.

The context of my first year of teaching was embodied by student attendance that fluctuated below 50 per cent, issues around engagement and behaviour that had no clear systems in place to address them, little curricular support to enable me as a fledgling pedagogue to structure the learning I was trying to attain, and few Indigenous staff employed (and thus no Indigenous teacher presence in my classroom for the first eight months). This is to say, I was operating in my first year of teaching within a broken institutional model of schooling within an Aboriginal community. This made the additional work of critiquing my practice a significant challenge.

During my time teaching in Clear River, it felt as though conversation regarding ethical conundrums such as student racial identity and belonging was out of bounds. It seemed that school leadership was unwilling to spend time discussing these themes, and that such conversations were seen as digressing from the important work of improving student literacy, or even making excuses for it. Teachers who agonised and deliberated over these issues were seen as distracted, wasting time; it was as though thinking about these things and being a good teacher were seen as antithetical.

Perhaps the silences on these issues are born from a well-intentioned place of not wanting to do harm by trying to tackle a subject that is potentially dangerous or hurtful, or simply a topic that people lack experience negotiating. However, I came to believe that these silences only entrenched feelings of difference and exclusion, not only for the teachers who wished to address the elephant they perceived in the room, but also for the Indigenous teachers whose perspectives were not sought on this, and the Indigenous students for whom an improved sense of belonging was never afforded.

In this first year, I agonised over how I could create a decolonising teaching practice when I was succumbing to the common mentality, as exemplified above, that 'western culture is not going anywhere'. This was a familiar justification in school discourse; that I was simply helping my students survive, and that therefore they 'needed' the western culture that I was

offering them in the hidden curriculum. This additionally bought into the logic of 'evidence-based practices' being best, with its implicit assumptions about replicable results, measurable success and the priority of quantitative 'data'.

I caught myself feeling, after Noel Pearson, that maybe there was no room for critical thinking and questioning with my students until basic literacy has been prioritised. In this thinking I recognised the 'culture of urgency', or what Kowal calls 'urgent need discourse' (2015, p. 25), that permeating departmental thinking. We members of the schooling institution feel that we have our students as a captive audience for only so long, and must quickly achieve as much as possible within that time frame.

My sense-making around this is further complicated when I ask Jan about her priorities for education.
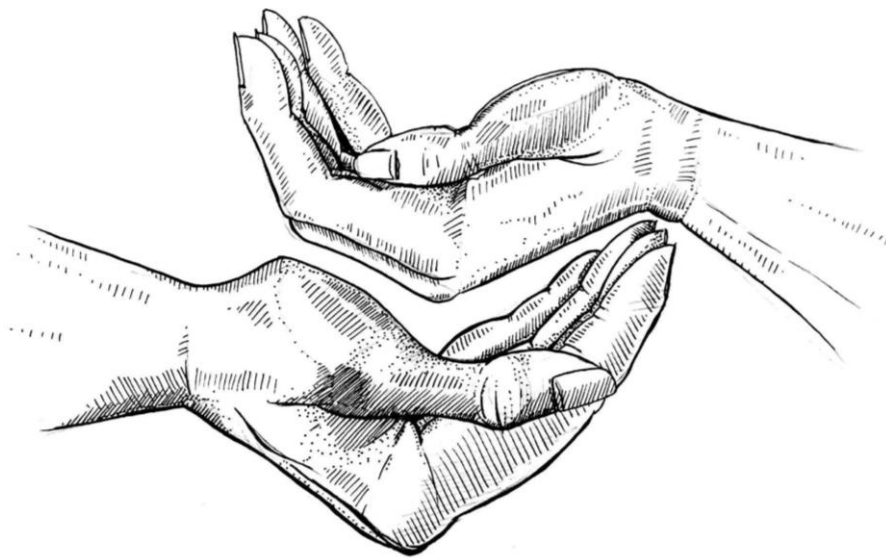
Figure 7-2: Jan's Model of Knowledge Systems supporting one another

She answers by cupping her hands into two imaginary baskets, like that on the scales of justice. 'We need both ways – they need to support each other. *Balanda* knowledge and our knowledge, working together.' She speaks of the way that she wants to see high achievement in English language with our students. She wants to send her kids to boarding school so they have the best chance possible at achieving this. I have just

gotten used to thinking about my role as a white ally being to support as much language and culture in the school as possible – fighting for the maintenance of culture and away from students having to leave home and family for an education interstate. Now I find that when Jan exercises her agency to speak out her own vision for the next generation, it is one of going to boarding school and acquiring the 'discourse of power' available through English language.

Whenever Jan spoke about such things, I found myself gripped with a fear that, with these two counter-running narratives, the ones I nicknamed 'Progress' and 'Social Justice', that one side would lose out. That in wanting students to become stronger in English, they may also become weaker in the intellectual tradition they had been raised in. What I felt was a sense of conflict with what Jan wanted for her community. With further probing I could recognise the ways that Jan's thinking about her community was less bound up in my binary thinking, and more informed by the plural Indigenous identities and discourses that she drew on in thinking about what was best for her community. (Journal, September, 2015)

I would later come to see Jan's considered response as the kind of 'both/and' third space that I needed to try to apply to the dichotomous vision of education that I was torn between.

7.10 The Institution and Othered Intellectual Traditions

The relationship between the Institution and othered intellectual traditions was another point of tension. On the school gossip grapevine was the allegation that a senior member of staff had stated that 'Indigenous languages are dying out, it's not the school's core business to address that'. This both enraged me and caused me to reflect on what was my responsibility and role – was defending, supporting and respecting othered Intellectual Traditions our job as non-Indigenous people? If so, was it our ethical responsibility even if it is not a Department mandate? Is it an ethical anti-racist responsibility? Does it cross into paternalism, a white saviour complex? My belief was that it is ethical to respect other intellectual traditions regardless of whether this falls into the 'key performance indicators' of a teaching position or not.

In a similar vein, I became aware of the ways that bilingual education seemed to have a reputation within the institution for 'not working', resulting in low literacy. In terms of

positioning within the institution, this meant that to express desire to pedagogically respect othered intellectual traditions was to be associated with poor pedagogy. This mental blockage within the institution, I felt, snuffed any ability to engage in dialogue about respectful pedagogy for local knowledge. In addition, a mentality that language was learned (and belonged) at home, not at school, defined the way my colleagues and I were able to discuss its importance within our classrooms, and the value of the 45-minute blocs each week dedicated to Language and Culture. Thus, local knowledge traditions continued to be devalued within the school institution.

7.11 Unifying Dichotomies through a Relational Praxis

Shifting away from my self-styled position as a social justice warrior, I began to focus more on ethics. However, dialogue about ethics within the institution is muffled at best. The process by which teacher ethics are translated into policies render them lifeless pieces of paper rather than relational pillars of our praxis. I was battling with how to embody the kind of ethics and respect and reduced othering that I aspired to, even when participating as a member of an institution whose purported and enacted values often ran in conflicting directions to my own. I was seeking a unified praxis that drew on the best offerings of both worlds of knowledge, as illustrated by Jan's cupped hands. It was important to me that this praxis would be relational at core.

Thus I sum up my developing praxis with the following diagram – a sketched-out map that shows the conflicting beliefs that were informing the complexity of my praxis – a desire to both be the most competent teacher of English that I could be because of the pragmatic benefits to my students' lives, but also my ongoing problematising of the schooling machine through a social justice perspective.

Through this diagram, I conceptualise the way that I am seeking to move beyond binaries. Aware of the dichotomies constructed in the school environment around what it means to provide an empowering, socially just schooling experience for our students, I was trying to bring together the best of both views to try to create something new.
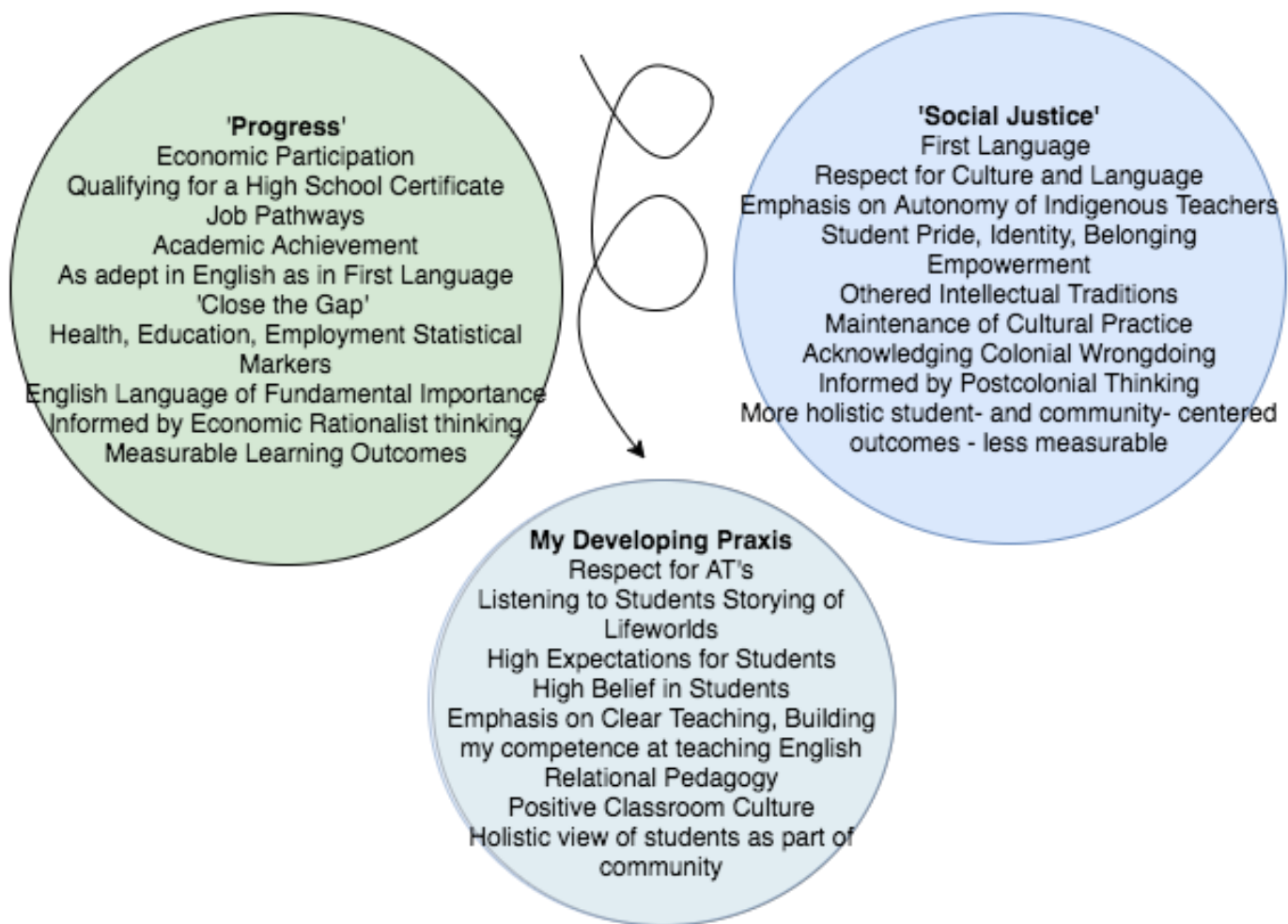
Figure 7-3: An early attempt at bringing together dichotomised approaches in my developing praxis

8 Knocking

8.1 Aspects of Relational Praxis

Having established the thematic terrain that my autoethnographic journals covered, I now engage in further analysis of how I sought to resolve these four challenging aspects of my pedagogy over time. After four years I had a hefty journal of reflections, and the accompanying interviews. In terms of making sense of and organising the many stories within these journals, four aspects emerged of my ongoing journey as a reflexive teacher. I call these Knocking, Unsettling, Colonising, and Collaborating.

These aspects, I hope, harmonise with Martin's (2008) 'five phases of decolonisation'. Martin describes how those who wish to participate in their own decolonisation go through Rediscovery and recovery (the group realises the state of realities caused by colonisation), Mourning (lamenting their victimisation) Dreaming (upon which the new social order is discussed and mobilised), Commitment (considering all aspects of the previous phases), and then Action (achievable only when a consensus has been reached in the previous phase of commitment) (2008, p. 54). If Martin has documented the phases that Indigenous people may go through to actively participate in decolonisation, what I sketch out here may be the beginnings of the mirroring process that non-Indigenous people may go through to participate in the decolonising of their own minds and teaching practices.

8.2 Knocking

> I stand in front of a door. It is closed, maybe locked. I am an outsider. I know that I don't have any right to enter, but I hope to be welcomed in. I know that there is life on the other side, I know that the room is not empty. This room has a life all its own that predates my arrival. I know that my knowledge of what is going on inside is constrained. I feel timidity. I want to do the right thing, to not cause offence or overlook protocols.
>
> I raise my hand, balled into a fist. I hesitate. I knock.
>
> In knocking, I know that I am at the mercy of the Insiders. I know that I am asking for something I am not entitled to. I am a visitor, I do not have a right to instant access. What

I am doing is demonstrating my desire to both show respect, and be allowed in. I know that their refusal is their right.

When the door is opened, I feel relief. I must state my case now for what I am here for. I am simply glad that I have acknowledged that I am not on my turf, that I have shown the necessary respect to an Other's boundaries, and that the door has been opened to me. Perhaps this is the beginning of relationship and learning.

In the most literal sense, in Clear River, there was no knocking on doors. To walk up the path to someone's house and knock on their front door would have been utmost disrespect. To really show my respect and observe their boundaries would be to wait in the car, wind down the window, and yell out the resident's name from the car, or from the front gate. Someone would then come to the fence and see what I wanted. This was such an irony for me – I felt demanding, as though I was driving through a McDonalds drive through and was simply too lazy to get out of the car. Yet here, that's how respect was demonstrated. To walk straight up to the door would have been the equivalent of walking through someone's living room unannounced. It was yet another example of the ways I would need to enter the imagination and norms of an Other in order to show respect. I had to learn to see the norms that were so different to what I was used to that they were unintelligible to my new eyes.

When Karen Martin speaks of 'knocking' in *Please Knock Before You Enter (2008),* she uses as a metaphor the basic respect that is afforded in non-Indigenous culture when approaching another's physical home. She uses this anchor point of understanding respectful protocols, to describe what those protocols look like from an Indigenous ontology. While referring largely to the research setting and talking back to the way that research has traditionally been done in Indigenous spaces, I took this meaning to be entirely applicable to the way I conducted myself within the schooling space as well. To me, knocking meant to acknowledge what already exists, to respect boundaries, to learn and respect protocols, to acknowledge my lack of authority in this space, to approach respectfully, to wait, to relinquish power.

When I knock, inherent in the action is the anticipation of what is on the other side. To barge in presumes that there is nothing behind the wall, that if I cannot see it, it does not exist. In my conduct as an outsider and newcomer, this was the disposition that I wanted to avoid. Just because I did not know, could not quantify, could not understand Indigenous knowledge systems, did not mean that they did not exist, that my students were 'empty buckets' (Freire,

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1970) waiting to be filled. Just because I could not interpret my Indigenous colleagues' pedagogies did not mean there were none at play. One of my first reckonings with difference was an awakening to the danger of not seeing things simply because I did not have the eyes to see it, to recognise things located outside my own cultural 'grid' (Kalscheuer, 2008, p. 31).

Institutional discourse meant that Indigenous teachers were often positioned as 'tabula rasa' (Kapuściński, 2008), an empty tablet, in deficit, bereft of the requisite knowledge for classroom teaching. Such a position presumes that there is 'nothing' behind the metaphorical door. Residues of such tacit assumptions became evident in my own thinking when my Indigenous colleagues were unable to attend work due to family or ceremonial duties. The response of a busy teacher responding to such an interruption to the partnership work of being in the classroom together was a moment where I also needed to reflect on my assumptions and biases toward my Indigenous colleagues. I have already outlined the way that I recognised relationships with Indigenous teachers to be the greatest site for ethical praxis to make a transformative turn, a site for reducing othering and bringing IKS to the centre instead of the margin. This was a site where constant resistance to the status quo discourse was necessary. Indigenous colleagues had pedagogies of their own, methods within the classroom that were too often and easily overlooked when they did not fit the dominant template of what 'being a teacher' looked like. Further, Indigenous teachers had vast years of experience well beyond my own fledgling teaching career. And again, Indigenous teachers' very absences from the classroom that seemed to have them marginalised as lesser colleagues were often informed by the same relational ontology, and cultural responsibilities that informed the greatest strengths of their classroom practice.

An example of the 'unseen pedagogies' would be Brenda's demonstration of relational pedagogy, as described in her own words.

> 'That's my favourite part when I see that child sitting down really quiet, I just sneak, walk in and pull the chair and sit down, and I just say "gunmala, are you right?" And then the child just sit there. And if it's like, really quiet, I say "don't be shy"... I always wanna come and sit next to the child, and make up a bright child... I like helping them, like giving them a chance... like to push them, just once that I say [it] and then I let the child go and he can do it, that's what I want to see you know? Them girls too, [I like to] give them comfort you know? Not to be shy, sometimes they come out there [points to

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door]… I want to make them happier, I want them to feel like they don't want to go home to their parents [instead of attending school], when I see them I'm happy. I like to do everything that I can, do my best to help. It's like, gentle, you know, I want to hear, listen, flat out reading, that's what I want! And then… they feel like they can be in front of all the audience, or in the background reading, that's what I want to see! Strong voice and strong person, boys and girls!' (Interview, October 2015)

In focusing on the relationships with teachers and empathising with what the students might be feeling, Brenda is doing much of the bridging of the 'border crossings' (Giroux, 2005) that is necessary in an environment where so much is dependent on students' semi-voluntary attendance. This is evidenced as the part of her role that Brenda felt most vital: that of liaising with families, but also the shared emotional burdens of youth behaviour, family troubles and illness.

'So always I sit down and make sure, maybe spend more time going round talk to families… hear what's happening at school, how their kids going you know, sit down and talk with them, and say something gunmala… I always been like happy in my heart to love people, to sit down and talk, we've got all these things around us you know? If you're sad it make you sad, it won't help you, It's like sinking and you've got no way to get out, no one to talk to, no one to help you you know? Gotta get help you know.'

The same acknowledgement of pre-existing knowledge is requisite for interactions with students, too. While in the classroom I found it second nature to show respect to the knowledge systems present within classroom and community, my frustration in other areas led to a blindness to students' own intellectual traditions. For example, my frustration at one gifted student's sporadic attendance led to the following scenario.

I forgot to knock. I caught myself writing report comments on a student who was out bush (in her homeland, with her ranger father, mind you) most of the term 'Ash has not attended school regularly enough to learn such and such… we expect to see her attendance improve in term 2…' I paused long enough to hear my own tone. My frustration, my own personal bugbear that I had felt that I was making 'progress' with Ash and I was disappointed to not continue it, was evident. She is engaging in an important lifestyle, and should not need to merge into my institutionalised ways of learning and knowing. I did ultimately want to affirm the value of this lifestyle instead of clashing it against my institutionally-motivated frameworks. A kind of agency was

being exercised by her father on which kind of education he wanted his daughter to engage with. I spent over four years of my education being homeschooled by a mother who wanted to exercise agency on how I was educated. How could I be a hypocrite here? (Journal, December 2014)

I digress for a moment to highlight how such a moment foregrounded multiple issues and confounding dilemmas I was facing about my practice. The fundamental difference between my mother and the ranger father was their differing access to discourses of power. In addition, if I was to be content with parents choosing alternate forms of education for their students, how far would I extend this logic? Perhaps this was what it would mean to be open to multiple modes of Indigeneity available to students through varying educational means, which would see some accessing the western curriculum I was employed to deliver, and see others heading out bush to pursue forms of education I could not provide.

To continue with and stretch the metaphor of Knocking, one of the foremost challenges on arrival was 'would I be able to hear the answer from the inside if my own voice was all I could hear?' I was aware of, and cringing over, the dominance of my own voice in the classroom, necessitated by the scaffolded literacy pedagogy but at odds with the ideals I had had for a more dialogic classroom. Giroux concurred with me: 'We become unquestioning and fail to realise the symbolic violence the dominant voice can exercise… to silence rather than empower them' (2005, p. 17).

I journalled the source of my difficulty to 'listen'.

> I feel that because of the mandated curriculum my time is dominated by an endless rush to complete tasks… and my voice (my white, educated, middle-class voice) is dominant. Worse, my demands are dominant over their desires – I 'expect' them to listen and to complete the tasks set, and this is in the name of desiring a good education for them. It is almost as if I am resigned that there is no time now to do critical literacy and question and empower – because I simply need/want to help them become literate. It is as though I hope that future generations will be able to ride on the backs of generational literacy, and then there will be time for critical engagement and discussion. But for now, I feel my job is to simply contribute to greater literacy. (Journal, August 2012)

In this sense, I risked contributing to a cacophony of urgent literacy priorities at the expense of doing the listening that might be necessary to deeply respect the local forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, being and doing that students were bringing to the classroom.

8.3 Learning and Respecting Protocols

The work of respect does not conclude after knocking and having the door opened to you. I must still observe the norms and behaviours that communicate respect, long after (and if) the proverbial door is opened.

In reflecting on the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers, I first begin to get an image of the 'knocking' ontology that Martin describes, in which relationships are approached carefully and respectfully, acknowledging the world of knowledge and relationships that already exists within a stranger. Brenda describes watching from a distance first, then stepping forward to be partners. She describes feeling shame (shy), but watching first and then stepping forward. She describes the process of observing me, a new non-Indigenous teacher with her friends first, and then how she took steps to get closer to me once she had an idea of what to expect. She describes a preference for teachers that are not loud and boisterous, and a desire to work with friendly non-Indigenous teachers. In the getting-to-know you process, she describes asking questions about identity markers and family as a means to orient a newcomer and get to know them. Then she describes teachers spending time planning together, delegating jobs together, and asking for help from a non-Indigenous teacher. She describes making friends with teachers and then having them leave.

> '[When I meet] another person, if I step back, like when we come every day we get close and closer until we know each other, you know?… But I'm still gonna go because if I want… to be like team teacher, you know, to be partners, I step forward, leave the shame behind, but first like, sit down quiet, and then like, peeping, and that's how you get closer and closer… coz I didn't know you but, I know you, because I've been around the school, because Betty was here, she told me "Ah, she's a quiet lady, nice one", yeah that's how we say, we don't come in and say "Aaaahhh!" [loud noises], that's like bad manners, like sometimes we make that person upset or like "Who's this lady?" But that's what I do… people really want that person to be friendly kind person, then I can get closer and know each other and tell about family and where you're from

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and you express yourself and how you identify yourself, and it becomes like a huge, like, explore something you know?'

For Brenda, one of the highlights of working at the school was interactions with the entire school network. Her openness and desire to connect with all of the people within the ecosystem of the school was exemplified when I asked what the most precious part of her work at school was.

'When I'm happy like when I see someone coming to me talking to me, that's when I feel happy. When I see people that don't talk to each other and walk past don't say hello, even in school or outside… But if I don't have people come to me, like you know wave at me or say [come], come sit with us, then I feel hurt because it's like we're falling apart, you know.'

I couldn't help but think about how even the way we walked through the school yard communicated messages about our openness to relationship. My students often complained about my 'steam train' balanda walk that they called 'Melbourne walking'. The physical manifestation of the efficiency logic that teachers are fuelled by: did such a simple thing run counter to communicating my valuing of the families and Indigenous colleagues that I walked past so often? To Brenda, a simple approach and acknowledgement was vital for her inclusion and belonging in the workplace. Jan, Brenda and Betty contributed the following picture of how a teacher might practically reach out to the community for positive relationships.

Jan: 'Its by saying "Good morning! Gunmala!" You know like, smiling, and like, patting on the back, you learn, you know?'

Brenda: A'nd when you come, especially when you wanna learn about culture, when you come in to the school we give you skin name and then plus every day, visiting, and then we can take you out, like sit down and show you places and then find out whose that people belonging here and the language, and even one way funeral, come and like just participate, you know, come and sit and show respect, this is our law, it's through young man initiation, always coming and inviting and seeing, and that's how you get closer… You come along and sit down and then we talk to you, you know, this is how, and even friendship and skin name and talk about proper… show respect to family, you can learn about families, laws… skin names and ceremony and even like personally, like people whose no good you can't step barging in, you just stand and

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someone will come along and check, so like you know and instead of people, ah you got no manners going there, but when someone stand close to you like a teacher… she's guiding you along to that…'

Jan: 'Its very hard, like, you know, then you get that'

Brenda: 'Then it's like, "Oh, she's always in my heart," that's how you get close to that, she talk to you through, she talk to you, she direct you, sitting alone under the moonlight, near the campfire, talking stories, hear a lot of history stories you know, and hope you hear, ah that knowledge they got it from the old people, you find that you listen, you know, by the person that she trusted you to go along with her you know? So you there always. That's how you get closer, they can direct you, they can tell you you're doing this… this and that you know, that's how you get over that, you know, something that connect you.'

Brenda: 'If she [hypothetical teacher] wanna come, she wanna know us, you know? Come sit with us, instead of she far away, she gotta face us you know? So we'll say, ma, you're welcome, come. That's how like, and then in kids and they have culture, they've got skin names and home lands, it's all tied up in all this in language, families, home, you know? So we can teach whoever wants to come to know our kids or to us, you know? And that's how they come closer to being like a good friendship with us you know? They can come, we say come along with us you know, sit with us. That's how like, I mean I don't see much, maybe they don't wanna know them like, but people who got a good heart, good, like, you know that person can step forward, they can be your friend. They can come. That person be like "Ooh, I got a friend now", see? Because people come a long way, only people step, we living here. We stay here all the time. And people come, they work, they go. They come and go, they just go back. And maybe next time they three years and come back, we still here… When new people come… I see them first thing, "good morning, how are you, you alright? How you? You got partner?" And… when someone have a problem, we see them alone, "I saw you you was like, you know, you need help or you right?" We talk them like that to make them some way feel better.'

This type of relationality – thickly located in context, on country, and in the physical presence of families and kin – seemed a far cry from the Professional Development session that talked in sterile terms about increasing student achievement through positive relationships. What the

Indigenous teachers were talking about was a genuine interlacing of lives and families, in a way that enabled a teacher to become enough a part of a family to take on the earned position of teaching the next generation.

When asked about what teachers can do to show respect in the classroom, Betty responded with a picture of gentleness in interacting with students. I anticipated her speaking in terms of honouring language and taking time for Indigenous knowledge. For her, respect started even earlier.

> 'Doing respect behaviour, telling the kids about the behaviour, and showing respect like, when you come to this town, don't wear fancy clothes. You have to show respect to the people in this community, yeah. Kids wear normal clothes… Share those stories to those [new teachers], respect and things like that. Talk in a politely way, and so the kids will you know, behave themselves, and also talk to them politely, so those kids will, you know, say "She's a good teacher". That's how you teach those kids so they have to, you know, feel what the good teacher is.

> Also… show respect to those students, like… others teachers you know, they bring more anger out to them and they you know, little bit of you know, putting their heads down, that's not fair. But [talk] in a manner way.'

8.4 Acknowledging my lack of ownership and right to being 'yielded' to

When I arrived, so clear in my mind was my vision for having a collaborative curriculum, written together with myself and Indigenous stakeholders, that I had a sense of urgency to knock down the doors and get it happening. In hindsight that my journals betray both naivety and a growing sense of the 'knocking' that would be necessary if I genuinely wished to give space to Indigenous knowledge within the classroom:

> Where this question (of IKS) applies to my classroom teaching, this has proved more complex than originally anticipated. Drawing on Indigenous knowledge means knowing who is willing to be part of the classroom time with my students, and who has the knowledge and is willing to share it, and this is layered with obstacles. Still finding my feet in the community and knowing who to ask is my goal for this year. Once getting to

know people, I want to be able to facilitate classroom experiences for my students drawing on this knowledge, rather than the contrived attempts I made earlier at writing up my term plan and then trying to find Indigenous people to slot in to enrich what I was already doing. I have since realised that this is backwards. I have realised that it will take time to forge the kind of connections with the local community that birth the opportunities to draw on this richness for my classroom. In order to properly draw on critical Indigenous methodologies, being non-Indigenous myself, requires genuine relationships with Indigenous people that desire to join in this project. This is something that will take time. I can, however, put out my feelers for the kinds of priorities my local counterparts have for education, and express my support and enthusiasm for these, and do what I can to implement them in my own classroom. (Journal, August 2012)

I wrote with frustration about failed attempts to have students' families come into the classroom (having not met them at all) to share their local history stories. I wanted to know who I could partner with to ensure our curriculum was drawing on Indigenous knowledge systems, but my language was loaded with 'resource' talk: 'find Indigenous elders to slot in', 'draw on the richness of history available', seeing IKS merely as a tool for the kind of utopian classroom I wished to create, based on my priorities. In finding my feet in the community, it was important for me to learn that genuine relationships and partnerships take time, and that urgency does not fit in well to an ontology of 'knocking'. Though respectful collaboration was the end goal, relationships are not something that can be built solely with an end goal in mind.

8.5 Waiting

By waiting, I mean two things. The first is that relationships take time to develop. The second is that the type of relationships that are worth Indigenous locals' investment are those with an intention of longevity, contrary to the model of 'Teachers as Two-Year Tourists' (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2004). When Brenda speaks about teacher relationships with students, she very much has a view to the long run.

> 'Yeah, like, you say to them like, if I'm your teacher now then somehow in some other year when they come than you can invite you, thank you teacher because you taught me, when you come back in a couple years time when they working or married or maybe have siblings, they see you and say, "Oh, you're my best teacher, you taught me everything", you know, then they will introduce you to their family, their way that's

gone through to their family's side… and they will take you to your homeland, you got a journey walking with them you know, finding your way with these kids, the children that are in our classroom.'

Waiting also takes on a discursive and reflexive form, in the process I must undergo in order to authentically and respectfully approach relationships with Indigenous people. By this I mean I must reflect on my own privilege. Although I cannot divest myself of this privilege, as though taking off muddy boots at a door, at least I can carry my awareness of, and where necessary apologise for, the muddy footprints I bring throughout the house with me.

9 Unsettling

When I speak of being unsettled, I meant that many of my assumptions and taken-for-granted beliefs were no longer stable enough for me to rely upon. I had anticipated this to some extent – I had even spoken about the 'liminal space' I had entered early in my teaching career in Clear River. I hadn't, however, anticipated that I would undergo so many fundamental belief shifts. I also felt unable to 'speak': so many things I struggled to articulate were unspeakable – things like disadvantage, dysfunction, trauma, and privilege. Some of these were the rightful 'don't speak about what you do not know' (Aveling, 2013) terrain, others were things I was not permitted to speak within the institution. I was unsettled in the poetic sense, a lack of peace and internal discord, cognitive dissonance that kept me awake at night. Most importantly, I was unsettled because the notion of myself and my culture as centre – the norm, the ideal – was being constantly disrupted. I didn't have language to articulate the learning that I was doing, and so the learning manifested itself as a state of deep, inarticulate discomfort.

Yet when I say 'unsettled', I am also connoting the relationship of settler and colonised people. As part of settler culture, becoming unsettled means unlearning many of the logics that were fixed in my mind as to what it meant to 'do good', and to decide what an Other people needed. This term is used to also refer to the decolonising aspect of my learning and reflection.

9.1 Unsettled Identity

As already detailed, my own identity and positioning was in flux. Never was this more evident than in my interactions with the schooling institution. Often overlooked in teacher discourse is the fact that most of us are driven within our professional practice by a need to be seen as a 'good' person – although manifestations of this are as diverse as are conceptions of what social justice is to begin with. As I articulated it in my first year of teaching,

> Every teacher seems to need the conviction that they're doing the right thing in order to survive and thrive in this occupation. So who actually is 'doing the right thing' by these kids? The hardliner who sticks to the letter of the curriculum and delivers content with great efficiency? The teacher who chooses to listen to the voice of the students at the cost of efficiently moving 'through' the subjects to be taught? The teacher who

> persists until kids really deeply connect with the subject and it registers, or the teacher who covers all the bases in a year? (Journal, August, 2012)

While my foremost concern while writing this was in my *efficacy* as a teacher, dilemmas concerning *ethics* were equally pressing. I was struggling to select which position and subjectivity I took up as a teacher, as I was already aware that there were many to choose from. I was at this point very much an illustration of Kowal's observations, exerting effort on 'maintaining a specific racial identity as a "good" White person and not an ignorant, exploitative, "racist" White person: part of the solution and not part of the problem' (2015, p. xiv).

Where previously I had known myself as 'good', as compassionate, as caring about social justice – I felt suddenly that I was in a place where I can do no *right*. Regardless of how noble my aims, they were all exposed to criticism and recognition of my flaws and limitations. For example: I care too much so I am a bleeding heart. I am disrupting the curriculum so I am an ineffective teacher. I am implementing a curriculum so I am a coloniser. I see problems in the community so I am imperialistic. I ignore problems in the community so I am rose-coloured and idealistic. I turn my gaze inward and I am navel-gazing. I turn my gaze outward and I am part of the neo-colonising problem.

Never before had I struggled so much to find a 'good' position, or so troubled my bourgeois need to see myself as such (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). Most of these reprimands come from within, from my own blossoming self-awareness, but balanced with the lack of positive feedback from the outside, it becomes a bit defeating – exhausting – all stick and no carrot.

I was, in unsettling my very identity, unsettling the white helper discourse as well. The *balanda* desire to help seems all very noble, and indeed it was affirmed by most white anti-racists (Kowal, 2015) with whom I interacted. However, the desire to help was not pure altruism but based in my own need to establish the kind of identity that suited my image of myself. My desire to know that I was doing good was not so different to any other colonising impulse. This was difficult to confront, as I was still motivated to do the best I could in Clear River, all the while trying to root out the imperialistic discourse that persisted within myself.

I feel that this state of discomfort and even distaste for my own taken for granted feelings (whether they be superiority, colonising impulses or straight up prejudice), is entirely necessary

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to 'unseat' and unsettle the white dispositions that inform imperialism. By unseating and unsettling, I came to understand this as not a one-off process, but an ongoing state of challenge and questioning of myself that aimed to constantly purge the self of the very roots that inform damaging white–Other interactions.

However, I was also unsettled in the silence of my Indigenous colleague, Betty. She was a quiet woman and I seldom knew what she was thinking. This kept me constantly on my toes, 'reading' her to try to alter my behaviours and learn how to work with her the best I could.

My placelessness also contributed to my unsettling. I no longer belonged in the place I lived – I would always be an outsider. I didn't even belong with in the institution – I felt always at odds with the schooling system. It would be a while before it would occur to me that perhaps my Indigenous counterparts felt the same sense of no longer being in their country, and not belonging to the western institutions of power in their community.

To be unsettled means to embrace an ontology of confronting my own distasteful dispositions that hide beneath my well-meaning actions. I think again of the process of preparing pandanus for weaving. We sat for hours, trimming back stalks, stripping them in half, tearing away the thorns and the parts that don't belong. I became overwhelmed at the burgeoning mountain of material that we had discarded. It was at least three times bigger than the pile of pandanus to be used. Yet that culling was entirely necessary in order for us to move on and create something from the plants we had gathered. This is the effect that I felt of the unsettling process – awakening me to thoughts that needed to be culled, corrected, purged in favour of more deliberate constructions.

9.2 Unsettling Self as Centre

Like many white, middle-class, privileged, heterosexual, able-bodied women in my position, I had seldom needed to question my view of the world with myself and others like me positioned as the centre, to which everything else was 'other'. Of course I understood terminology such as 'ethnocentrism', I had used it since my teens. I understood that there were multiple cultures all around the world, and that those of white Europeans were not superior. I understood these things on one level, but when the surface was scratched, the way I thought about teaching in

Clear River betrayed that I still saw myself and my western basis of knowing as 'norm' and 'centre.

Moreton-Robinson articulates this when she states that 'Whiteness remains the invisible omnipresent norm. As long as whiteness remains invisible in analyses "race" is the prison reserved for the "Other"' (p. xix). Reading her text *Talking up to the White Woman* (2000), ultimately a critique of whiteness as it pertains to white feminism, was a significant eye-opener to the areas in which I was still blind. I thought about all the subtle ways that I presented whiteness as the 'norm', all our constant teacher talk to students about 'getting a job in the city', our taking for grant norms like reading benchmarks, listening, speaking without a trace of kriol (a form of Aboriginal English)… all around my classroom practice were clues as to the invisible norm that I was perpetuating.

Giroux also pinpointed the way that my very notions of justice and what it meant to achieve 'good' outcomes for my students were laden with imperial power constructs (2005, p. 20). The master narratives of human rights that shaped what I thought was 'doing good' for a community were one example. The very terminology of 'remote' is another, implying that Clear River itself was 'off centre'.

At first, I thought that my practical response to my recent postcolonial learnings ought to be to teach them to my students:

> Without a postcolonial discourse here in Clear River, am I really the person in the best position to initiate that? Am I, as a white, middle-class female outsider teaching in Clear River, the best person to open up that kind of postcolonial dialogue? (Journal, August 2012)

It took time to recognise that this was not learning that I was undergoing in order to transmit them to my students, but learning I needed to undergo in order to challenge the taken-for-granted beliefs that informed my dispositions and my teaching discourses.

9.3 Unsettling Cognitive Comfort

Cognitive dissonance became the norm for my life in Clear River – the unsettling feeling of holding multiple conflicting thoughts in tension (Festinger, 1962). Tensions and binaries were

abundant in my thinking; it felt that my mind could never relax. I described this to my friend, Max, as having a mind that was an elastic band – always tempted to 'snap back' to my comfort zone, but having to resist that in order to keep thinking flexibly, to keep stretching and resisting the status quo way of thinking (about Indigeneity, about myself as a white person, about the relationship between the two).

As I have already outlined, the greatest tension where I needed to practice this elasticity was between a pursuit of social justice pedagogies and the great educational narratives of progress and 'development' through constant assessment and achievement. Elasticity here meant being informed by some of the apparatus within that discourse in order to make the most of my students time within the classroom, without subscribing to the logic of these approaches wholesale. Trying to embrace parts of both of these logics in a kind of third space opened me up to new possibilities.

The best example that comes to my mind is the way I interacted with Visible Learning (Hattie, 2009), the improvement agenda purchased by the Department in order to improve Indigenous student outcomes once and for all. Within that, I found myself referred to a range of different thoughts that incidentally answered many of my questions that I had had since beginning teaching. In my first year I asked wistfully, 'how can I help students to own their own learning, so that there is less hidden curriculum and more agency?' Visible Learning referred to the work of Carol Dweck (Dweck, 2008) as the answer to this conundrum, sending me reading the psychologist's work and finding an entire way of thinking about Growth Mindset and confronting the discomfort of being a learner. Over time, this became the most powerful learning in my classroom. Before we would learn something new, I would preface this with the fact that we were about to 'fall into the pit' as a class – that we would feel uncomfortable and scared and a even maybe a little bit 'dumb', but that's ok because that's the discomfort that comes when we learn something new. I was delighted to find that my students responded whole heartedly to this – to find that the discomfort they constantly felt in the classroom was, although in part due to learning in a language different to their home language (a notion I tipped my hat to them for constantly), also because that is simply what learning (at least, in the western education framework that we were operating in) feels like. I offered them narratives from the times that I was also in the pit – with my studies, during language classes, when I tried to remember my relationships according to the skin kinship system – and stories about my brother

being an apprentice bricklayer, and having to move through the phases of novice, apprentice, practitioner and finally expert.

The delight of seeing this new classroom discourse being enjoyed and utilised by my students set aside – even this seeming victory in 'empowerment' and student achievement brought on cognitive dissonance for me. What did it mean if I was subscribing to some of the apparatus informed by the western-centric achievement-oriented system I was part of? Was I selling out? Was I contradicting myself by on the one hand valuing Indigenous knowledge systems, while on the other hand aiming to do the best job I could of my role, which was to educate students in a *balanda* education system?

Such conundrums never fully resolved in my head. Even now, I wonder what might be an Indigenous ontological critique of the logic of growth mindset, and know that this would send me questioning my practice all over again. This was a component of the 'unsettling' that characterised my time teaching in Clear River.

9.4 Unsettled Notions of a 'Good Teacher'

Cultural offerings are resplendent with visions of the 'good teacher'. The films that I watched during my teaching degree offered romantic visions that infused my ideals of the kind of teacher I aspired to be. This was rapidly unsettled. I was soon to realise that being a good teacher looked less like having students stand on their desks and yell 'yawp', and more like checking my language to make sure I wasn't alienating my ESL students through empty waffle, making sure that I listened despite the teacher-jargon heaviness of the prescribed curriculum, and ensuring that I wasn't boring my students to the point of lack of engagement or non-attendance.

I had arrived in Clear River, as I have outlined, with a fairly strong idea of what ethical pedagogy would look like. I could argue that I arrived in Clear River with quite a fixed idea of pedagogies of social justice. I had read, in various depths, Freire's *Pedagogy of Oppression* (1970), Dewey's *Experience and Education* (1963), had critiqued aspects of the education system as it stood, including the role of neoliberal measures such as NAPLAN, and had visions to replace them with a dialogic classroom in which my students' voice took primary importance and the world was our oyster to be discovered experientially. I envisaged being part of a de-

schooling movement (1973) that liberated my students from oppression. I have alluded to the tacit arrogance of this idea, the idea that I could be a maverick teacher blowing in with a radical new way of teaching that resolved all the ills of Indigenous education. In reality, no teacher can (or should) arrive with an imported, pre-packaged, place-less and related-less image of pedagogy and implement it as such without ethical negotiation. Discovering a pedagogy of social justice had to be done contextually, with respect to both place and people. The flaw of my pre-Clear River thinking lay in failing to grasp that, as Sellar has put it; 'Pedagogy must be understood as an "inherently relational, emergent, and non-linear process that is unpredictable and therefore unknowable in advance"' (Sellar, 2009, p. 351). Sellar suggests that an ethically responsible pedagogy connects the lives of children and communities, disrupting those habits and judgments that might close down the possibilities of connection. He suggests we engage in the 'responsible uncertainty of pedagogy' (Sellar, 2009, p. 347). These dual strands of understanding, that our pedagogy must be created in place and relationship, and embracing uncertainty so as to leave behind habitual ways of relating, form the basis for why 'unsettling' is a necessary phase of practice.

With my attempt at an imported pedagogy and ideas for how it would unfold, the challenges to my premeditated practices frustrated me. My discomfort spoke out through the following pedagogical dilemmas.

> I think I'm hitting the 'frustration' phase of my first year. I'm frustrated that things that I teach (I know I ought to say 'facilitate') don't seem to register or actually take effect in the students' lives. I'm frustrated that the learning that happens in our classroom doesn't seem to be connecting to their lived experience, yet I don't know how to do better.

> I have ambitious projects – such as getting community members into the classroom to tell us stories about Clear River, and about dreaming, and about cultural ways – but in the process of getting these projects off the ground, the wheels seem to fall off – partly something that seems endemic in any project a *balanda* tries to start to 'benefit' local people. So what does that mean? Do I give up? Is that a sign that I ought not be teaching here? Should I just stick to what I know? How then do I empower these students with confidence in what they know? How do I invest confidence and pride in these students? To what do I attach their learning when 'get a job' is a *balanda* aspiration inflicted on them? To what do I attach their learning when there is no instant

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successes or achievements they can take pride in? To what do I attach their learning when they are not even aware of their lack of empowerment, let alone have the desire to overcome it? How on earth do I avoid becoming another oppressor? (Journal, October 2012)

Lather has spoken of embracing a 'praxis of not being so sure' (1998, p. 184). This is the pedagogy I had to embrace in my classroom in Clear River, and in the liminal space that teaching here had thrust me into. In Clear River, both as a new practitioner and as a non-Indigenous woman in an Indigenous space, I knew very little and had to come to terms with this in order for new possibilities to arise. Somerville refers to these processes (asking the difficult questions with which I was rapidly filling journals) as part of a responsive pedagogy:

> Researching, teaching and learning about place means participating in a contact zone of difference. This requires continuing engagement with difficult questions, moving beyond a personal comfort zone to refuse easy answers and often to dwell in a space of unknowing… Yet it is in the in-between space of energy and struggle in the contact zone where new possibilities lie. (Somerville, Davies, Power, Gannon, & de Carteret, 2012, p. 6)

This contact zone and its accompanying discomfort indeed proved to create the uncertainty needed to find new possibilities. With Bakhtin, I felt how the 'importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of an individual's coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 348). Seeking to understand the distinct individuals' discourses that made up the classroom environment became a liminal space in which I would be constantly unsettled and never 'sure', yet always searching for new ways.

9.5 Unsettling as Teacher, Becoming Student

The feeling of unknowing that I have described led to a recognition that I needed to wait and take time.

> I am also increasingly aware that the longer I am here, the less I know. I know nothing here. I am out of my depth with many of the subjects I am required to teach, I am constantly around a language I do not speak and can only just begin to grasp (an experience I share with my students!) and I know nothing about community, much less about how to 'remedy' the trauma this particular community is entrenched in. The two

mantras that seem to arise most frequently in my head currently are that I know nothing yet, and that the change I hope to bring through my classroom activities, the learning I would love to facilitate, will take time. (Journal, September 2012)

Beyond simply embracing the pedagogy of not-knowing, being a teacher who moved into new spaces and possibilities meant often taking on the role of student. The positioning of being a child, a student, became the one that felt most ethical.

Even in calling myself a 'student' of other ways of knowing, I still had to keep in mind that, regardless of how much I dedicated myself to this learning, I still only scraped the surface. A colleague and I began to use the words 'signified vs signifier' to describe our interactions with Indigenous Knowledge, a reference to the state of our interactions with this type of knowledge as being at a word level only (Saussure, 1983). While I might have been able to 'language' the cultural stuff of my students lives – use words like 'ceremony' and 'dreaming' and my skin name, and imply a basic level of understanding about these things, these were actual words to me, no doubt empty of the significance and the meaning that my students carried with them. This mimicry that I participated in gave me the false sense of understanding, when in actual fact I understood only a shadow of what my students did.

As Kapuściński outlines,

> thinking is formed on the basis of language, and as we speak different languages, each of us creates his own image of the world, unlike any other. These images are not compatible and are not replaceable. For this reason dialogue, though not impossible, demands a serious effort, patience, and the will of its participants to understand and communicate. Being aware of the fact that in conversing with the Other I am communing with someone who at the same time sees the world differently from me and understands it another way is important in creating a positive atmosphere for dialogue. (2008, p. 43)

I could not, therefore, fall into a false sense of 'knowing' as I began to grasp rudimentary aspects of my students' life worlds and knowledge worlds. I was still very much an un-knower, very much inhabiting a liminal space of uncertainty. If anything, the familiarity to some concepts aided a sense of relatedness that began to overshadow the overwhelming sense of

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otherness that had dominated me in my first year. I was coming to see myself as an unsettled learner – sometimes able to 'help' but often needing to learn.

9.5.1 Coming-to-Learn

My ankle is cramped and the scant grass underneath my awkward cross-legged position offer little respite from the gravel pressing in. The early April sun is beating down, and even though a fledgling tree casts some shade over our little circle, the humidity has established itself early and ensures that our faces are speckled with little beads of sweat.

I have seated myself next to Emma. This craft is frustrating me but I know that it is one she adores. She had written a story for me over a year ago about how she loves weaving pandanus because it is good for her hands. For me, it is a frustrating endeavour that has me firmly planted in the seat of learner, noob, know-nothing. I am fighting a sense of self-consciousness, temporarily forgetting the bravado and pride I usually take in subverting my teaching position to one of learner. Emma has already mounted a great pile of pandanus, stripped and split and ready to dry, dye and weave.

We spent the entire day out bush the day before. We had headed out to an outstation about an hour from the community, to collect pandanus to be woven into a large traditional mat for the newly established Culture Room at the school. Two girls classes had gone, a significant contribution to the passing on of this traditional craft. They would learn every step of the procedure to weave pandanus from a small crew of older ladies, willing and ready to pass on the art. The ladies had given a brilliant impromptu speech, summing up the urgency of the girls learning this craft now, because when they pass on it will be up to the girls to continue teaching this skill. And I got it on video. A moment of teacher pride. I can use this later for recounts and narrative writing.

These days out bush, to me, are equivalent to taking vitamins or eating weetbix. I know they are good for me and my class, I know we need to do it, but the task has great moments of lovelessness. The original novelty of the uniqueness of my position (can I call it the tourism honeymoon phase?) has long worn off. These trips out bush mean many incredible, important, crucial things central to what I want to achieve as a teacher – cultural maintenance, learning from elders, shifting me from the position of all power and knowledge, learning in 'place' instead of in a sterile classroom – but in practice the ontology of this experience is not easy. These days mean long driving in a hot, packed troop carrier, long episodes of standing in the wet heat, acting as crowd control

to a herd of cats that liked to stray off into the outer edges of the bush instead of sticking close to Betty, our elder and teacher. The lowest point hits around 1pm – with at least one more hour of activity to go, students' energy has often petered out and even the most generally participatory and proactive students embark on mutiny. Silent mutiny. Often exhibited in sit-downs and dirty looks that communicate that they are done and they will not make life easier for me until I pack them into an air-conditioned truck and drive them home. The sullen, defiant looks on their faces invoke in me a deep sense of futility, but still, the importance imbued in the task at hand requires that we push on. Unsurmountable relief fills my soul the minute we agree to turn around and call it a day – it feels that today's battle is over. Every aspect of our days out bush position me as unconfident, out of place, and in deficit.

My entire body feels the tension of driving out to locations that feel remote to me, on unpredictable, gravelly, corrugated roads. My body tenses at each unexpected bump that jostles my passengers around. Every muttered word in language suddenly became an indictment on my poor *balanda* driving abilities.

But here, sitting and stripping pandanus to the best of my abilities, I can at least relax. Relax, that is, until I remember my sense of uselessness at this point of our teaching time. My inability is naked to the Indigenous eyes literally circled around me, every ripped stalk of pandanus another evidence that I am attempting to fit into a norm that is unnatural to me. My innate sense of positioning as a teacher – not as fount of all knowledge, per se, but at least as grasper of some knowledge! – is rudely interrupted by this sense of absolute deficit. I can, at this point in time, offer no expertise. I can offer no enrichment to this learning activity. I can offer no voice into conversations spoken entirely in language. Nor does anyone want to hear anything I have to contribute right now! I am completely and utterly the learner, marginalised, even – and to sit in this context means to relinquish all sense of power and expertise for the next hour and a half. My discomfort is like chalky paracetamol caught in the back of my throat. I swallow.

I try to relax into this role. I try to relinquish my need to feel participant and 'facilitator', and try to relax into learner, observer, quiet relinquisher of power for the greater good. I meditate on how, even silently and unacknowledged, it must be good for my girls to see a *balanda* struggling, trying and failing at an art that comes to them with such ease. I watch them succeeding, relaxing into roles that have been passed on by their grandmothers. I watch Emma, her face relaxed yet focused as she continues to grow

the pile of (successfully!) stripped pandanus before her, clenched between her toes. This is a mastery and confidence she rarely gets to experience in our deficit-laden classroom.

From the corner of my eye I see a small mob of girls forming, slowly drifting off toward the drink taps. I can't have them wandering off. That makes a joke of the cultural transmission that's being attempted here. I get up to round them up. They don't want a bar of it. I strongly feel the loss of my power, as suddenly I have no authority and the girls defy me, they keep walking. I growl. I wonder instantly if part of my growling is my own frustration at feeling so powerless. I then remember that perhaps this is how my students (let alone local teaching assistants) feel all the time. I soften my tone and remind the girls that they need to show respect to Betty and sit down and keep weaving, they may get a quick drink but they need to return to the group.

My words sound hollow.

I sit down again and find a new piece of pandanus to strip. Betty is completely absorbed in her work. She's on placement, I wonder if I should be coaxing her to check in with the younger girls and make sure they're on the right track. That's what my pedagogy dictates. I decide to save that conversation for after, as a reflection on her teaching.

A cacophony of voices are commenting my experience. Dewey tips his hat at Betty for engaging students in a vital lived experience that is educative. Giroux is probing my feelings at the disruption of a power aesthetic I am accustomed to. My contemporaries' multiple voices congratulate the significance of 'learning in place'. Either way, what I am strongly aware of is that I am not currently the Teacher – I am firmly positioned as Learner. This realisation is bittersweet. (Journal, October, 2012)

This vignette illustrates something that I began to be aware of regarding my privilege. I was able to select my own positioning, instead of having it thrust upon me. I was able to imaginatively position myself as a learner, a child even, as a teacher eager to show respect and hold complexity in tension. I was able to position myself as a questioning, political ally, not a follower of status quo. I could position myself as aware of my own privilege, taking responsibility for 'my mob' in meetings (Kessaris, 2006); trying to remedy the wrongs that I perceived within the education system, trying to draw on my agency to first do no harm.

A more alarming recognition, however, was that I also played a role in the positioning of those I worked with. That element of my sense of self was agency that I could use to then position myself in relationship to the women I was working with – power to position them more positively, to acknowledge their power, all the while questioning the sick reality that a young, middle-class, white woman had such power. It is here that I see the interconnectedness of identity positionings, the potential othering that can occur in that space, and my privilege as a white member of the institution and dominant culture. My ability to play an active role in my identity constitution was an aspect of my privilege of which I became acutely aware.

Moreton-Robinson (2000) had already highlighted to me the subtle yet important dynamic that I was implicitly involved in, that was, how I positioned myself within the community, especially in relation to my Indigenous colleagues. She unveiled for me the subjectivity of 'white feminist woman' holding the upper hand on what was right and wrong, blinded to life-worlds that exist outside my own. I did not want to position myself as the 'white woman authority', or the 'white social justice warrior' that held a measuring stick of ethical authority against local ways of life. I read Kowal (2015) and saw in myself the demographic of 'white anti-racist', but I did not want that to result in crisis and resignation, as her final chapters seemed to forecast. I wanted to find healthy and reflexive ways to position myself in relation to my Indigenous colleagues. I was finding some success in positioning myself as a co-learner with my students, but I was yet to find a way to position myself with Indigenous assistant teachers. The complexity of that relationship overwhelmed me – that often these knowledgeable and wise knowledge-holders from the community were rendered in deficit in classrooms for the ways that unspoken western teacher discourse was located outside of their own personal pedagogies or fields of knowledge. This power dynamic, especially in my early years in Clear River, was problematic to me, as it seemed to override and ignore the natural relations and positions that these women would hold within the community – of authority and commanding respect.

I did not want to create a forced dynamic, over-keen to show my respect and deference. I felt myself sliding in to saccharine politeness and I wanted to move beyond this into genuine respectful interaction that would be able to wordlessly express my desire to go beyond the status quo interactions and to really cede to another world of knowing and living. It was on bush trips to collect pandanus, and at the weaving lessons that Betty ran, that I felt that this kind of respectful dynamic most readily established itself. Armed with my inklings about other

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ways of knowing and epistemologies (that reminded me that there was another world and way of operating, whether it fit my recognised structures or not); and with an understanding of the importance of relationships and respect for these women as the cultural figures and roles that they played within the community, pandanus trips offered me a wonderful opportunity to genuinely be a learner and to fit 'under' them in a hierarchy as I would as a member of the community, rather than the somewhat artificial dynamic of the school that rendered me as expert and them as in deficit, 'lesser' teachers.

Kowal has written about this very dynamic extensively, named as a final strategy that white anti-racists may be able to take up in order to minimise the stigma of whiteness inscribed into our positioning and subjectivity when working in such a setting, as I referred to in the selfhood section. I recognised this in a very tangible way on my own trips out bush to collect pandanus. Lulu was a young student in my class, with a reputation for being troubled and disruptive. Out bush she took up another identity altogether, far more confident and grounded, settled almost. On one particular trip out with Betty and her sisters, collecting pandanus, I suddenly recognised that I had been relegated to, and taken up without resistance, a position in our crew of eight or nine, beside Lulu, as her peer. She was the youngest of our group and alongside her is where I belonged in the pecking order. I was assigned the same tasks by Betty, demonstrated in the same manner that Betty was instructing her, and found myself tagging along beside her and asking her for advice. It was with relief that I recognised that I was no longer struggling to figure out how to position myself to be respectful – out here, on this trip at least, I had naturally fallen in to the position that was most readily available to me, and noticed with delight that my constant struggle for how to be respectful and show that I had respect was put to rest as I took up that positioning.

What Kowal does not detail, however, is that none of these positionings are fixed. I take up this child-like positioning out bush, and in the classroom the roles are reversed with Betty. I find myself in the classroom constantly trying to actively take up the child role again – trying to return to that positioning that we so naturally found out bush. I find myself kneeling beside her when we do our planning, actively reducing my physical stance so that I am physically positioned as her junior. Over time this interaction becomes somewhat like a dance – avoiding stepping on toes and learning how to more seamlessly cede. I hold in tension that I am naturally complicit in colonialist systems of power within the community, and that while I choose to cede, Betty has involuntarily been subjected to this dynamic for a long time.

I pause and wonder what it takes for this dynamic, that of child, to be taken up genuinely. I can already recognise how heavily it is laden with the context of white anti-racists wanting, and needing, to feel 'good'. I wonder about how many relational tropes that I buy into, are motivated by offsetting my own white guilt (Kowal, 2015, p. 160). What does it mean to step away from that relational motivation, and to find genuine relationship?

I eventually realised that I had my finger on the relationship between 'standpoint' within the institution and as a researcher, and the constantly changing 'in flux' subjectivities available to me. I did not have one homogeneous standpoint through which I was being governed by the institution. I was moving around laterally within my positioning within the institution, which affected how I interacted and was positioned within it. I felt that my position in relation to others within the institution was always vulnerable and always in flux. Taking into account the emancipatory notion of standpoint as giving primacy to voices not often heard, I harness my standpoint here in order to speak back to all the tensions felt between my various positionings within the institution.

I began to be aware of my privilege also through the very fact that I was able to select my positioning, instead of having it thrust upon me. That element of my sense of self was agency that I could use to then position myself in relationship to the women I was working with – power to position them more positively, to acknowledge their power.

> I am asking myself how I am positioning myself in the classroom. I position myself as a learner: I have gone through the ropes of *balanda* education, but in this context I must learn as well. I position myself as needing and relying on my assistant teacher, and am open to my students about the fact that I know she knows things I don't know and that we need to work together to give the students the best of both worlds.
>
> As Jan would later say to me in a yarning circle, 'When you asked Betty those questions, it's like you're the child and Betty is the teacher. That's good, that's how you learn'. (Journal, November, 2015)

Even though I was able to exercise my agency in choosing to be positioned as a learner, this was still at times a struggle and another site of unsettling as I relinquished the position of 'knower' to become a learner.

9.6 Unsettling the Third Space of my Imagination

I have already begun to articulate the way that I wanted Third Space to be manifested – a physical meeting of two parties physically creating, even just textually, a third option, a shared curriculum for example, or a shared way of conducting the classroom. However, I found the Third Space to be intangible, a conceptual openness rather than an actual recipe for creation. It is a dispositional concept that promotes openness and a search for alternatives beyond our current binary thinking. I return to the earlier story about approaching Betty to ask about our positioning of one another in the classroom, to illustrate this.

> When I first began working with Betty, as the first Indigenous teacher assigned to share a class with me, there were few subject positions available to me to choose from. The 'roll-your-eyes' norm didn't appeal to me – relegating Indigenous teachers to the back of the classroom where they could sharpen pencils and therefore be regarded as dispensable when they inevitably (fed up with menial tasks) stopped showing up to class. I could also take up the positioning of bossing her around, taking seriously the fact that she was technically a pre-service teacher (as a student within the Remote Indigenous Teacher Education program) and I was her supervisor. In this subjectivity I could do as her previous supervisor had done, presume ignorance on her part and imply that I was the only one that had any cultural capital in the classroom. Or, I could be chummy friends but neglect the professional engagement necessary for our collective class work. None of these appealed to me.

> In our first interactions, I really struggled to discuss what we were doing in the classroom, even though I wanted to be able to assist her in completing her placement – which inevitably involved some kind of leadership on my part. I hesitated with this though – I didn't want to boss her around and I couldn't seem to think of any way to lead on my strengths without being perceived to see her in deficit and myself as the bearer of all knowledge.

> I spoke to the placement coordinator about this. She was a rarity, I could just as easily talk to her about functional grammar as I could Third Space. 'Tell Betty that, then', she said, after hearing me out. 'Have the same kind of open conversation with me that you had with her.'

I wondered why I had not just done this to begin with. In my fear of doing something wrong, and interacting in the wrong way, I was actually avoiding meaningful interaction with Betty, objectifying her as a topic to be discussed with other people.

When I finally broached this topic with Betty, my words were careful. 'Betty, I've been finding it really hard to talk to you about what we do in the classroom. I'm worried about bossing you around. Do you mind if I come to you for advice for all of the life things, because I know that you know everything, but then is it ok if I lead the way in the classroom, to help you with teaching the spelling and maths?'

Betty laughed. 'Of course! Skin way, you're my mother anyway!' According to the kinship network, it was not only appropriate but expected that I would direct Betty in the ways of the western classroom that she was not yet familiar with. It would be a few years before I recognised that that very conversation constituted a Third Space of sorts. Rather than sticking to the status quo interaction in the classroom and avoiding the murky and uncertain terrain of how to interact, we had jumped right in and established a new dynamic. There would be more work to be done in the future in terms of overcoming the binaries that still existed, but this was a step in the right direction. (Journal, June 2013.)

As I have already begun to articulate, my paradigm of understanding the world allows me to see identities as under construction continually, informed by social interactions. In understanding identities in such a way, I allow openness to reflexivity on both my interactions and the way Betty receives them – as I am leaving room for our identities to still be 'under construction', therefore ripe for change and transformation. While Bhabha says that '"people" always exist as a multiple form of identification, waiting to be created and constructed, and thereby stresses interventions and the agency of marginals', Kalscheuer asks if 'perhaps he is too idealistic':

Do marginals really have the chance to 'set up new structures of authority'? Or did Bhabha forget the question that Spivak raised in 1998, namely 'can the subaltern speak'? Enthusiastically, he searched for possibilities and ways for marginals to get heard, yet he forgot to prove if marginals, once they enter the Third Space, have a chance to be heard or not. (2008, p. 39)

In reading this, I thought again about the dynamic I was seeking to clarify with Betty. Had I adequately established a Third Space there? Can Betty speak? When Betty enters the Third Space, can she really be heard? If Betty spoke in the Third Space, would I hear her, truly hear her, or would I lose her voice in my own grid, locating what she wants to say in what I want to hear? What would be different if our power was equal? How could I create ethical practices in myself that would stand even when the institution didn't support them, even when the institution assigned more power to me than to Betty? This did not constitute losing my faith in Third Space, resigned that the power imbalance between the two of us prevented it from occurring in its purest sense. Rather it motivated me to stay in the imaginative space of Third Space, and to try to maintain a disposition that moved ever closer to hearing the subaltern when she spoke. I return to the notion of locating my othering within the institution. It was in my interactions with Betty that I remembered how much power, comparatively, I had.

I had been so delighted when I discovered Bhabha's Third Space that my imagination set about creating its image in my mind. This image looked something like this:

> One day, Betty and I would suddenly crack the code of the perfect education system that would bridge both worlds. We would write a term's curriculum that seamlessly drew on both her worlds of knowledge and expertise, while coincidentally answering all of the key criteria specified by what I needed to teach to meet the criteria of a yearly plan. We would delightedly uncover areas of commonality between both knowledge worlds that put students' own cognitive dissonance to rest once and for all. Students would rise up, freshly empowered by the strength afforded them by both knowledge systems, newly reassured in the power of their local knowledge systems, and find fresh inspiration to enliven their own conscientisation (1970) and the empowerment of the entire town.

Like so many of the constructs my imagination offers me, this one was not to manifest itself in this way. However, the vision informed how I behaved. I behaved as though this vision was possible, while at the same time becoming more critical of the taken-for-granted assumptions underpinning such a vision (that the western curriculum was still the source of empowerment, that the western curriculum and IKS were ever going to be compatible, that ability to communicate in my language was what Betty needed to be able to do in order to fulfil her role as an assistant teacher, for example). By 'behaving', I mean that I worked to give Betty a position in which she would feel capable of speaking up about what she wanted taught. I gave

her space to teach what she prioritised, and we planned together. I would pause the class whenever IKS rose its head and ensured that we were able to give it 'airtime'. I took the time to hear Betty's contributions and what she wanted to teach. We took bush trips. While my vision may not have been correct, the vision that Third Space offered me engendered dispositions in me that allowed other moments to come through – moments where I think Betty felt deeply respected, moments where I was dispositionally prepared to abandon a meticulously planned lesson plan in order to dialogue with students, and moments where Betty would seamlessly take over the classroom because she knew our interactions 'permitted' this, that I both expected and supported her to do so.

Thus, the unsettling of my agenda of Third Space resulted in a disposition of seeking to both critique the privilege and power conferred to me that prevented a genuine Third Space from occurring, and holding that imaginary space in my mind to open up transformative possibility at all times. The importance of partnerships is not diluted by my inability to enact them as I originally envisaged, and will be explored in greater depth shortly.

10 Ceding

'They will come to see that they are not helping us but following our lead.'

(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 384)

> My steps were timid
>
> Gingerly I proceeded
>
> Cautious and respectful and not wanting to disrupt
>
> The monolith that I thought was sleeping
>
> In the place I was beginning to know
>
>
> So I stepped quietly and carefully
>
> Tiptoed, even
>
> Because I thought that's what it meant
>
> To show respect
>
> To acknowledge the thing that was greater than I
>
> And show my reverence

Slowly a dawning came

Not just the sun suspended high over the river mouth

But a dawning in my thoughts

Not so much an awakening as a recognition

That maybe things weren't as I thought they were

That maybe, just because I didn't understand the monolith

Did not mean it was not present

That just because my mind could not comprehend

Did not mean that it was sleeping

For the monolith

The age-old culture that had been here before my own worldview had even been
     enlightened

Before the dawning of logic as we know it

Before modern science had begun to language itself

Was not sleeping

Not dormant

Not to be tiptoed around

She was active, and living, and encroaching on my ignorance

She was taking territory within my mind

While I still thought I was tiptoeing around her

She hadn't been resting at all

She was hard at work

In the questions I began to ask

In the limits that I began to feel in my ways of knowing

In the growing uncertainty of my taken-for-granted

She was moving

While all I saw were shadows of another logic, another way to see

Another way to behold the world

She was rejuvenating herself in new life,

Not just in me but in the young people I was learning amongst

And she was kind enough to let me begin to join in a conversation

She wasn't sleeping at all

She was moving in ways that I could only just begin to see

That my mind was only just beginning to attune to

I will never know the monolith fully

She is not mine to know

She has her own custodians and I am only a visitor

But what I know for sure

Is that she is strong

She is to be respected

She is not slumbering

She is bigger and more complex than I can see

And that she is every bit as worthy of esteem as the cogs that turn in my own *balanda* mind.

August 2016

Having unsettled my positioning in Clear River and become accustomed to feeling that discomfort, I am able to take up new positionings that are enabled when I am no longer clinging to certainty.

For the fifth time in a day, while coding interview data and reflecting on the past year of work, I used the word 'colonised' to describe my mental state post-Clear River. The word first came up in a discussion between my supervisor Glenn and me, an ironic twist on the word that highlighted the way that, through decolonising, the process could work two ways. It was a term to address the way Indigenous knowledge interacted with my consciousness while in Clear River. At first it alienated me as an outsider, then crept up on me and opened up new possibilities and invitations to engage with it, then it consumed my consciousness while I became entirely unsettled and began to learn the limitations of my own thinking. I was searching for a term to address the way a growing chasm was arising in me, between the logic that was most familiar, and another logic that was competing with it.

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I used the term 'colonised' cautiously; I felt out of line calling it such. Colonisation is not merely an uncomfortable stain on history, it is a bloody one. It wasn't one that I ought to use lightly. Yet I was searching for a word that demonstrated the power of a knowledge system that has encroached more and more on my way of understanding the world, once I finally opened up to it. I recognise the limitations of such a word – it implies that the same governmental authority has been assigned to Indigenous knowledge systems, which is not the case. Indigenous ways of thinking have not colonised me by brute force; they have crept in as I have invited them, creating challenges for cognitive dissonance and eliciting tensions within me where previously there were none. The process is uncomfortable, but I open myself up to it, rather than having it forced upon me with bloody consequences.

I referred to myself as 'colonised' to describe the disjuncture I now feel when I think about the western education system in which I was raised. I wonder with remorse whether this is akin to the feelings of students taken away to boarding schools, as in the reservation schools for which the Canadian government has just apologised at the time of writing. Is this the uncomfortable murkiness that Indigenous students felt, when confronted with a new way of thinking, insisting that their old ontologies were deficient? Because this is how I feel about my western ontology now. I recognise its limitations, now that I am aware of an alternative.

I use the term to describe the way two sets of priorities have emerged for me – often at odds with each other. I use the term to describe the tax on my time – when the balanda education system dictated that, as a good teacher, I should spend my time doing 'x y and z', but I knew it was important to also make time for bush trips with Indigenous colleagues, language classes once a fortnight, and attending the ceremonies we were invited to. Being part of two worlds necessitates double the time.

I refer to the times when my knowledge has been insufficient, and an Other has had to step in for me. This inadequacy is unsettling. When my students don't understand, and an Indigenous teacher intervenes, my power as an educator is unsettled. When Indigenous teachers make plain how much students have to learn and sense-make about my teaching strategies in order to understand the actual content I'm teaching, I am unsettled. I recognise the ways I am insufficient without this partnership.

I speak of colonisation to mean that I willingly entered into the realm of Indigenous knowledge where I would experience things similar to what colonised people experience. A similar

discomfort: the sense of being out of my comfort zone, the insecurity of not knowing how to behave or not understanding the norms around me, the experience of being in deficit, the experience of having a mounting list of understandings to master in order to simply survive within another terrain. I acknowledge that I experienced these in a more privileged way than many Indigenous peoples around the world, as I entered willingly and could just as easily retreat when it got too much. Indeed, my Department of Education house-for-one, in a community where up to 20 people inhabited close quarters together, was a constant reminder of the privilege-within-privilege that I experienced.

Yet stark differences exist between my 'colonising' and the experience of Indigenous peoples the world over. Unlike the experience of those who had no choice and were colonised against their will, the process I experience takes place with my consent. I willingly relinquish some power in order to enter the space of Indigenous knowledge systems and have IKS enter my thinking. In so doing, the word 'ceding' is more appropriate, as it brings with it the connotation of consent given, of willingly subjecting my power and thought to the way of thinking of an Other.

> My little brother and I are in Vancouver and one of our first tourist outings is to the magnificent University of British Columbia, that houses the Museum of Anthropology. We stare up at towering totems, a collection carved over hundreds of years. We stand with twenty-odd other visitors in the room, meditatively in silence, necks craned, contemplating.

> We stumble upon an exhibit filling a North wing of the museum. A local First Nations man, Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, paints Haida-style designs in resplendent colour, a surrealism that makes me think of Dali. His landscapes are bold commentaries on ongoing issues of colonialism as it presents itself in the modern day. My brother is smitten by the colours and magnitude of metre-tall canvases, and he sits himself where he can stare at two large paintings and read the museum's commentaries.

> When our time is up and we head home, I cast one more look over my shoulder to catch both the artist's name and the title of the exhibit. 'Unceded Territories'. The phrase sticks. I am taken by the defiance and agency packed into two small words. For Yuxweluptun, the territories to which is he is connected are not simply colonised. They are unceded. Neither consent nor treaty were reached in the hostile takeover that occurred. (Journal, July 2016)

The word 'ceded' keeps coming back to my mind over coming weeks. While I had only heard it in policy formalities, the context of Yuxweluptun's work has me thinking about it from new directions.

'Ceding' frames what I have struggled to describe in a different light. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word as 'to yield or grant typically by treaty', connoting willing relinquishment and mutual agreement. Ceding emphasises a two-way process. If I called this phenomenon 'colonising', I was making myself object, and Indigenous knowers the subject. But there was subjectivity and agency for me too – the privilege of choosing my own relinquishing. I wanted to emphasise that both parties were subjects in this process – myself as a willing participant, and Indigenous knowers and indeed IKS itself.

10.1 Ceding to multiple ways of knowing

I began seeking an alternative to the monologue format of my classroom, both literally (due to the teacher-talk-intensive curriculum that dictated that much of our classroom time was spent with the students as audience to my delivery), and in the sense of creating a dialogue of knowledge systems within the classroom. This was, after all, how I envisaged utilising the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007) as a social justice practice within the classroom.

In reading about a Bakhtinian framework for moving from a monologic classroom to a dialogic one (Nesari, 2015), I paused to consider that, so far, my attempts at dialogue within the classroom had failed: they made my students uncomfortable and uncertain, placed a cognitive load on them that was both culturally and systemically foreign. It soon dawned on me that much needed to be done on my part as a teacher to make possible a dialogic state with my students. I began to realise that before I could enable a dialogue of knowledge systems within the classroom, I needed to first become open to multiple knowledge systems within my own thinking. If I could do this, then I would be able to embody a praxis of radical openness that would allow me to seize moments of potential dialogue, due to a disposition that showed my respect and openness to other ways of knowing. I began to see such a 'multilogicality' as a precursor to Bakhtinian 'dialogic' pedagogy. Baynes has explored Kincheloe and Steinberg's original usage of this term as a pedagogical device for radical openness to other ways of knowing:

In order for non-Indigenous people to work effectively with multiple ways of knowing, there needs to be a preparedness to engage in knowledge from multiple perspectives. Kinchloe and Steinberg (2008) suggest that the concept of multilogicality is central to non-Indigenous people's understanding of Indigenous knowledges. Multilogicality can be described as a critical complex concept that focuses on transcending reductionism by gaining access to a wide diversity of perspectives when involved with research, knowledge work, and pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2008). Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008) explain enacting multilogicality as replacing the single photograph of Cartesian thinking with the multiple angles of the holographic photograph. (Baynes, 2016, p. 82)

By multilogicality, I mean a radical openness to the multiple intellectual traditions that shaped the world, that enabled dialogue to occur in my imagination, even before students were necessarily able to participate in that dialogue with me directly. By this I mean actively using my imagination to apply the multiple forms of knowledge available in a given context, even before my students are able or willing to use dialogue to assert these knowledge systems themselves. This idea will be continued at the conclusion of this section.

10.2 Ceding in team teaching

I am teaching with Brenda and the word 'yielding' comes to my mind. Now that I think of it, the word 'ceding' works just as aptly. I am observing the tag-team of power that goes on between us. She cedes at times when there is a concept that we need to deliver that she's not comfortable with yet. When she observes that she needs to address an aspect of lore that I am not familiar with, such as young men that have returned to class from ceremony and can no longer be seated near young female relatives of theirs, it is Brenda that steps up, and I cede. She takes the time she needs to set things right. I am with the students, listening and learning.

I am loath to imply that such ceding occurs only in settings of behaviour, however, leaving the conceptual work of teaching to me. With Betty, we succeeded in pushing our work together closer and closer into a Third Space, meeting together to bring our respective knowledge worlds to a particular topic.

The sensation I feel is strange, like relinquishing power. It is like carrying my privilege in a grocery bag and being willing to put it down, but having the luxurious security of knowing I

can pick it up again. It reminds me vaguely of some of the moral upbringing my mother provided when I was in my early teens. She taught us the concept of 'yielding', giving way, surrendering rights. She was teaching us in the context of her spirituality and religion: teaching us to relinquish our power to a higher cause. It's funny how the same concept comes to play in that reflexive part of my brain when I interact with Brenda. For I know that I am relinquishing power to a higher cause once again. Not a spiritual entity, but an entity of knowledge traditions and systems that I do not fully understand. Much like the Anglo-Christian discourse I grew up around, ('having faith' and 'stepping out in trust'), that is the liminal space that I am entering into when I yield. I am not regarding a list of structuralist rules, tenets of thought that I first agree on and then to cede to. I am ceding almost intuitively, respecting the knowledge that I do not fully comprehend.

When I first began to reflect on this sense of 'encroaching' from another knowledge system, my first impulse was that I ought to try to quantify what I was ceding to. My impulse was to understand – to conquer this field of knowledge before it could conquer me. It didn't take long to recognise both the naivety and futility of such an impulse – that not only could I not 'conquer' Indigenous knowledge as an outsider (nor should I, nor were the requisite disembodied artefacts available to me, such as books that would usually help me to 'master' a field of knowledge), but also that in order to cede, I did not need mastery. I needed only a willingness to learn and to be dominated by another knowledge system. 'Humbled' is the word that most commonly came to my mind.

I am aware of the irony as I continue listening to Brenda address the class. I am speaking about relinquishing a classroom space that was never mine under treaty to begin with! My pretend-*balanda*-space classroom is almost like an embassy – technically land belonging to the nation-state, but still on foreign ground. This land was never ceded, but here, through my privilege and the power of the institution, I as a teacher am afforded the ability to pretend that I fully own this space. Then I find myself almost patting myself on the back at the revolutionary act of sharing space with my Indigenous teacher, while in this place that has been her home far longer than it has been mine. This is how the ruling relations that are still at play shape my thinking. I have normalised the taken-for-granted assigned to me as a registered and qualified teacher, which occurs across the school with the predominantly non-Indigenous teaching staff.

The power of my position keeps rising to my attention though. How is it that I have the power to choose to cede? Is it I that get to choose what I am ceding to, or is that a decision being made by the entity itself? If I do not understand, can I cede? A split second of panic passes through my mind – when Brenda is speaking in language as she addresses the students now, what if she says something that places my students at risk? The institution tells me I have a duty of care to my students. This is a real concern in the moment, but fortunately there are other factors at play: Brenda is an ethical human being with a profound care for the students that predates my presence in my students' lives, we have a strong relationship that means I know I can count on her to update me fully on what was discussed, and I also know my students well enough to 'read' when conversations go into terrain that is uncomfortable. I am hardly needed to take a protectionist stance. However, in inhabiting the tension between ceding to IKS while also ceded to an Institution, I have a duty to respect both.

10.3 Ceding as Becoming-to-Know

When I say becoming-to-know, I have replaced my original sentiment (beginning-to-know) with the Bakhtinian sense of becoming that more accurately described the kind of knowing that I am referring to – the kind of ongoing shaping of one's ideology (in a more ontological sense than a political one) that refers not to 'knowing' a discrete body of information, but of becoming through awareness of the ideologies (and intellectual traditions) around me. Bakhtin (1981) speaks of this different type of knowing, this hearing othered voices to inform our growth: 'Another's discourse performs here, no longer as information, directions, rules, models and so forth – but strives to determine the very basis of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behaviour' (p. 342). When I cede, I am no longer drawing on discourse as information and IKS as rules and models of knowledge, but as the basis of my conduct.

10.4 Ceding as a discourse

Ceding as a discourse acknowledges at every opportunity that there is an Other perspective available. In an educative horizon, where teacher dialogue about students is almost exclusively framed in deficit positionings, ceding involves harnessing IKS as tool to counteract in-deficit positionings of students.

Ceding, when applied to discourse, also refers to my ceding of agenda when it comes to generating Third Spaces. As Cheyfitz has outlined, there is a danger of postcolonial theories such as Third Space being utilised in ways that are not aligned with the needs of Indigenous communities (Cheyfitz, 2002; Dudgeon & Walker, 2015). Ceding refers to my relinquishing the lead, continuing on with the temperament of 'knocking' well into the establishment of a relationship. Ceding refers to a discourse of 'you first', allowing my colleagues the agency to establish when Third Spaces are appropriate in the first place. Discursive ceding is also the shift that occurs in me, as a feminist, when I cede to the indigeneity of my colleagues first before attempting to focus on any shared experience we have as women.

Ceding as discourse is allowing myself to be othered by Indigenous knowledge. By implication, by making space for Indigenous knowledge to be spoken, I am delegitimising some of the more colonising and neoliberal discourses that shape the classroom. Thus, even in ceding, I am performing an act of resistance.

10.5 Ceding as a methodology

When it came to methodology and research, ceding is the point at which my faith in my own study began to be shaken, and led me to investigate ways to incorporate my new dispositions and learnings into the work. For example, a study that genuinely cedes to Indigenous knowledge systems would be one that engages with an Indigenous relational ethic at every phase of the research, right from the conception of the research questions, in order to cede to the discursive priorities that are often silenced or that I as an ally would not have thought about from my standpoint. While this study was conceived between non-Indigenous people before I even met the community in Clear River, the ceding that has occurred for me now means that any study in the future would involve community consultation and incorporating an ethic of unsettling and ceding into every phase of the design of a project.

10.6 Ceding as Process

In order to understand how ceding might occur as a process in my relational praxis, I sought to understand more about how both colonising and ceding have taken place.

The legal notion of *terra nullius* was one example. In order to justify heinous colonising activities, discourse in the early days of Australian 'settlement' regarded the landmass as *terra nullius* (Painter & Jeffrey, 2009), meaning 'empty land' in Latin. *Terra nullius* has always reminded me of the modern equivalent that underpins schooling discourse in our context: tabula rasa. Kapuściński's writing introduced me to this notion, a colonialist view of the Other as an 'empty slate' (2008). In Clear River, an epistemological amnesia (B. Martin, 2013), takes over teachers who, with eyes glued firmly to the curriculum and the achievement necessary to gain ground professionally, forget that there is another world of knowledge within their students' minds.

The knowledge holders to whom I cede do not have this amnesia. My Indigenous colleagues understood my ontological terrain better than their colonisers understood theirs. Rather than ignoring what went before, in the true sense of knocking, Indigenous teachers colonised my mind by making connections to what I already knew, what we both knew of *balanda* ways of thinking, making my own learning processes easier than the steep and cruel orientation to western thinking that colonised peoples would have undergone. They did not regard me as a tabula rasa or an empty bucket, but took into consideration my existing worlds of knowledge in the way they began to orient me in other ways of knowing. This respectful process of regarding me as already contextualised, related and knowing gives me a strong example of relational ontology that I can apply in my teaching.

Colonising processes historically took place with a clear pre-envisaged agenda, usually rooted in economic and development-oriented foundations. The ideological colonisation processes I underwent, however, were built on a relational foundation. The very way that the Indigenous teachers spoke about my learning betrayed not an agenda but a relational orientation, knowledge that was being passed on in order to promote relationship.

The ongoing colonisation processes that continued through the stolen generations included cruel stripping away of all previously held knowledges: native languages were banned from being spoken within mission schools and many stories surfaced in which children were not allowed to sing sacred songs that connected them to home lives.

Never was I, however, banned from speaking English in my interactions with my Indigenous teachers, but I knew and felt the emphasis from Jan that speaking and learning the language was key to understanding. I was motivated to do so because of the implied emphasis – I knew

that, from where Jan stood, it was the obvious first step for truly engaging with her and the students relationally. While historical colonising practices happened with a 'stick', here, the logic of being colonised is in the stick that dangles before me. The carrot was the relational capital that I valued. In fact, while during the process of colonisation, Indigenous students were forced to stop speaking their native tongue and singing their traditional songsm even now they do not have access to education in the medium of their own first language, a privilege English speakers and Europeans take for granted (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). In this sense, I am ceding also to linguistic human rights.

I wonder what the equivalent might be that I can willingly cede to. The first thing that enters my mind is a skirt. In Clear River, to show respect to the old ladies, an outsider wears long skirts. This is called wearing 'proper clothes'. I have always wondered whether this is more of a residue from missionary days than a through-and-through traditional aspect of Clear River life, but I have ceded all the same. The irony is that I grew up in a religious atmosphere where skirts were mandated all the time, in a discourse of 'modesty' and neutralising sexuality so as not to 'make young men stumble'. I remember with a smile that in my late teens, on leaving such a 'cult', I swore I would never wear skirts again. Yet here I am, swaddled in fabric to my ankles. A young visiting placement teacher is offended. She finds this guideline oppressive to women. I remember where her train of thought comes from. Since leaving a religious atmosphere, my stubborn insistence on wearing jeans is symbolic to me of the hard-earned rights of women to not be dictated to on what they wear. I appreciate that when I'm in Melbourne, I can see that as symbolic empowerment, progress. Yet here in Clear River, this is a right that I relinquish, despite what it means for me culturally and symbolically, because that is what it means to show respect. That is what it means to cede to the law of the land. The part of me that defiantly wears pants to stick the proverbial finger to a repressive religious background, can afford to 'park that' to cede to the wishes of the women I respect. And so I do. This seems a small compromise in light of the fact that members of the stolen generation were prohibited from speaking their very languages, practising the songs that were the lifeblood of their intellectual traditions.

10.7 Ceding as Epistemology

Ceding-as-Epistemology occurs in the sense that I begin to see the limits of what I know, and also the limits of the knowledge frameworks rooted in western science. This places me in a better position to problematise the institution, the knowledge that I am teaching, and my position as a knowledge worker in a community where I know little. After Fanon, I wonder what it might take to utilise my 'epistemic privilege' (1952, p. 25) to embark on decolonising of my own mind.

A different framework for knowing exists when we turn toward narrative and openness to other ways of knowing, and away from positivistic or postpositivistic ways of knowing. Clandinin here refers to 'blurred knowing', turning from the 'secure base' of presuming upon knowing the world to 'understanding that there are multiple ways of knowing and understanding human experience' (2007, p. 25). Speaking about this kind of openness in terms of research, this is embodied as 'A turn toward acceptance of multiple ways of knowing the world is a turn toward establishing findings through authenticity, resonance, or trustworthiness' (Clandinin, 2000; citing Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 25).

Clandinin describes the postmodern 'unravellers' of the positivistic monolith who have made way for more openness toward other ways of knowing (2000). I pause and think about my own unravelling. It came in fits and spurts. A pulled thread when an Indigenous elder spoke with unwavering certainty about a visit from her deceased mother. Looping unravelling stitches when I hear about Indigenous stories, carried down for centuries, corresponding with other stories across the globe, stories of a huge flood. Holes torn when I learn about how Indigenous knowledges had their own ways of categorising and understanding animals that prefigured western taxonomies developed much later. This unravelling and fraying of my reliance upon western frameworks for what constitutes truth and legitimate knowledge created openings where my mind could more respectfully regard other knowledge systems.

Charteris, Gannon, Mayes, et al. (2016) refer to the same kind of unknotting occurring when we examine the threads of our subjectivity and come to understand how the present has come to be. Examining these knots within our own thinking opens us up new possibilities, as through '[u]nthreading these knots and examining their constitution, we consider alternative (collective) subjectivities that may be re-threaded' (p. 35).

10.8 Ceding as Multilogicality

10.8.1 Multilogicality as an answer to the issue of devalued knowledge systems

For the teacher who is native to western frameworks of knowledge, what I am proposing presents challenges in terms of what it means to have 'rigour' at this interface. When working at the interface between knowledge systems, even the concept of rigour itself is called into question as an apparatus of western knowing.

It is the dogmatic clinging to the scientific rules of positivism that enable and engender disregard for, and marginalisation of, Indigenous knowledges. In 'borrowing from the rhetoric of the sciences, particularly claims to objectivity and rationality' (Clandinin, 2007, p. 27), ethnocentrism becomes the logic by which western thinkers, and indeed educators, abide. To this way of thinking, being open to others' way of thinking, especially those that appear to be in conflict with western science, is pluralistic at best and illogical at worst.

This results in blatant discrimination against the epistemological worlds of others. Such an approach does not seem enlightened or rigorous to me. To deny that what we believe constructs meaning in our lives, to deny the important aspects of relationality and place as less scientific modes of meaning-making than western scientific means of obtaining knowledge, is to exclude entire essential parts of our lives and knowledge-making.

Bala and Joseph capture these complexities in the introduction to their article on the space between Indigenous knowledge and western science:

> Recognising the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge, albeit partially, has profound implications for conceptions of science… the relationship between science and bodies of knowledge hitherto repudiated as myth and superstition needs to be rethought so that Indigenous knowledge is demarcated from both science and pseudo-science. (2007, p. 39)

Yet even when rejecting the western dogma of what constitutes knowledge, even when trying to move beyond regarding Indigenous knowledge only as 'myth and superstition', caution must be taken to not embrace an empty universalism toward multiple knowledges. Ulrich Beck constitutes the cosmopolitan view of reality as 'dress[ing] itself up in universalist clothes but [it] can neither deny nor rise above its origins in the horizon of national experience' (Beck,

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2009, p. 16). When seen through the framework of a relational ontology, a view of 'local' theories moves us away from making claims about universal truth, and toward recognising localised standpoints: 'If we assume theories are local, and ours exist in relation to others, then we have no firm basis for treating other theories as wrong. At least, we can't make this as a general claim – true for all times and all peoples. They would only be wrong from a particular local standpoint' (Hosking & Bass, 2001, p. 353).

Such an approach would seek to extend my current thinking beyond mere universalism or pluralism. Where universalist approaches to difference and othered knowledge systems seemed to be tone-deaf, where pluralism seemed too vague and overlooked the value of Indigenous knowledge, I wondered about a new approach that might rigorously position me as a student of learning to see through multiple perspectives.

10.8.2 Multilogicality as an answer to monologism

The processes of globalisation and cosmopolitanisation around the world have brought us to a place where our previously binary-laden ways of understanding the world, understanding truth and knowledge, are no longer sufficient. As the postcolonial thought continues to problematize the way we dichotomise, silo, compartmentalise and separate knowledge; a new order of logic becomes necessary. Nowhere has this been more evident for me personally than in a context where the binaries of truth and fact, education and knowledge ('I am western and I will decide which knowledge is privileged') result in ongoing subjugation and disrespect of Indigenous people. The importance of a new kind of openness is especially necessary in a work environment that works directly with knowledge. Every day, in a thousand sentences and micro-utterances, teachers have the opportunity to reaffirm the status quo of what knowledge is valued and what is not, and therefore what identities are respected and what are not – micro-messages that students indeed internalise. I argue for a new type of logic that shapes openness within educators to embrace epistemologies that may seem foreign or clash within our current frames of reference, but a radical openness that might allow emergence of new identities, collaborations and subject positionings that were not previously possible.

I have foreshadowed the parallel between the ontological turn that has occurred in the social sciences, and the ontological opening that occurred in me as I sought to radically respect othered knowledge systems. Here I describe the way of thinking that has been called 'multilogicality', as an answer to teacher dispositions that render them radically open to othered

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ontologies and epistemologies. I use the term 'logic' to denote our systems for deciding what is legitimate knowledge and what is not; however, I use it while holding in mind the systematic way that 'culture selects what is and isn't perceived by its members, to prevent information overload' (ibid, 2009, p. 31). To enter into a disposition of multilogicality is to open up oneself to that very information overload once again, to work to perceive the elements of the world around us to which we are traditionally closed off, in order to try to 'see' the world the way marginalised Others do.

Kincheloe used this term to speak about bricolage in the research world. As he describes this state of thinking, binoculars represent 'a singular and undivided picture' that draws on images in both left and right sides of the brain, 'where the sum of the images is greater than the separate parts'. In bringing these two images together, the view is actually enriched and enhanced through 'resolution and contrast', creating a new perspective (2007, p. 886). While Kincheloe's usage refers to bringing multiple discrete perspectives and methodologies together in the research act, the application to my disposition as a teacher is not lost on me. It represents for me the relationship between knowledge systems and the multiplicity of available epistemologies in a place like Clear River, and presents itself as a precursor to Bakhtinian dialogism.

When Bakhtin speaks of dialogism, he is talking about interactions in which the entire worldviews and perspectives of all participants are engaged in the interaction (1981). In the classroom, this is hindered in multiple ways. A western epistemological voice is dominant in the classroom, often rendering student perspectives silenced. However, a key obstacle to dialogism in the classroom is the multiple hurdles faced by students in engaging with this kind of interaction and exchange. Students' confidence in articulating their own voices is constrained at the best of times and in any context, but this difficulty is paramount when lack of confidence in speaking the common language is also present.

Much of the functioning of Clear River operates in what Bakhtin would call 'monologic' perspectives: 'operating in a particular discourse or speech genre to subdue diversities of viewpoint among participants' (Bakhtin 1981, paraphrased by Smith, 2005, p. 123). Nesari extrapolates on this state as one that 'emerges wherever and whenever universal truth statements… do not allow any other sort of truth… to appear' (2015, p. 643). In a classroom informed by western epistemologies, there is ongoing risk of making universal truth claims that

serve to prevent the speaking of 'other sorts of truth' that might be present in my students' worlds. In this 'institutionally constituted reality' (Smith, 1990, p. 123), the logic and knowledge systems of Indigenous people are marginalised, ruled out as located beyond the limits of western thinking. Nesari argues that government interactions with knowledge through education departments betray a state of monologism (2015, p. 643). While 'there is always another perspective present in a classroom' (Nesari, 2015, p. 643), the degree to which these perspectives are heard within the classroom varies, and the degree to which a teacher enables students to feel welcome to voice these perspectives also varies.

In terms of this monologism, Barnhardt and Kawagley discuss the kind of exchange that ought to occur in knowledge spaces at the interface:

> Native people may need to understand western society, but not at the expense of what they already know and the way they have come to know it. Non-Native people, too, need to recognise the coexistence of multiple worldviews and knowledge systems, and find ways to understand and relate to the world in its multiple dimensions and varied perspectives. (2005, p. 9)

Thus, the onus is on a non-Indigenous teacher to engage in the discomfort of uncertainty, making the journey of their own toward someone's knowledge world when it feels far away from their own. This reflects the kind of classroom environment where each member feels welcome in spite of their 'not knowing', in spite of their discomfort, even when understanding is not complete. In this sens,e I am seeking to create a classroom environment of 'becoming', where we see that we are each 'becoming-to-know' in different knowledge worlds, and that being uncomfortable and uncertain is part of our learning process.

10.8.3 Teachers welcoming othered knowledge systems: Multilogicality as relationality

It appears that, ultimately, Bakhtin's vision was that dialogism be the antidote to monologism, where different voices 'speak back' to the dominant voice of what truth is. I hold that before a classroom can become dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense, a teacher must be working to create the conditions in which the subaltern are more able to speak (Spivak, 1988). For a teacher to do this involves a disposition of multilogism: a disposition toward understanding and imagining student epistemologies and perspectives even when they are not explicitly expressed or voiced in the classroom. For many of my students in Clear River, generations of participating

within an education system in which neither language or intellectual tradition is valued has rendered students (and often their families) silenced. In this sense, as students are not yet able to interject in the classroom with contributions that articulate their distinct perspectives and worldviews, the onus is on the teacher to create conditions in the classroom where more than one truth is embraced.

I believe the beginning point for this openness is dispositional, in the mind of the teacher. At times, the onus will be on the teacher to create room (within his or her own mind first) for the fact that there is more than one view of truth. The teacher may begin to imagine this voice already in her own head, thus rendering her open to the presence of different perspectives that may not yet be ready to be voiced. This imagining is not a final step, but a precursor to helping students begin to articulate their worldview in dialogue, feeling that the space has already been created to do so, feeling that the teacher is able and ready to listen and engage with dialogism, pre-empting the multiple perspectives present in the classroom. Perhaps, in this sense, multilogicality is a pre-emptor to students feeling 'welcomed' in the same sense that I am when I knock. This kind of thinking has been referred to as 'blurred knowing' (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). This very ability to place oneself into the shoes of others to understand a differing subjectivity and ontology is what I came to call 'multilogicality' in my mind.

Ellsworth describes 'cultivating a third ear that listens not for what a student knows (discrete packages of knowledge) but for the terms that shape a student's knowledge, her not knowing, her forgetting, her circles of stuck places and resistances'. (1997, p. 71). In the spaces where students are least able to speak, namely a colonial classroom in which the dominant language is not their own and their educators are not from the same culture, it is the teacher who must learn the skills of listening and hearing, and imagining the knowledge worlds that a student has grown in, beginning to take the steps toward a classroom environment where multiple knowledges are welcomed.

10.8.4 Multilogicality as Imagination

In recognising the limits of my own western frames of knowing, I am able to imagine what it might be like to use a different framework to measure, understand, and make sense of the world around me. In imagining this, I contribute to the further legitimation of other forms of knowledge and sense-making that have been historically marginalised. Here we extend empathetic practices beyond just 'being nice', beyond empathising with the feelings and

experiences of others, and extend such empathy into understanding the very ontology and epistemology that others apply to their knowledge-making about the world, even when I am not native to or literate in such an ontology. This imaginative labour enables a deeper respect than many current 'team teaching' discourses allow, a kind of respect for difference that does not marginalise by framing anything outside my epistemological norm as in deficit, but seeking actively to respect that which I do not necessarily understand, that which I cannot locate within my own 'grid' (Kalscheuer, 2009, p. 31).

Mignolo notes that Marx himself was able to embrace the 'perspective of the proletariat but not their consciousness' (2008, p. 55), meaning that he was able to empathise with an Other perspective but could never claim to have lived their marginalisation and therefore possess the same consciousness. Multilogicality can never claim to take on the consciousness of an Other, as our life experiences have led to different consciousnesses. What I am seeking to do is to be increasingly more able to empathise with the perspectives of marginalised Others. This is the kind of 'de-colonial epistemic shift' that Mignolo termed 'pluri-versality' (2008, p. 8), nurturing a broader vision than a merely universal one, to one in which multiple worldviews can co-exist.

This imagination is not the usual type of encyclopaedic knowledge (Clandinin, 2007) that I have previously relied upon. It is a knowledge that is constituted and constructed not for me to make hard and fast concrete conclusions about the world, but in order for me to relationally enter into the world of another, to express empathy and openness to other ways of being.

I am aware that there is a danger in recruiting imagination where voicedness is not yet occurring. While speaking about white feminism, Moreton-Robinson has cautioned of this in a similar way: 'Elizabeth Spelman (1990)… urged white feminists to be conscious of the ways in which the legacies of white privilege appear "in our confusing imagining women with knowing them: in priding ourselves on tolerance, and in appropriating others' identities through our desperate rush to find similarity"' (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. xix, citing Spelman, 1990, p. 185).

I wish to clarify at this point that I do not see myself as a precursor to Indigenous empowerment, in the sense that Indigenous students need me to enable them to speak. I take on the strong words of caution that Moreton-Robinson levels at this kind of approach:

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Implying that white women of the dominant culture can alleviate the oppression of women from other cultures by providing them with the space to have a voice expresses naivety about why white women have the power to be able to be inclusive. White women's need to be inclusive must be matched 'by an awareness of how the legacies of our privilege appear in the ways we may try to satisfy that need: in our confusing imagining women with knowing them, In priding ourselves on tolerance, and in appropriating others' identities through our desperate rush to find similarity'. (2000, p. 47, citing Spelman, 1990, p. 185)

Ceding, and its accompanying disposition of multilogicality, are attitudes that allow a non-Indigenous practitioner in some way to enable themselves to participate authentically in collaborations with both Indigenous teachers and students. It is this kind of participation that I detail in the next section.

11 Collaboration

I foregrounded early in the study that, if I was to move my teaching praxis towards a more ethical place, one of the chief aims was to work on genuine partnership with Indigenous teachers. Having embarked on a learning process, my very perception of what partnership may look like was transformed. If partnership is the aim of an ethical pedagogue, then the preceding three sections may outline the shifts that are prerequisites in order for this to happen.

In my initial conceptualisations of Third Space, I anticipated a verbal meeting of two knowers, negotiating and creating a third way of knowing and being. Instead, what I began to recognise as Third Space was the constant negotiation, constant studentship under those to whose teaching I chose to submit myself, those that participated in my ceding. I have to adjust my perspective from what I anticipated certain things would look like, and how they eventuated in practice. My aspirations for collaboration are no different in this regard. The discourse around partnership in the school was that Indigenous teachers ought to enter into the teaching practice located within non-Indigenous pedagogies. This vision was largely about the Indigenous teacher 'joining in' the non-Indigenous pedagogies at play: sit down together and plan, deliver a literacy program together, split teaching responsibilities down the middle and emulate them together, perhaps only with the variation of delivery language. In this sense, the current discourse seemed to be *balanda* teachers saying 'come and join me in my practice, doing what I do'.

My early efforts at collaboration focused my energy on trying to establish an equality of responsibility and ownership within the English morning sessions with Betty. The problematic nature of this is self-evident: it was in the class in which I had the first-language upper hand, a field located outside of Betty's native tongue. It meant that my attempts at 'equality', a myth to begin with due to the inequality of whose knowledge the class was centred on, felt tokenistic.

Especially when new forms of collaboration began to emerge that I had never anticipated, I began to recognise the ways that I had brought my own *balanda* frameworks for what teaching partnerships look like, and was surprised by how they eventuated when genuine partnerships and relationships created the foundation to allow them to do so. It is this kind of subtle exchange, the beginnings of collaborative teaching partnership, that I wish to capture and

analyse in this section. This section seeks to cover what became my end goal of relational, ethical praxis in an Indigenous education space: productive and respectful collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers.

Much of my reflection in my earlier years was on the largely wordless interactions between myself and Betty, the quiet Indigenous assistant teacher I worked with. I spent much time and effort interpreting her, as I believe she would with every non-Indigenous teacher she works with. I wanted to know what was important to Betty, what was a priority to her – and I naively told myself that, if I tried hard enough and communicated well enough, the language barrier would be eradicated. This is obviously not reality. The language distinction that persists in a schooling space in a linguistically diverse Indigenous community sometimes serves to render both parties mute, silencing much of the communication strong relationships are based on. In addition, it is also a site of inequality, as the Indigenous teacher is expected to come more than halfway in communicating in English, while there are few expectations of non-Indigenous teachers to learn local languages. In lieu of shared concise vocabulary, the role of the imagination comes to the fore, constructing creative ways to interpret an Other's behaviour, understand an Other's priorities and ontology, and to demonstrate goodwill and openness to the Other even when I cannot simply express my thoughts plainly (and neither can my Indigenous counterpart, as I am not fluent in their language). Such interpretation of meaning and interaction became a very intuitive art within the classroom that involved heavy intellectual labour for both parties. This is not an aspect of classroom teaching that is currently acknowledged or supported within the institution.

One aspect that was not able to be resolved without the shared language for frank and concise conversation was how we managed the power dynamics in the classroom between the two of us. I found myself juggling the authority and power that the institution conferred on me, wanting to keep this 'equal' with my Indigenous colleague. The uneasy relationship of ownership and power in the classroom always defaulted back to me, despite my fledgling efforts to de-centre myself. It is here that I recognised the impossibility of trying – and being unable to – completely divest myself of this power. These attempts often manifested themselves as trying to lend my non-Indigenous pedagogical behaviours for Betty to adopt.

> [I'm] thinking a lot about subject positions within the liminal space. We are still in the process of creation as a class – and I am still figuring out how the subject positioning

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between Betty and me works out. How to genuinely create a space where both of us carry the teaching? It's a lot of work to get a truly equal relationship happening there.

Betty completely took the reins this week to sort out where her phone was (it got stolen during the week). She totally took control and laid down the law on the kids – about what was ok and what was not, and what the consequences would have been if things were done traditional way. She took the reins completely and took full authority of the class for the entire day. It was great jolting of both of our subject positions and was beneficial to both the kids and her teaching pandanus weaving to them that day. (Journal, April 2013)

When she didn't take up these pedagogical behaviours – for example when she opted to not 'teach up the front' with the spelling system we had been preparing together, or when she did not come to school for long periods of time, the power would then default back to me. In hindsight I wonder whether it was actually shared power in the classroom she wanted, or whether respect was given and received in a different mode to the one that I was used to dealing in. Instead of working so hard to make sure the institution recognised her power as equal to mine, I could then focus my energy on maintaining a view of Betty as still authoritative and powerful even when her conduct was different to what the schooling institution would deem 'teacher-like'.

In these interactions around what it meant to be a 'teacher', I heard Staszak's voice in my head, reminding me of the connection between power over subjugated groups:

The asymmetry in power relationships is central to the construction of otherness. Only the dominant group is in a position to impose the value of its particularity (its identity) and to devalue the particularity of others (their otherness) while imposing corresponding discriminatory measures. (Staszak, 2009, p. 2)

Yet even in the way I thought I needed to 'construct' Betty as equally powerful as me within the schooling institution, it was still me as a member of the dominant group imposing the values of what I thought she ought to be, a leader that 'took the reins'. This, according to Staszak's analysis, is still a residue of othering.

By collaboration, I mean to 'to work jointly with others in some endeavour' (Merriam-Webster). I do not mean 'to cooperate', as in a scenario in which one party cedes to the agenda

of another as if by coercion. I refer to the shared vision and contribution that occurs when two parties work together to achieve some end.

Though the title of 'collaborating' thrusts a great deal of focus on the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers, I do not wish to limit the conversation to that alone. Broader than simply 'team teaching' as a means to a neoliberal end, I wish to illustrate a vision for relational teaching that gives rise not only to sharing knowledge in a recognisable classroom format (through programming and planning, for instance), but to opening up classroom participants to share ideas and even ontologies within the space provided by the classroom. If classrooms are ultimately about knowing, my argument is that all forms of knowing held by all the different participants of the classroom space ought to be welcomed into the classroom discourse. When I speak about collaboration, I am speaking about a dynamic in which all knowledges are embraced, thus giving rise to abundant possibilities for what can be discussed, created and learnt by all members of the classroom. I am speaking about al members co-sharing and co-creating the social and epistemological fabric of the classroom.

Both forms of data drawn on, autoethnographic journals and yarning circle transcripts, saw relationships emerge strongly as a theme. Toward the end of a four-year teaching post in Clear River, I began to observe the way that relationships gave way to natural and authentic collaboration, producing results that far exceeded what I had been able to imagine in my first year of teaching. Rather than a theory of how to collaborate, what I am proposing here is a theory of relatedness that informs genuine collaboration and mutual respect and understanding.

The theory of relatedness that began to emerge from the data draws strongly on the relational ontology outlined by Martin (2009). I wish to reinforce this theory from a non-Indigenous perspective, hoping that it enables non-Indigenous practitioners to draw on awareness of their own subjectivities and white privilege, and move beyond them to embrace a more relational ontology that may open them up epistemologically to an Other way of seeing the world.

11.1 Why 'Collaborating'?

Biesta has written of 'how it matters how we speak of those we teach' (2010). I wish to add to this essential rumination that it also matters how we speak of those we teach *with*. As exemplary relationships of what my students could expect of relations between Indigenous and non-

Indigenous people in their world, my very visible relating with my Indigenous colleagues was observed by my students and helped to inform their ability to both trust and feel respected by me. I had begun to see how the degree of respect shown to Indigenous teachers could affirm students' held beliefs about racial interactions. I highlight the way that this seems to be a key site for their internalising of how their Indigenous teachers (and sometimes elders), and therefore their own selves, are positioned. In this sense, I wanted my students to be able to observe the non-Indigenous adult in the classroom showing deep and genuine respect to Indigenous teachers as humans, but also as knowledge-holders. Thus, it seemed to me self-evident that, in order to allow students to feel pride in themselves and their knowledge systems, they ought to be able to witness respectful collaboration and interactions between their Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers. They ought to be able to see how a non-Indigenous teacher could defer to and respect the validity of Indigenous knowledge systems, and even become a student of these. Through reflection I began to think about the language around how I interacted with students; I later realised I needed to apply the same analysis to how I thought and spoke about Indigenous teachers. My earlier phrases of 'utilised' and 'used' and even 'teach' began to erode as I began to challenge the assumptions behind them. I believe that it was then that genuine collaboration began to happen.

Increasing dialogue has begun to appear around partnerships in Indigenous communities. It is becoming acknowledged that genuine partnerships are necessary for both Indigenous self-determination and for the achievement of the more neoliberal goals of the education system (Kearney et al., 2014). The central argument that forms in my mind when I read and reflect on the data collected over four years is that relationships are central to genuine collaboration and partnerships. I argue that, for collaboration like this to happen, steps must be taken by non-Indigenous allies to reflect on our own privilege and positioning as non-Indigenous people, and to consciously engender dispositions and awarenesses that allow genuine relational collaboration to take place.

11.2 Challenges and Dilemmas to Partnership

Kowal (2015) has highlighted the flaws that can occur in attempts at partnership. She casts a spotlight on disingenuous attempts: the kind of 'propping up', the kind of behaviour that sees non-Indigenous participants within organisations cropping themselves out of the frames of

photos and footage in order to make it seem as though projects were delivered entirely by Indigenous people. This seems to occur in settings where non-Indigenous allies feel that perhaps they are not able to ally with their Indigenous colleagues in authentic ways. I wanted to ensure that I found genuine ways of collaborating, rather than just trying to stage the appearance of doing so.

11.3 Collaboration: The Vision

The school itself, at least in word, acknowledged the importance of Indigenous partnerships, known colloquially as 'teaching in teams'. Footage was frequently shown at professional development staff meetings of successful partnerships in remote communities, although the school nominee to run these sessions was selected on the basis of this being his particular passion, and funding for his position came and went over four years according, presumably, to institutional priorities. Generally these discussions emerged around once a year, as though to tick a box, and the conversation seldom continued, or continued sporadically, when team teaching once again returned to the school's improvement agenda. When collaboration was spoken of, it would be in the context of discussing how the Indigenous classroom teacher could participate actively in teaching the western curriculum. The kind of teaching expected of Indigenous teachers in this discourse was located outside of their particular fields of expertise, working mostly with the written word and reading recovery or teaching maths, in order to enable the *balanda* teacher to effectively run groups. There was seldom a genuine focus on working within an Aboriginal worldview or knowledge system. The orientation permeating most of the schooling institution was toward educating students in the western knowledge system necessary for participating in the economy.

A few of us, on the other hand, were looking to initiatives such as the More Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI), seeing the vision for having more Indigenous teachers present in schools. It was to this end that I was motivated to conduct myself in our partnership in a way that increased the likelihood of Indigenous teachers feeling confident and able to participate as fully fledged teachers within the school environment. In seeking to establish better relationships, and therefore more meaningful and productive partnerships, with Indigenous teachers, and thus reducing othering within the classroom, the following 'awarenesses' emerged.

11.4 Collaborative Dispositions

The notion of dispositions is a useful one for thinking about aspects of ethical practice. Dispositions can be articulated, learned and adapted instead of being seen as fixed states. Several dispositions, in addition to multilogicality as outlined in the previous section, emerged as helpful in the shaping of relational partnerships and collaboration in the shared classroom.

11.4.1 Empathising with othered responsibilities and priorities

It was helpful to remember that different humans are interacting with the same shared space in very varied ways according to the most pressing and urgent needs being faced by them. While I was liberated from the basic needs of food and shelter, many families were struggling to make ends meet. While I had found ways of belonging in the school community, for Indigenous colleagues their ongoing belonging within the town was dependent on continuing responsibilities and participation in community and family life. Participation in ceremonies and funerals, attending to children for whom they had responsibility through complex kinship systems, and resolving community problems, regardless of their inconvenience to the schooling system, were part of maintaining an ontology of relatedness and the networks within the community. This burden of work was a form of labour that, while not fitting into the western framework I bring to my experiences in terms of 'work', is an entirely necessary component of life for some. This was one way I sought to reflect on my privilege, learn to see the way Other's life experiences converge from my own, and regard my colleagues with empathy.

In the process, I came to understand more of the Indigenous 'ways of being' that Martin calls 'relatedness'. While Martin does not explicitly speak of relatedness as a panacea for othering, its application here became plain to me. In an Indigenous ontology, 'the phenomenon of establishing relatedness remains core' (Martin, 2003, p. 76). Focusing on, and re-entrenching othering, goes against the Indigenous ethos of establishing relatedness. The opposite of othering is not sameness. The opposite of othering is relatedness.

Relatedness allow for the fluctuations that I have mentioned in terms of relationship dynamics within the classroom: 'Ways of being entail processes for staying in relatedness and dealing with the fluctuations, changes, alignments and realignments within our world that relatedness is experienced in depths where change is ongoing, amongst and between the Entities… giv[ing] formation to the transitions whilst maintaining relatedness'. As Martin phrases it, 'Since there

is always change, there is always a need for renewal and realignment, enfoldment and evolvement' (Martin, 2003, p. 77). Partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers may not achieve a stasis of the type that non-Indigenous teachers may be accustomed to experiencing in 'mainstream' education settings. These relationships will always be transitioning and changing, accommodating changes in seasons, family structures, the ceremonial calendar and various other aspects that affect day-to-day life in a community. Accommodating this through the lens of relatedness might mean placing emphasis on maintaining a relationship with an Indigenous teacher that stays strong across these fluctuations, enabling this relationship to glide over the transitions and be renewed in the face of changes in this regard, rather than dismissing the notion of working together when we faced changes or interruptions.

In such a disposition, I am going beyond the departmentally mandated ethics of what it means to be a 'good teacher', and further into the philosophical realm of what it means to be ethical to the Other (Levinas, 1979). By this I mean a taken-for-granted belief that I am responsible for the wellbeing of an Other through a deeper sense of responsibility than, for example, duty of care, or a parent–child relationship. Levinas's sense of responsibility is simply to have the other's best interests at heart. It was from this belief in what it means to conduct an ethical praxis that I began to search for some beginnings of what ethical, empathetic and open practice might look like. This kind of relatedness acknowledges more fully that Indigenous teachers are human entities in their own right, with their own sphere of family dynamics, roles within the community, and personal politics and beliefs in the role of education. This is all too easy to forget, in my experience, in the discourse of the school, where their very job title makes them secondary to the non-Indigenous teacher.

> Previously Betty and I would spend our release time together, to discuss where we are going to next… This year though, it seems that this is not as much priority for Betty – her work in the school seems to have become a side job, casual work to keep her going but not a career as much. I pause and realise that I have not explicitly had this conversation with Betty in the past school term – checking in with her about what role she wants to be playing in the classroom and how I can support that. I feel a quick flash of resentment that this feels like a duty I take on because Betty is important to me, but I don't feel supported institutionally to do it well. (Journal, January, 2015)

11.5 Disruptive Conversations

In my undergraduate degree, I was enamoured of utopic visions of classrooms in which students sat encircled and equal, sharing their opinions freely with the confidence of being heard, rising up to take their place in the political discourse of their generation. Though this was my aspiration in my Clear River classroom, I struggled to make this utopia a reality. Sitting my students in circles was interpreted by them as a threatening and unsafe scenario, (not to mention the hierarchies of relatedness such as kinship relationships and 'poison cousins' that occurred in the classroom that, I can only imagine, affected the configurations in which they would sit normally), but asking students to 'raise their voice' in a language not their own was once again a superimposition of western ideals on students for whom it was a greater challenge. A visiting lecturer once cited Wells's work as seeing the dialogic approach as an apparatus of middle-class education, which did not necessarily have the same results when applied ad hoc to a demographic that did not possess the same familiarity with dialogue, meetings and round-table discussions in the form that I was used to.

> Tilley came over while I baked for a cake stall on Wednesday and we chatted away for an hour. She agreed with my hypothesis that to go in with constructivist attitudes of 'generating dialogue' is often imposing of a western way of thinking: inviting the students to think as I do, with little scaffold to support them there. How might I scaffold the kind of open dialogue that might help them to raise critical questions? (Journal, February 2014)

I reflected on how I could, rather than imposing 'dialogue by brute force', have a disposition of looking for 'openings' to have conversations as the opportunity arose. I wanted to enable agentic behaviour, to embolden students to speak up, and I knew that the way we conversed as a class would affect this to some degree. Many of these kinds of conversations were brief but, I felt, effective. By taking on a disposition of viewing the whole child and their entire trajectory instead of just the immediate concerns of the day's learning outcomes, moments were harnessed (often at the expense of the lesson plan, at least temporarily) to try to disrupt the status quo beliefs that students had internalised from the education system or racial relations within the community.

I sit next to Jameliah and Kahlee and Shanelle and various other disengaged students during the hour-and-a-half Language and Culture classes, and I engage with them and become their student, and that becomes a powerful, transformative opportunity. We reframe knowledge, we reframe *balanda* relationships, I enter into a more diverse learning space and position myself as learner. That is powerful.

A similar power unfolds when I am teaching dense grammar, spelling patterns, trying to get the students heads around how particular sound blends are spelt. Tanisha groans, this is tedious. 'How do you KNOW all of this, miss? My brain is full!' I pause. Here again is that transformative responsibility, opportunity.

'It's easy for me, Tanisha. I only have one culture and one language, I know all of this because it's my first language. And I know it's harder for you mob, because you have more than one language, and are walking in two worlds. But I'm working to make it easier for you.'

This is the important reframe. This is the important Third Space. I cannot be the practitioner blinded by western epistemologies, by colonising 'progress', 'you have to learn it because I say so'. I have to be the practitioner that acknowledges (for social justice's sake, for dignity's sake) the complexity of worlds that these girls are entering into, the fact that English is an additional dialect, the fact that this knowledge I am trying to help them construct is not native to them. (Journal, March 2014)

This became the disposition that I brought to understanding the Third Space – a disposition of taking up opportunities for transformative conversations, rather than trying to force us as two parties to come to the table to bring together our disparate worlds. This translated into Third Space being more of a 'cultural interface' (Nakata, 2007), rather than an organised space of deliberate re-creation. By this I mean that the Third Space was simply the time and space that we took to discuss the complexities of the two worlds intermeshing, rather than trying to mesh them together in a formal way such as a curriculum document. This is the way that I felt I could use my agency and begin to encourage my students' agency, in a sustainable way.

In some ways, the way I was welcomed out onto country on pandanus-collecting expeditions offered an apprenticeship of sorts where I could learn, where I could get a greater sense of what enacted Indigenous knowledge looks like, and a sense of the thirding that is possible. This gave me a strong sense of the kind of dynamic I wanted to replicate in the classroom – that same

sense of being welcomed that my Indigenous friends extended to me, that enabled Third Space learning to occur.

At the end of 2015 I began to see encouraging signs of students articulating these things themselves.

> I was going through my Stage 1 Language and Culture students' folios. We were collating our work that we had completed over the year so that it could be submitted for audit, and contribute to the students 'patterns' for graduation. A busy year, we had completed interviews, annotated posters in two languages, and designed ICT products that would assist in the support of Indigenous languages and culture. Jan had co-taught this unit with me and it had been full of exciting collaboration.

> I suddenly found a document in a student's portfolio that I had never seen before. I scanned over it and knew that, although this was hand-written, it was not in this particular students' voice. I read over some of it. I instantly felt sick. Titled 'Clear River Culture', the writing piece had several disparaging comments in my student's handwriting, such as 'kids play in the dirt', 'parents are out gambling all night', as well as a commentary on families' diets and sickness. Why was this in my student's folios? We'd never done any such thing in class!

> As I continued looking through folios, I found replicas of the exact same piece of writing. I felt a bit panicked, I still couldn't figure out what was going on. I looked up the date of this piece of writing in my weekly planner, and saw straight away that I had been away ill that day and a substitute teacher had taken my place. I looked up the relief lesson I had left and saw that I had asked the teacher to supervise the students in translating stories they had collected from elders previously about Clear River culture and ceremony. I was appalled that they had instead, it seemed, been asked to copy down this slanderous commentary from the whiteboard.

> I found Xena's writing. When I read the piece that she had filed neatly away in her folio, the tone was completely different. I could tell that she knew that the activity was wrong, and disagreed with the content that the teacher had printed on the board. Her's diverged from the other students' completely. Where the teacher's writing said that families ate junk food, Xena stated boldly that families went out bush and hunted for fresh goose, fish and buffalo. Where the replica copy said that parents gambled all night, Xena stated that families cared for each other. On every point that had been

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written, she took the opportunity to reframe the story with her truth. In the midst of this awful scenario, I was so incredibly proud of Xena's stance, and her ability to reframe a discussion from one of deficit and criticism to one of difference and pride. (Journal, October 2016)

What Xena participated in was what Tuhiwai-Smith would call 'reframing' (L. T. Smith, 1999), which 'is about making conscious decisions to re-frame what has been critiqued to restore Aboriginal terms of reference. Reframing is to, simply but purposefully, consider how this can be understood from our existing Stories and can be achieved as learned from our Elders, our Entities and our Ancestors. The re-framing is the preparing the voices of the voiceless' (Rigney, 1999), centring Aboriginal thoughts, knowledges and entrenching relatedness, also occurring 'within the way Indigenous people write or engage with theories and accounts of what it means to be Indigenous' (1999, pp. 153-154). Here, Xena re-asserted what it meant for her to be Indigenous, and centred her own thoughts about relatedness in defending her family against the way that they had been framed.

While I cannot take credit for Xena's agentic response, I reflected later that night that I hoped that other students, with continuing disruptive conversations, might be able to one day follow suit. That, perhaps if we as teachers continued to allow them to discuss and disrupt and transform their understandings of racial relations in Clear River, they might be able to articulate their own voice to speak back to scenarios like this in which their people and culture are spoken down to. This was the kind of collaboration I aspired to between myself and my students – working together to respectfully make sense of how we interacted and the complex relations that embodied their community.

11.6 A Shared Liminal Space

Another form of collaboration between teacher and student that emerged was the way we both understood ourselves to be in liminal space. We frequently acknowledged as a class that we were learning, often in two different directions. I also felt it important to emphasise the way that the learning process was uncomfortable for me as well, and that learning did not come easier to others simply because of the colour of their skin (a belief that students had articulated previously and returned to; see '*Black Skin Means Dumb'*, Section 5.1.2). The visual metaphor

we used to discuss this was borrowed from James Nottingham's work on learning challenges (see, for example, Nottingham, 2017), and we called it 'The Pit'.
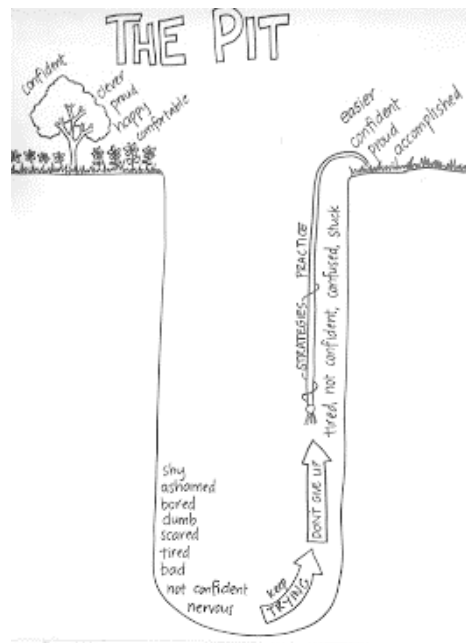

Figure 11-1: A Clear River classroom drawing of Nottingham's 'Learning Pit'

We used this image to discuss the way that we felt when we began to learn something new. I described my own feelings when studying something unfamiliar in my own learning. The students described the thoughts that went on in their heads when they were confronted with something new and unfamiliar. The words 'dumb, sleepy, no good, want to give up and go home' featured prominently. I was able to connect that uncomfortable, 'feeling dumb' sensation that often precedes a learning event, with the way that I felt around aspects of language and culture that I did not know. By using this simple visual metaphor, we were able to normalise discussions of the discomfort that we often feel around learning, and I was able to have a constant anchor to normalise the fact that I was a learner in this environment also. This shared learning space became a regular point of discussion in our classroom.

Normalising the discomfort felt by learners is connected to what Patti Lather terms 'a praxis of not being so sure' (1998, p. 492). Deconstructing the status quo understanding of teacher as know-all brings a collaborative element to both the students' discomfort at learning (often internalised as the discourse of deficit) and the teacher's lack of expertise in the life worlds of

the student. If both are learners intersecting each other's worlds, a levelling of power begins, in which neither are experts in both worlds but both are learning and growing together. This enables both parties to assist the Other in their learning. This was the collaboration I sought to establish with my students.

Jan also identified this sense of uncertainty, through a powerful metaphor about water. There is a specific word in language for the meeting place between saltwater and freshwater – two types of water that have come to be used to describe *balanda* and *bininj* knowledge worlds. Jan describes this as murky, the learning place where students are uncertain and cannot find their way forward. She describes the role of Indigenous teachers in helping students find clarity in this liminal 'in between space'.

> Jan: 'That bugula (water) you've learned, it's like saltwater and freshwater, it's same like teaching. If a kid comes along, like I've said, this is saltwater, he's finding it difficult. Like for your procedure, teaching, technique; ok this kid comes along and you know, he don't know anything, so for Brenda or Betty or I, we there, and we say ok, this is all Jessie, she's teaching, this is her lesson, for your kids lesson. And now so he's finding, digging out, to find a fresh water, that's example of bugula, of saltwater and freshwater, but there's all types of bugula, like did Betty show you about that milky one?'

> Jess: 'No, I didn't learn about the milky one… Is that that mix between saltwater and freshwater?'

> Jan: 'Yeah yeah.'

> Brenda: 'And it's something like, white.'

> Jess: 'Yeah right.'

> Jan: 'And then it comes out, like, it clean, it's bubbles. It's got a meaning with it, it cleans all the rubbish out, and the kid, now he's achieving that goal he's going deeper deeper inside to find the clean fresh water.'

> Brenda: 'Crystal water.'

> Jess: 'It's not murky any more, it's not confusing. Is that a little bit like that pit that we talk about?'

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Brenda: 'Yep, yo, that one.'

Jess: 'When kids start learning something they go into that pit, it's confusing, it's murky.'

Jan: 'Well not only Betty teaching you how to find water, but it's like she's giving you a meaning with that, giving you more feedback to teach, but your teaching really (en)riches. Same in our culture, but it's building up both, you know, it helps you to finish your degree or whatever, [paper], it's got a lot of meaning with that [water].'

Jess: 'Yep.'

Jan: 'Same for us, and same for our future kids' generation – they finding their way to have a good education, they finding a way to have a good teacher.'

Brenda: 'And the pathways.'

Jan: 'And the pathways.'

(Yarning Circle, November 2015)

Jan uses her water metaphor to describe the learning that all participants in the classroom space are sharing – the murkiness that results from two worlds of knowledge combining in one learning space, and the uncertainty that all of us feel according to our differing worldviews and knowledge systems. She describes her exhortations to students to go deeper, to persist and keep searching despite the uncertainties, to keep searching in order to find clarity. I take this advice on board myself, a reminder of my agency to persist and keep seeking to understand, to keep searching for clarity in this world where two waters meet. This shared space of uncertainty offers us a basis for genuine relationship, through the empathy generated by feeling the same discomfort.

11.7 Being a White Ally

The work of Applebaum (2010), Maddison (2011), Kowal (2015), Moreton Robinson (2000), Kendall (2013), and Aveling (2013) had developed my sense of what it meant to be white, what it meant to be white but desire to do good, and what it meant to move beyond guilt and

bourgeois motivations to genuinely become an ally. In reflecting on how my life and interactions are informed by a position of white privilege, I became more aware of not only my own subjectivity, but the subjectivities of my Indigenous counterparts, and how an inherent inequality delineated theirs and mine. I began to understand an Indigenous subjectivity within the schooling space, and to question how an empathetic practice on my part can seek to partner and ally with my Indigenous colleagues. The following excerpt from an interview with Betty describes the experience of coming to partner with non-Indigenous teachers.

> Betty: 'Yeah when I feel, when I feel… since I came in, and it was, you know, little bit not really shy, but yeah, when I just met, came and met you, in this class, and then see you all those students you know, they were just walking around, and then next day I feel, happy. And then like a family, you know? When I came um, what you call it, feeling nervous when I came. As soon as I came in, and it was yeah, really hard. Really hard, and then I just seen you round, walking round.'

> Jess: 'And when did it get easier for you?'

> Betty: 'Then next day, feeling, you know, easy, and then yeah, soon as those girls when they call my name, "Betty!" and they, you know, like, and seeing those words to me into my heart, and then I feel you know, good to them.' (Interview, October 2015)

In actively hearing my colleagues' stories, I was able to see more of my privilege through struggles that they faced in the school environment that I had not. This became a helpful empathetic offset to my own feelings of marginalisation within the school environment.

> Brenda: (speaking about the phasing out of bilingual education in 2008) 'So somehow, we gotta still have that language. And from then and now they didn't want us. And then they stopped. They stopped that language. And then they (introduced) that RITE [Remote Indigenous Teacher Education] program. And it's like, huge. It was Tilly [Teacher Educator], you know. She came and seven of us was in there and two didn't make it, so five of us was in there, and everything was just change. Everything was in that, we did that, that language classroom, all the [bilingual resources] storage books, everything was just moved away, and the kids see all this all around [gestured around classroom]. It's a big brain bust, you know? And [with Tilly] we did that altogether like [pointing at grammar displays], when announced all that, she taught us through all that. I went alright but like, must be four years, and I got stuck from two years 'til a little bit

family problem, but it was too hard. But I still went back helping. Them girls. And I remember like, I can't, I gotta still keep coming to work. 'Cause I failed. But somehow I can still go back to my classroom teaching. But then I met you, you know?

You were like teaching, and everytime I seen you, you were doing English and Maths. I say "This is what I should do". Doing my uni. It was like, in my head. I watch you when you teach. Teach the children, you know, and sometimes I like, I look the kids, and sometimes kids sitting there, I just go talk to kids, and say, whisper in his ear, like, in language, "You know that?" Murangi, I said. [In language: Do you understand?] Well I explain it to him then. And sometimes I have. And I'm like, "This is how I gotta becoming a teacher". It's all that thing, like, I got a little bit help from you, you know? Like from, connecting you, you know? And how you assessing the kids, And then I thought to myself, I been through, like, you know how we do that, coz Tilly showed us how to do that.

And I remember the first part we did that, putting all those like sounds, vowels, nouns, you know. I been through all that part so it's like "Yeah". It's in English, you know, to me that's like, that's how you should be like, teach the children how to do. To have that English, you know?

Then I said, then I see you like you working well with these kids, you talk proper to those kids like the way you do like in maths, show them like races like different ways and that like I was learning when I was in college like in high school you know, like races, all different size of maths like how you can and write poems and like, how, you know?

And even like, I mostly like learning from you too, like you teach me, like you teaching them kid but you also teaching I mean you teaching all us like you got good strategy and all that you know, I'm also learning from you too."

In hearing Brenda describe her subjectivity as an Indigenous teacher, I hear the heartbreak of seeing school-wide policy changes occur. I hear her feeling of powerlessness as the school environment takes on a discourse that marginalises her expertise, that leads her to feel that she has 'failed'. I also hear the relationality that drives her practice – the family dynamics that she negotiates and places priority on over her studies, and the positive relationships with other teachers that makes her want to resume her studies, and her relationships with her students that reignites her desire to be qualified as a teacher.

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The yarning circles constantly returned to this theme – the importance of belonging and feeling loved within a school community. For the *balanda* teachers in question, though, our focus seemed to drift closer up the hierarchy to the notions of esteem and self-actualisation. The dominant metaphor in the school site was that of our careers as 'ladders' for us to climb. Our sense of esteem within the schooling environment and department is a fixation that manifests itself in the tensions of who we are trying to appease – community or department. These differences for me accentuate the ways that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers interact within the school environment. They also seem to explain, at least in part, the difficulties teachers face when they are othered within the school environment, and fail to receive the love and belonging that they wish to receive. Where I as a *balanda* can respond to that Othering by focusing my energies on the esteem and self-actualisation aspects of my career, and the benefits that I reap in those domains, they do not seem to be as important to Indigenous teachers as the sense of belonging that is so integral to an Indigenist ontology.

11.8 Collaborative Practice

Having sketched out the dispositions that I observed that enabled a collaborative dynamic with Indigenous teachers, I attempt here to sketch out some beginning points for ethical practice, specifically, teaching practice that works in collaboration and partnership with Indigenous stakeholders. The following series of vignettes describe a sequence of lessons that exemplified Jan's facilitation of a Stage 1 Language and Culture assessment task.

> I had an amazing afternoon working on Stage 1 Language and Culture assignments – the students were interviewing elders.
>
> Before the class started, I was wracked with anxiety. I didn't know what to do. There were too many variables. The interviews had been organised in tandem with the culture team (who were apparently out collecting an elder to interview) yet it was not my home class (Year 11 class that I took only for one subject) so I had no idea of either who would be in class that day (a drastically fluctuating high-low ability class), and the approaching cyclone on Monday had dominoed my plans to workshop our questions, practice interviewing, and learn how to ask the questions in Burarra to keep the interviews in the language domain. I was walking into this with no preparation, no idea what to expect, yet with the vague sense that I would need to steer it. I never know how I stand when I steer cultural events – it feels like a commandeering of sorts, like

I'm trying to be the western connoisseur, like I'm overstepping the mark, like I don't know where to step to begin with.

Jan took charge, thank goodness. She seated us at the table, made a brief introduction to Susie, the old lady she had brought in for interviewing, and sat down to go through the questions with her and pre-think their responses. This, I never would have thought of. Jan effortlessly offset the cultural discomfort of being bombarded with questions, by discussing them in detail with Susie before we even began.

The girls were feeling a bit awkward at this stage (I only had two of my quietest, least participatory students, but thankfully they both spoke Burarra and were related to the old lady).

From this point, I realised that I had no power to hold on to, and no need to – that I had entered another terrain and the law of *balanda* education (that the teacher, the practitioner, must lead every activity and have utmost control at all times and have foreseen the educative value beforehand and milked it for all it's worth, as reflected in planning documents) was redundant here. Here, things took form themselves, with people rising up to share their knowledge out of pre-formed relationships and understanding how they fit within the social spectra within the room. Here, people shared their knowledge out of a genuine intrinsic desire for knowledge to be shared, a traditional cultural role to make sure this knowledge lives on, a fight for the survival of this knowledge. Jan pulled out a book about Rom (from my rudimentary understanding, a system of Yolngu law), which caught my eye. She was using it to guide the course of the interview, letting the photos prompt the important stories that Susie could share. Our rudimentary list of questions was demolished quickly, in pre-scribbled down, pre-formulated answers that Jan and Susie had quickly devised together:

What is your full name?

Where are you from?

What is your skin name? What is your moiety?

Where is your country?

What is your tribe?

What is your dreaming?

Where did you get an education?

What is an important story you can share with us?

Who told you this story?

This part, the part that I – the *balanda* – had devised and organised, was robotic and unnatural. Billie spat out the questions, and Susie gave her one-word responses.

But then, free from the shackles of what I had pre-ordained, Susie really started to speak. Jan initiated a few more questions about Rom (from what I can gather, one aspect of traditional education, a ceremony, related to trading gifts and diplomacy) and prompted the students to ask these questions in language.

At this point the tables had completely turned – I was the one keen to learn and to find out what I didn't know – to grasp Indigenous knowledge systems. I strained. I squinted, trying to catch even the tail of the flying conversation going over my head. *'Marn.gi'* – they must be talking about what you know. 'Sugar bag' – must be talking about honey. Susie pulled at her own hair and gestured to a photo – that pole with the raw rope hanging from it must be adorned with human hair. The book had captions in English – these I devoured while keeping an ear open to the steady stream of language going back and forth – trying to grasp the profundity that I knew must be going on, that I would only ever have access to by means of oversimplified English translations and the incorrect worldview for interpretation.

I grasped that Rom was for establishing relationships and partnerships between clans and/or communities. I grasped that it culminated in creation of a totem pole to be given as a gift – feathers, hair, etc., from the appropriate moiety. I gathered that it plays a role in education and that it can be repeated many times over a life time, i.e.: not a one-off ceremony.

My head was aching. My eyes felt heavy listening and straining to hear this language that's not my own. Nevertheless, the power of the current activity was not lost on me. (Journal, August 2015)

Jan spoke passionately about her education that she had out bush – counting on shells and sticks to learn maths, the importance of the elders, the importance of the girls taking on what she is teaching.

Before we got started, though, Jan was upset. She and Jason (*balanda* staff in charge of Language and Culture coordination) had rounded up four elders to bring in to be interviewed – Doreen, June, Wendy and Steven. They turned up at the door all smiles until they realised who was there – only one student (at that stage). No-one knew that our deputy principal had scheduled my Stage 1 class to be in a cooking class the entire

week, so there was just one student left. Jason went and rounded up some more students from Andrew's class, and I tried to go and speak to Phil the chef to see if the girls were actually free and could come and join us. The girls were right in the middle of making a cake though so it didn't work. Jan was gutted. 'This really makes me angry – I need to speak to the Principal about this. Our language and culture is important!' I really felt for her – as marginalised as I feel, I seldom have to deal with my efforts being so overlooked that other events and courses are planned over the top of what I have worked to organise.

During the interviews, Jan made direct eye contact with the camera. It was often lingering and slow – it's like she was waiting to see that her message had made it right through. I could feel the weight of the importance of what she was transmitting. I sensed that she understood the struggle to be able to comprehend the heaviness of what she was telling us – so used to interacting with people that had no eyes to see her culture's logic. She kept impressing on me the way that there was so much to learn – 'our culture is rich, there is so much to know'. I wondered if she got fed up with being treated like her culture was the sum total of a few feathers, a dance in the sand, and a bit of ochre paint. She kept referring to Wendy next to her. This old lady, she knows everything – she learned it the proper way.

I was taken aback by her answer when, after she had told me about her promised husband and how promised husband worked, I asked her if her daughter Acacia was to be promised. 'Her father is on dialysis. He hasn't got a lot longer. But what he did promise her was that her young life was for education – she has been promised to education – to learn everything she needs to know.' For Acacia this is a deep recognition from her people that she has two worlds of education to master and that to master the western way could mean greater power for her and her families. They seem to have sensed that this is necessary – they need figures like Acacia – young, powerful, articulate – they need her to bridge the gap.

'This is the gap Jess – I'm not just talking about the NAPLAN gap, when the kids take those tests – I'm talking about our kids don't know our way, we have so much to teach them.' Jan's words sank into me. Maybe when we talk about closing the gap, we're focused on the wrong one?! (Journal, October 2015)

I do not think it is any coincidence that genuine collaboration seemed to begin when our field was located in my Indigenous colleague's field of expertise instead of mine. This is when the Indigenous teachers I worked with were able to model for me a powerful kind of collaboration.

Rather than sitting and planning together and documenting everything (a cumbersome step, given the changeability of circumstances in the community context and the need for constant flexibility), Jan's mode of operation was to communicate deeply about our intentions and the desired outcome, and what we were facilitating the students to learn, and then to, on the day, reach out to the rightful speakers or knowers in the area and generate conversations 'as we went'. It almost felt like a 'transparent planning' model, where rather than generating beforehand a text that dictates what we do and then keeping this as the hidden script, everything was on the table openly in front of the class, any guest speakers, and all teachers collaborating. Things could be discussed and decided as we went, questions asked openly and other teachers 'checked in with' along the way. When I learned to relinquish my idea of how teaching is done, and embrace such deliberate spontaneity, it often became a delight to see what was enabled as rigid expectations were allayed in favour of in-the-moment communication and adaption. In the true nature of relational pedagogy, this involved a shift from a text-based focus to a relational and communicative focus. Being an on-the-ball teacher did not necessarily involve the perfect document, but rather honed skills in communicating, relating in the moment, and guiding conversations.

11.9 Beyond Tokenism into Genuine Partnership

In seeking to symbolically demonstrate the equality of Indigenous teachers with non-Indigenous teachers, Indigenous teachers are asked to attend staff meetings where the content and delivery was located well outside their linguistic or contextual discursive access. This was another dilemma I faced in terms of seeking to avoid colluding in the ways we were othering and marginalising Indigenous staff as a school body. These staff meetings made me uncomfortable, and I found myself colluding further by tokenistically trying to involve other staff, moving paper handouts over to my Indigenous colleagues as a gesture of inviting them to read with us, then feeling that I ought explain in more simplified terms the pedagogical jargon that we were discussing. This then seemed only to further entrench the dynamic of teacher and learner between *balanda* and *bininj* staff that I felt unsatisfactory. I struggled to

think about how to avoid colluding in this dynamic, feeling that the way it ought be remedied was that Indigenous teachers held their own Professional Development sessions on topics that located *balanda* teachers outside of their expertise. This happened once in the four years studied.

An essential part of collaborative practice to which all three interview participants returned was the strength of their own feelings about the need for genuine relationships and belonging between themselves and other staff. The Indigenous teachers expressed their willingness to embrace relationships with non-Indigenous teachers, seeking to offer moments of cross-cultural exchange that enables a form of equality that means both can 'come to the table' with their various forms of expertise in order to partner together.

Through the yarning circles, the women also emphasised the important aspect of their work that can become a 'blind spot' to *balanda* teachers – that despite efforts to ensure that our teaching is explicit and easy for students to understand, misunderstandings occur and students get lost. Of these moments, the women spoke of their moments of strength and expertise, of the role that they had honed for themselves in which they survey the classroom for students falling 'between the gaps' and partner with these students to bring them into the discourse of the group.

> Jan: 'But for students like this, they had a lot of support and teaching from you, but we had to put it into our different way of teaching, like helping with your understanding of your teaching technique. And the same for like, for maths, English, for the intersection, you know, like have…'

> Brenda: 'And you had both, you know, like for three years you had Betty helping you. When kids say like, difficult things we don't know what she's saying, "She said this, this, this", so it's easy, and we have those students give feedback like when they answered back straight away and they like, coping you know?'

> Jan: 'This one other thing, like, when a new kid came inside and they like, "What she want us to do, like, I can't do it", like one other kid said "I can't do it", and Brenda and I we said "You can do it, we'll do it in our way, in the language, write down all this procedure or something, and then you'll have a look". And then one little kid's, "Oh yeah", then we're "That's what Jess said to do, to do this, do this".'

Brenda: 'It's like for the last three years you had [Betty] to interpret, because you know, and it made sense, when kids don't know she tell them what you want kids to do, coz kids are looking around "What I'm doing?", so she is always helping them to understand. And now kids are getting faster, when you tell them now, they, knowing you as well you know? Like classroom teacher you know?'

It is in this way that Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers partner – neither ceding their usefulness or their autonomy within the classroom, both emphasising their strengths, both groups journeying with the students' best outcomes in mind.

12 Conclusion

Throughout my beginning years of teaching in an ontologically complex setting, I confronted many aspects of praxis: my sense of self, my position on what social justice entails for a disadvantaged sector of Australia's first nations population, how to interact with my role in the institution even when at times my ethics seem at odds with its values, and how I might reflect on my own beliefs and views in order to reduce othering of Indigenous people.

I have detailed how, in order to reduce othering, intensive reflexivity was necessary through every aspect of my praxis. I have examined the othering that occurs at all levels of the institution, and to all members, and how I situated myself within those processes.

I have highlighted the way in which Indigenous knowledge systems (and indeed, many other marginalised intellectual traditions) are othered and how I as one teacher could resist this within my praxis. In so doing, I have recognised that to reduce othering is to come to emphasise relatedness instead of focusing on notions of 'difference'.

In so doing, I turned reflexivity inward to examine the very ontology and epistemology that underpin my operations within the world and my role, and sought to disrupt these in order to move toward greater openness to other ways of knowing and being. In the process of such a disruption, I have articulated multilogicality as a dispositional, discursive practice a teacher can adopt in order to make the conditions necessary for members to be able to engage in dialogism within the classroom. I have outlined that a disposition of ceding as teaching practice is a necessary precursor to genuine collaboration, recognising the power imbalances that occur when working in postcolonial settings, and recognising the necessity for non-Indigenous teachers to alter this power imbalance through their own reflexivity and learning.

In summary, I felt that my concern with othering began to be resolved, at least in part, by relationality becoming the overriding culture rather one of difference. Where previously I had conceived of the opposite of othering being sameness, I now began to see the opposite of othering as relatedness. There is much space for non-Indigenous teachers developing more relational pedagogies (such as those that occur within other Indigenous spaces within the community) in schooling spaces that reduces othering and places greater emphasis on

relatedness instead. The strength of this is that it addresses the second dilemma I faced, that of marginalised Indigenous knowledge systems. If we adopt a pedagogy of relatedness, then we are actually as educators learning from aspects of Indigenous ontology, such as seeing the connectedness of all things rather than being constrained by a compartmentalised western ontology.

With the ideas that I began to outline in order to resolve the dichotomy of institutional versus personal ethics, I found hope in careful and thoughtful 'slow' teaching that placed more emphasis on reflexivity than on rapidly produced outcomes. This did not mean that I rejected department-mandated outcomes wholesale at the expense of students' educational gains, but that I proceeded with these more slowly in order to do justice to a relational pedagogy.

I have examined the boundaries of my own knowledge system in order to challenge the limits of what I know, and to engage with othered intellectual traditions. In so doing, I have raised questions of how non-Indigenous participants and teachers can engage with Indigenous knowledge systems. This question was not answered here but it is highlighted as an area in which further research and thought is required.

In a similar vein, the reader would have witnessed the transformation that I undertook as a researcher, such that I would approach this study entirely differently from the outset if I had my time again. At this point in time, as I write this at the conclusion of the study and having engaged with the learning journey I have been on, I know that I would begin the entire study differently now, with my learning about Indigenous methodologies having transformed my thinking. Regardless of its best intention, this study from the outset was shaped in a way that is embedded in western scholarship, and the very design did not take into consideration the privilege of my position. An alternate design with greater decolonising potential might be one that draws more comprehensively on student and Indigenous participant voices in both the shaping and creation of the research, or a study that firmly positions me as an ally to Indigenous voices rather than the centre of the research. The study that I wish I could 'do over' exists as a literal dialogue between an Indigenous and non-Indigenous education practitioner, which is more appropriate given the fact that it is not in a non-Indigenous practitioner's head, but rather through relationship, that transformation and the potential for a paradigmatic turn takes place.

Through the journey of autoethnography, I established that I would undertake research next time through the phases of relationality that I have described here – and that it would thus take

a very different form in order to make space for Othered voices in a more effective way. I still feel that this research has been important – for my personal growth, to challenge the boundaries of my pedagogies and to offer an insight for others to open their worldviews as well – but it pales in comparison to the need for more Indigenous voices to be heard through research and academia in order to flood the western academy with othered voices, in order that the dam walls be broken and let flow the multiplicity of voices, logics and epistemologies that exist outside of the western scientific hierarchy. Thus, I am inspired by many of the current movements that are occurring in both education (for example, the collaborative work of the Warddeken Land Management Limited and the Nawarddeken Academy) and grass-roots Indigenous research collectives (Aboriginal Researcher Practitioners' Network; Research US, Remote Indigenous Researcher Forum). I am a student of these Indigenous knowledge initiatives as I continue to learn how to craft an ethical non-Indigenous practice.

Since this study was conducted, I have also become aware of more ways in which I could have conducted this study differently in terms of methodology. I think specifically of the work that is emerging around collaborative autoethnography (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2012) as a means to address the concerns that I had about my voice and its centrality to the study, while still affording the close examination of teachers' internal lives that I had originally wanted to conduct. I am excited by these new possibilities for drawing on the strengths of autoethnography while also inviting multiple voices to speak back in collaboration, and I would be remiss to not acknowledge the movement that has happened in this field since the beginning of this study.

Inherent in my deference to projects such as these is my respect for Indigenous teachers and the need for ongoing work to value their role and contribution. While I was able to create some movement in my role in terms of engaging fully and relationally with my Indigenous teaching counterparts, there is work occurring at these levels that enacts respect for Indigenous intellectual traditions in real and tangible ways, well beyond the limits of what I was able to achieve here.

The learning that was of greatest value to me was in recognising Indigenous teachers, and therefore IKS space, within the classroom. I was transformed through developing eyes to see things outside my realm of experience, beyond my own ontology and epistemology – thus, embracing a multilogicality that continues to stretch my thinking beyond the limits of my own knowledge system.

Nearing the completion of this study, a master class with Miranda Johnson highlighted for me the major silence in my work so far – that care of the self was a legitimate aim in ethical praxis, especially in 'fraught political contexts' such as Clear River, where my sense of self was always at such risk. I waged an internal war to this end, feeling that to care for the self was to indulge the self, when perhaps critique of my own privilege was more necessary. When I regard this study as a whole, and consider the effects of burnout that affected me as a teacher, I recognise that the emotional and cognitive labour that I speak of in seeking to embrace discomfort and multilogicality requires a care of the self in order to be sustained. In addition, when subjectivities and knowledge frameworks are questioned and start to come 'undone' through engaging with othered knowledge systems, it is, as I have described, unsettling. Charteris et al., discussing Deleuze and Parnet, have alluded to the kind of care that is needed when we begin to pull apart the very thinking on which our identities and sense of security is laid.

> Deleuze and Parnet (2006/1977) caution that 'precautions' are needed when lines (or 'threads') of knots are disentangled, with care taken to 'soften' or 'suspend' lines rather than cutting them loose. This care is necessary because these lines (or 'threads') that separate bodies (according to seniority, performance and space) condition our sense of value and security. These threads are 'so much a part of [our] conditions of life'; undermining a line does not merely undermine existing hierarchies, but is also aimed 'directly at ourselves'… It is confronting and unsettling to unweave a thread that you had understood to be part of your very self. (2016, p. 42)

Without diluting the importance of teachers embarking on this kind of exploration and epistemological 'shaking the tree' (Gough, 2006), and without seeking to undermine the necessity of teachers engaging with decolonising thought in postcolonial contexts, there is a need for care of the self when dissecting and deconstructing the tenets of thought on which much of one's identity rests. Though such decolonising deconstruction is entirely necessary when dealing with the intersection and cultural interface of incommensurable knowledge systems in which there is an imbalance of power, the fragility that can be caused within non-Indigenous educators while attempting this arduous intellectual work alongside the normal labour of teaching in a politically fraught environment cannot be understated. This is an aspect that could be studied further.

The overarching finding of this research, and the most significant learning for me as both a teacher and researcher, was in the sense of profound collaboration and enrichment of the

classroom that takes place when non-Indigenous teachers can learn from, and come together in genuine partnership with, Indigenous knowledge-holders and educators. This has implications not only for the teachers' underlying views of the world being expanded and testing the limits of western knowledge, but also for coming to find the localised and relational pedagogies that are deeply located within the 'place' where one is working. This, in turn, has implications for deeply affirming Indigenous students' sense of self through a non-tokenistic valuing of Indigenous knowledge systems and knowledge holders, within the classroom and without.

Reading over this work at the end of nearly six years, I still feel discomfort at the way that I have framed many things. This is evidence to me that the narratives enclosed, and my framing of them, is merely a slice in time on a long continuum of growth and examining my own privilege and the limitations of what I know. I daily become more aware of the ways I still participate in thinking that exacerbate othering discourses, and I continue to journey away from this into more open and inclusive ways of operating. I continue to problematise my own practice and thinking, a process that is never complete. Unanswered questions remain. In this sense my study, which began with the notion of liminality, encourages staying with that liminality and its accompanying sense of 'not being sure', its openness to my unknowing and to the limits of my thinking. That journey has by no means concluded.

Just as I began with an acknowledgement of the women who have shaped this work, I conclude with their words to me in the weeks before I left Clear River, as we concluded our series of yarning circles.

> Jan: 'There's one thing that you've learned so much, from Betty, and Brenda, and me, and a few other language teachers like the old man, and Agatha, that something you'll know that our ancestors spirits, it's connected to you. So you taking full knowledge away. All the information that you gonna take away, like you gonna have to memorise them, you gonna have to think a lot, like when you go to sleep you'll look at the pictures, ah this is the knowledge, this is all this teacher gave me, this is how I've learned.'

> Brenda: 'And their way of learning, and their journey, and all that, it's like [a] learning journey.'

Glossary

balanda   non-Indigenous person, European

bininj   Indigenous people from the Clear River area

bugula   Water

gapula   old person, a term of respect

jin-gapula   female old person, a term of respect

junggay   a ceremonial=worker who runs errands between the ceremonial grounds and the camp, taking instructions to the people and bringing food supplies, etc.; in the Bible, a priest.

marn.gi   knowing, understanding, learning

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